

**CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AND ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY IN  
NIGERIA: A FOCUS ON POLICY AND LEGAL ADVOCACY CENTRE  
(PLAC) IN THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTION**

**BY**

**Nkechi Blessing ABUH (Mrs.)**

**PG/NLS/2015001**

**BEING A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE  
FOR LEGISLATIVE AND DEMOCRATIC STUDIES/UNIVERSITY OF BENIN  
(NILDS/UNIBEN) POST GRADUATE PROGRAMMES IN PARTIAL  
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF MASTERS  
DEGREE IN ELECTIONS AND PARTY POLITICS**

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## **CERTIFICATION**

This is to certify that this dissertation titled “Civil Society Organisations and Electoral Democracy in Nigeria: A focus on Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) in the 2019 General Election” was carried out by Nkechi Blessing ABUH under my supervision and that the Dissertation has not been submitted for the award of degree in this institution or any other institution.

.....  
Dr. Mohammed Wakil, OON  
(Supervisor)

.....  
Date

## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this dissertation is a product of my research efforts undertaken under the supervision of Dr. Mohammed Wakil, OON . It is an original work and no part of it has ever been presented for the award of any degree anywhere. All sources of information have been duly acknowledged through the references.

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**Nkechi Blessing ABUH (Mrs.)**  
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**APPROVAL PAGE**

This is to certify that this Dissertation titled “Civil Society Organisations and Electoral Democracy in Nigeria: A focus on Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) in the 2019 General Election, has been read and approved as having met the partial requirement for the award of Masters in Election and Party Politics (MEPP) of the University of Benin/National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies NILDS-UNIBEN Postgraduate program and is approved for contribution of knowledge.

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## ***DEDICATION***

*This project is dedicated to God Almighty for His grace and mercy  
and  
To my husband, Pharmacist Omanube Shehu Abuh for his consistent unflinching  
support*

## ***ACKNOWLEDGMENTS***

I start by appreciating God Almighty for helping me eventually accomplish this program. I equally appreciate my Children: Reuben, Chinemerem, Victor, Eikinekwu, Emaojo and Joy, who all individually and collectively contributed tremendously towards this academic accomplishment.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

CSO	-	Civil Society Organizations
EMB	-	Election Monitoring Body
INEC	-	Independent National Electoral Commission
NCSSR	-	Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room
PLAC	-	Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre

## **ABSTRACT**

The roles played by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), especially in democratic environments globally, have contributed tremendously towards the conduct of free, fair and credible elections as well as in supporting electoral institutional processes. Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC), a CSO participating in the Nigerian electoral process, carried out several activities round the 2019 general election cycle (pre- election, during election and post election stages). This research studied the roles played by PLAC in the 2019 General Election. It also examined the specific activities carried out by PLAC in the 3 stages of the 2019 General election with particular focus on how those specific activities impacted the outcome of the election.

The qualitative research method was adopted in carrying out this research work. It involved the collection of texts, interviews, observation and documentary evidence in answering each of the research question raised by the study. The primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted on nine(9) Staff of PLAC who had been in its employ in the 2019 electoral cycle.

The result of the study established that PLAC participated in the three stages of the 2019 electoral cycle by mapping out all its programs, activities and resources round the three election stages. Some of the specific activities carried out by PLAC in the 2019 electoral cycle included policy advocacy for electoral reforms and improvements, voter education campaigns to raise awareness about the electoral process, establishment of a central situation room hub for effective election observation to assess the conduct of the 2019 general election, election reporting to highlight key findings and make recommendations on areas of improvement for future elections as well as conduct of post-election analysis with relevant stakeholders to discuss identified areas of strengths, weaknesses and recommendations. The Impact of these activities and other roles by PLAC on the outcome of 2019 General Election were summarized as increased voter awareness and empowerment, mitigation of escalation of conflicts and violence in many Polling Units on election day as well as advocacy for electoral reforms (arising from the gaps noted during the election).

The study recommended that PLAC, as well as all CSOs in the electoral process are to understand that election is a process not an event so that they may set effective agenda around the 3 stages of each of the electoral cycle. They may also conduct a needs - analysis of the 3 stages of the cycle so that they can proportionately deploy their resources effectively to each of these stages in order to ensure positive electoral outcome that will promote electoral democracy in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Civil Society Organizations, Election, Electoral Cycles, Democracy

## CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the Study

The study seeks to examine Civil Society Organisations and Electoral Democracy: A focus on PLAC in the 2019 General Election. Studies have shown that Civil Society Organisations (CSO) play very vital roles in the political, social, and economic development of any nation. To begin with, CSOs have been variously defined by Scholars as non-State actors or entities. They are a not-for-profit, voluntary entities, formed by people or individuals within a society and they are usually separate from the State and the market (UNGP, 2015). They generally include professional bodies, social movements, non-government as well as religious organisations. This study specially focused on CSOs involved in electoral democracy.

The electoral process, on the other hand, is the means by which democracy is exercised, measured and evaluated within a country. All over the world, elections are very important part of the electoral process and have been entrenched as the main process through which citizens can choose their representatives or leaders. According to Obakhedo (2011), election is a major instrument for the recruitment of political leadership in democratic societies. These elections are usually planned, conducted and managed by an Election Management Body (EMB), or other democratic institutions set up for such purposes. However, various scholars have alluded to the fact that the planning, management and conduct of elections are huge projects that demand the combined efforts and support of many stakeholders like Civil Society Organisations in order to achieve the required outcome.

Over the years, in Nigeria, most especially from the onset of the fourth republic (1999), CSOs have played active roles in the various stages of the electoral process, especially in the actual conduct of elections by overseeing or observing the conduct of elections. Being agents of democratic development of any nation, CSOs have supported election management in Nigeria and they have been recognized as key stakeholders that have played instrumental roles in the success of the electoral process (EU-SDGN: 2018).

The role of CSOs in electoral democracy has been summed up as “provision of civic education, review of electoral legal framework, engagement with electoral authorities, oversight of electoral processes and enhancement of the inclusion of marginalized communities in election processes (F.C.S. 2020). From the foregoing, the roles of CSOs in the electoral process are varied - ranging from activities carried out during the pre-election, conduct of election and post -election stages of the electoral cycle. While activities like provision of civic education and engagement with various election stakeholders fall within the pre-election activities, oversight (observation) of the conduct of election fall within the actual conduct of election while the review of legal framework as well as post -election litigation are post-election activities.

In Nigeria particularly, studies show that many CSOs participating in the electoral process have actively been participating mainly in the actual conduct of election, that is in the observation of election-day activities. As enshrined in the United Nations Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, and the Code of Conduct for International Election Observers, this important component of the electoral process has been said to deepen democracy. Over the decades election observation has become a global instrument that underscores that non-partisan election observation has the potential not only to enhance the integrity of the electoral processes but also to deter and expose irregularities, and electoral fraud while providing relevant recommendations for stakeholders. However, this role, alone, cannot effectively impact the electoral democratic process in such a way as to significantly improve the processes and to compel active participation among the electorates. It is equally not sufficient to compel the electoral institutions and managers to respect and strictly play by the rules of the game. This much was noted by Rufus (2021), when he stated that “the collective efforts of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in shaping Nigeria’s electoral ecosystem are yet to translate into credible elections in the country since such attendant negative indicators as declining voter turnout, loss of stakeholders’ confidence in the electoral process and the resultant illegitimate and unpopular political representatives such dot our elections”.

This study is therefore an attempt to examine the roles civil society organization (CSOs) play in electoral democracy in Nigeria with particular focus on PLAC’s activities in the three stages of the 2019 General Election cycle. This is with a view to noting the specific

activities carried out across the three stages of the electoral cycle and identifying their impact, if any, in electoral democracy in Nigeria.

## **2.1 Statement of the Problem**

The formation of CSOs contributed greatly towards democratization process in Africa and Nigeria particularly from the late 1990s. They have ever since been key players with an interest in improving the credibility and legitimacy of elections. Nigeria, for instance, has successfully conducted six regular periodic elections in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019. In each of these successive elections, CSOs partnered and engaged with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as well as other election stakeholders with a view to deepening democratic tenets through improving the quality of the electoral process and electoral democracy. In fact, with the successful conduct of the 2015 General elections (adjudged internationally as very free and fair), it was taken that Nigeria had eventually attained defined democratic thresholds that needed only to be consolidated.

However, despite the mass mobilization of the citizenry and other various election stakeholders in 2019, that election was adjudged to have serious shortcomings that questioned the credibility of Nigeria's electoral process. As reported by Babayo (2021), that election was accompanied with misinterpretation and political confusion in addition to tension and perceived violence and threats. The recorded cases of election rigging, stuffing and snatching of ballot papers and boxes, hate speeches, thuggery, flagrant abuse of electoral laws, voter apathy, votes buying etc. in the 2019 General election seem to have eroded the capacity of CSOs in promoting good governance through their roles and activities in the electoral process in Nigeria. Citizens have consistently been yearning for the enthronement of democratic principles through constitutional reforms and transition programs, but they seem to be consistently disappointed. This necessitated the call for consolidated action for the formation and involvement of civil society organizations whose mandate is focused on the improvement of the quality of the elections and electoral democracy generally.

Despite this formation and even consistent increase in the involvement of CSOs in the democratic process in Nigeria through the six (6) consecutive elections already conducted (1999, 2003, 2009, 2011, 2015 & 2019), Nigerian democracy seems to still be at crossroads. Elections and the electoral activities (through the electoral cycle) still leave much to be desired and still fall below internationally accepted standards. While a few CSOs, like PLAC, carried out activities through the electoral cycles (especially in the 2019 cycle), a lot more still need

to be done to improve the electoral democracy in Nigeria because many of the electoral malfeasance associated with pre-election stages, election and post-election stages still persist, while other new challenges have emerged. This is the problem that spurred this study.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

Sequel to the foregoing background and problem the study will be guided by the following research questions

- i. What roles did PLAC play in the 2019 General Elections
- ii. What are the specific activities of PLAC in the three stages of the 2019 General Election?
- iii. How did the involvement of PLAC in the three stages of the electoral cycle impact the outcome of the 2019 General Election?

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

The study seeks to examine the effectiveness of the roles played by PLAC in the 2019 General election in deepening electoral democracy in Nigeria. Other specific objectives are:

- i. To identify the roles played by PLAC in the 2019 General Election
- ii. To examine the specific activities carried out by PLAC in the three (3) stages of the 2019 General election (pre-election, during election and post-election)
- iii. To examine how the activities of PLAC in the three stages of 2019 General Election impact that election outcome.

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

The study is significant in many ways. Despite the different scholarly studies and debates over the role of civil society organization (CSOs) in electoral democracy in Nigeria, there remain scanty research which specifically and empirically examined this role with respect to the activities of PLAC especially as it concerns the 2019 General Election. Where such attempts were, the focus was on election day activities without particular attention on broader scope (which is the three stages of the 2019 electoral cycle). This is the gap this study intends to fill.

For Civil Society Organizations, this study will enable them institutionalize their engagements and electoral activities round the electoral cycle so as to enhance electoral democracy in Nigeria.

For Independent National Electoral Commission, the study will help it engage more meaningfully with relevant CSOs round the electoral cycle for better and more acceptable



electoral outcomes that will always reflect the Will and Aspirations of the Nigerian electorates.

For other electoral stakeholders, the study will enhance better collaborations with relevant CSOs for the promotion of democratic tenets and enhancement of the electoral process.

For students of Election and Party Politics, this study will be useful to them in understanding the roles of relevant stakeholders, especially CSOs, round the Nigerian electoral cycle.

For the general public, this study will afford them a better understanding of how the activities of CSOs involved in the electoral process help in enhancing the electoral process and deepening democracy principles in Nigeria.

### **1.5 Scope of the Study**

The study examines how the general roles played by CSOs and specific activities of PLAC have contributed to the advancement in the Nigeria's electoral space (with particular focus on the 2019 General Election). This scope was chosen because 2019 was the year in which Nigeria was supposed to consolidate on the progress made in the 2015 General election and also because the 2019 general election was the last election conducted during the period of this study. The study is sure that democratic consolidation is achievable through the effective and proper contributions of every institution, like the CSOs, concerned with electoral activities in Nigeria.

### **1.6 Operational Definition of Terms**

The underlisted are terms and concepts used in the study that need to be operationally defined to give the reader a clear focus and understanding of this work.

#### **➤ Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)**

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are a wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. According to (Van Rooy, 1998) defines CSOs as "the population of groups formed for collective purposes primarily outside of the state and marketplace". It is also defined as "the sum total of those organizations and networks which lie outside the formal state apparatus" (Booke, 2000). Generally, therefore, CSOs

are intermediary entities, standing between the private sphere and the state. They are autonomous and voluntary in nature.

This study is focused particularly on the CSOs whose activities are centered on electoral activities and geared towards enhancing electoral democracy.

➤ **Electoral Democracy**

Electoral democracy as used in this study, describes a government that was established through a system that enables all the eligible citizens of a country to select their leaders from a list of qualified candidates in a competitive process usually referred to as an election. For this study therefore, ‘Electoral democracy’ means a system of choosing representatives of the Nigerian people into public offices through elections. This process must be competitive, credible, free, and fair. It further entails that the choice of the people must be freely given without any form of coercion.

➤ **Democracy**

The definition of democracy has consistently been subject to analytical scrutiny by social scientists. One of the most literal meanings of democracy was given by Abraham Lincoln. He defined democracy as “government of the people, by the people and for the people” Guaba, (2005). Huntington (1991) as cited in Ibrahim and Zhizhi (2003) sees democracy as a political system which is considered democratic because the most popular candidates are chosen through fair, honest, and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population are qualified to vote. Democracy, as used in this study, however refers basically to the periodic elections of candidates to fill in public offices in Nigeria.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The purpose of this chapter was to review relevant studies already carried out by some scholars in fields of study similar to this subject matter. It included the Conceptual review, the Empirical review, the knowledge gap identified as well as the theoretical framework upon which this study stands.

## **2.1 Conceptual Review**

### **2.1.1 Civil Society Organization**

The issue of defining what constitutes Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) is a problematic one as different author defined it variously. Holloway (2001) defines it as “citizens, associating neither for power nor for profit, but as the third sector of society, complementing government and business”. Generally, CSOs can encompass grass-roots organizations, citizens’ movements, trade unions, cooperatives, and other ways in which citizens associate for non-political, non- partisan and non-profit motives. To Holloway, they are not necessarily formal or registered. He looks at the political economy of the modern society in three basic sectors: state, business and a third sector defined by citizen self-organization. The State’s distinctive competence is legitimate use of coercion. The business sector’s competence is market exchange and the third sector’s competence is private choice for the public good. Citizens mobilize through values they share with other citizens and through shared commitment to action with other citizens. Holloway further states that it is taken as given that CSOs can do things on their own (which neither of the other national development actors like the government and the corporate sector can). So, for Holloway, CSOs are organizations made up of ordinary citizens of the State and they have values they are committed to pursuing, however, they must not be necessarily registered or formal.

On his part, Van Rooy (1998) defines CSOs as “the population of groups formed for collective purposes primarily outside of the state and market place”. It is also defined as “the sum total of those organizations and networks which lie outside the formal state apparatus” (Booke, 2000). Something very common with the above definitions is the emphasis on the fact that civil society organisations operate outside the state and the market place. This means that civil societies must be independent and not set up for business or profit purposes.

For McNicoll (1995), Civil society is “the totality of self-initiating and self-regulating organizations, peacefully pursuing a common interest, advocating a common cause, or

expressing a common passion; respecting the right of others to do the same; and maintaining their relative autonomy vis-a-vis the state, the family, the temple, and the market.” According to Diamond (1994:5), civil society is ‘the realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating, self-supporting, autonomous from the state and bound by the legal order or set of shared rules. This explain CSOs as involving citizens who act collectively in a public sphere to express their interests, passions, and ideas, exchange information, achieve mutual goals, make demands on the state, and hold state officials accountable to their actions.

In summing the above definitions, CSOs can be said to be intermediary entities, standing between the private sphere and the state. They are autonomous and voluntary in nature. They can also simply be defined as stake holding, non-governmental agencies, institutions and groups within a state, having the ability to influence certain decision, policies and activities of either government or other groups within the state. Broadly these definitions show that CSOs excludes anything private (like family) and also excludes anything government. In other words, between the one extreme of the private (family) and the other extreme of the State (government) are associations (loosely) referred to as CSOs.

In further expanding the above understanding, White (1994) sees the CSO as an intermediate associational realm between state and the family, populated by organizations separate from the state, enjoys autonomy in relation to the state and is formed voluntarily by members of the society to protect or extend their interests or values. For Layton (2004), civil society is “social organizations occupying the space between the household and the state that enable the people to coordinate their management of resources and activities.” In similar vein, Bayart (1986) sees the civil society as a political space between the household and the state. He went further to state that, “it encompasses NGOs, advocacy organizations, business associations, chamber of commerce, informal community groups, cultural societies, religions, sports clubs, labor unions, students’ organizations, youth organizations, community-based organizations, social movements, traditional leadership, women organizations, professional associations e.g. physicians and lawyers associations, and the media.

The above definitions are all encompassing and buttress the position of earlier authors discussed above, as they all conclude that the civil society is an intermediary entity,

standing between the private sphere and the state. This means that the CSOs have the ability to influence certain decision, policies and activities of either government or other groups within the state. They are generally bound by the pursuit of a common interest and collectively express a common passion, which for this study, is the promotion of democratic principles through the enhancement of electoral democracy in a given State, like Nigeria.

### **2.1.2 Electoral Democracy**

An “electoral democracy” describes a government that was established through a system that enables all the eligible citizens of a country to select their leaders from a list of qualified candidates in a competitive process usually referred to as an election. Citizens who qualify as voters (through the attainment of statutory age requirement) casts secret ballots of their choices and the ballots are summed for the selection of the most preferred leaders. In order for the election to qualify for democratic integrity, the process must be free and fair, without any coercion or bribery tactics and independence of the incumbents (Ajayi, 2009).

Schumpeter further clarifies that the kind of competition for leadership which is to define electoral democracy entails “a free competition for a free vote” (Schumpeter 1975). In other words, it is not only the process that ought to be free, but the voters must have made their choices freely. Similarly, Przeworski defines democracy as a regime in which governmental offices are filled as a consequence of contested elections (Przeworski, 1996). He suggests further that only if the opposition has the chances of winning and assuming offices is a regime democratic (Przeworski, 1996). In his own submission, Huntington asserts in the Schumpeterian tradition and defines democracy as “a political system that exists to the extent that its most powerful collective decision makers are selected through fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes, and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote (Huntington, 1991). Huntington further adds, like Schumpeter, that democracy also implies the existence of those civil and political freedoms to speak, publish, assemble and organize that are necessary to political debate and the conduct of electoral campaigns. In the same vein, Di Palma also notes that: Democracy is premised on free and fair suffrage in a context of civil liberties, on competitive parties, on the selection of alternative candidates for office and on the presence of political institutions that regulate and guarantee the roles

of government and opposition (Di Palma, 1990). In this discourse therefore, ‘electoral democracy’ means a process of choosing the representatives of the people into public offices. The process must be competitive, credible, free, fair and inclusive. It further entails that the choice of the people must be freely given without any form of coercion.

### **2.1.3 Democracy**

The concept of democracy has no single or universal definition, different scholars or political scientists has given different meanings based on the environment they found themselves. According to (Schumpeter, 1947), democracy means only that the people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the men who are to govern them. This means democracy implies conducting elections and choosing leaders that will represent the majority. Rousseau and Rivero (2003) see democracy as the power of the people as it manifests in ways of thinking, behaving, and organizing that enhance participation in and influence over the decisions affecting their everyday lives.

This kind of process can come through, public debate, election and representation-building of consensus and formidable decision-making. Precisely, democracy is seen as a political system that is characterized by periodic and free elections in which politicians arranged into political parties that engage themselves in a competitive poll to ensure a standing government, where the political right will enable all adult citizens (18 years and above as it applied in Nigeria) to vote and be voted for. Furthermore, Huntington (1991) as cited in Ibrahim and Zhizhi (2003) sees democracy as a political system which is considered democratic because the most popular candidates are chosen through fair, honest, and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population are qualified to vote. This promotes political participation of all adult members. The full participation of the people during electioneering gives the incoming government a legitimate foundation to govern. This means that any government that does not emanate from the popular choice of the people will not enjoy legitimacy which gives every government a political support from the people. This further buttress the fact that since democracy is all about choosing who should govern the people, then election is one paramount in every democracy.

One of the most literal meanings of democracy was given by Abraham Lincoln. He defined democracy as “government of the people, by the people and for the people” Guaba, (2005). Scholars have however argued that the simplicity of this definition does not do

justice to the extremely controversial notion of the concept of democracy. Guaba (2005) however provides an array of interpretations of democracy. Beginning with the elitist version typified by Mannheim (1998), who argued that the people cannot directly participate in government, but they can make their aspirations felt at certain intervals; and this is sufficient for democracy. The pluralist version finds expression in Dahl's interpretation who insists that the policy making process, however centralized it may appear in form, is in reality, a highly decentralized process of bargaining among relatively autonomous groups representing the generality of the people within the society.

Democracy therefore, can at best be said to be relative. For Agi (2000) writing on the concept of Democracy, firstly made a distinction between direct and representative democracy. In a direct democracy, all citizens participate directly in the laws and take turns in carrying them out. This form of Democracy was practiced in ancient Greece and in decentralized pre-colonial Africa societies. It gave way to representative democracy due to size in population and territory. In Representative democracy, the people do not generally make the laws or administer them but choose those who will do it. This latter type characterizes the modern type of Democracy.

## **2.2 Empirical Review**

### **2.2.1 Historical Overview of Civil Society in Nigeria**

Civil society in Nigeria as in other third world nations differ sharply in terms of its evolution from that of the Western world. While in the western society, civil society grew out of necessities, that is to say, they grew out of the expansion of state which was occasioned by the complexities of governmental role in everyday affairs; third world CSOs came about as a result of peoples' dissatisfaction with state policies and activities. In fact, most scholars and political commentators have tended to trace the evolution and subsequent proliferation of civil society organisations to the high-handedness witnessed by the masses during military dictatorship in Nigeria as in other third world nations (Ikubaje, 2011).

Civil society actors in Nigeria have been in the vanguard of the democratic struggle, especially immediately after Independence in 1960. Prior to independence, civil society actors emanating from political change and ending colonial rule, were already in place, though not very pronounced in Nigeria. Many of the early civil society groups in the pre-

independence era re-emerged in the 1990s as democratic activists. In fact, some of the most pronounced pro-democracy activists were those like National Democratic Coalition – (NADECO) who fought against continued military rule prior to the election of President Obasanjo in 1999, (Aborisade and Mundt, 2002). Thus, the contemporary, pro-democracy movement in Nigeria has its root in the early pre-independence days. First among these various groups was a trans-national organization known as the National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA) led by some intellectuals under the leadership of a Ghanaian Lawyer, Caseley Hayford. Its main objective was uniting the four British West African Countries-Gambia, Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast now Ghana and Nigeria in their demand for self-determination. Some scholars believed that despite the colonialist opposite reaction to the demands of this groups, they (the groups) were successful in their bid, because in 1922, the establishment of a new legislature with the elective principle was made by the Governor Sir Hugh Clifford in Nigeria; a major request of the group. In short, it may not be wrong for one to conclude that the pre-colonial civil society came into existence mainly to fight off what they perceived to be an unprecedented oppression of the black race and more specifically against the Nigerian masses by the colonial masters. As independence loomed in the horizon of the Nigeria state, a barrage of religious, peasant, communal, student, women and labor groups permeated the Nigerian civil space.

The expansion of civil society activities was further fired-up because of the repressive post-independence military rulers, as well as the feeling of non-reprisal from the colonial regime and other regional events that stirred citizens into democratic action. Some of Nigeria's most prominent civil society organizations like the Nigerian Union of Teachers, the Nigerian Bar Association, the Nigerian Society of Engineers, the Nigerian Medical Association and the Pharmaceutical Society of Nigeria were all founded before independence, and were patterned after similar European civil society actors (Aborisade and Mundt, 2002). After independence, new professional associations became deeply entrenched in the country, with CSOs such as the Nigerian Union of Journalists and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (Aborisade and Mundt, 2002).

However, trade union CSOs like the Nigerian Labor Congress and the Nigerian Bar Association became the most active of pro-democracy CSOs. Membership in a professional association was largely a status symbol and admission into a class-oriented brotherhood (Lucas, 1994). By the early 1990s in Nigeria, many new civil society



organizations were established for the specific purpose of defending the rights of citizens and extending the frontiers of political rights and freedoms throughout the country (Bangura and Beckman, 1992). During this period also, Nigeria experienced not only an exponential growth in the area of human rights and social activism, but also a growth in the area of personal freedoms. These emerged to coordinate the struggle for civil liberties (Aborisade and Mundt, 2002).

The establishment of the Campaign for Democracy (CD) became very significant in Nigeria. The group became the quintessential pro- democracy civil society organization in Nigeria. The CD was the organization that advocated for processes and procedures for the fight for human rights and it addressed social ills throughout Nigeria. Some of the “Constituent bodies” under the umbrella include the National Association of Democratic Lawyers (NADL), the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), Women in Nigeria (WIN) and the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ).

The return to the authoritarian regime of General Mohammadu Buhari in 1993, provided the grounds for the various groups and associations to forge a common front in confronting the excesses of that regime.

## **2.2.2 The Role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Deepening Democracy in Nigeria**

### **2.2.2.1 The Role of Civil Society Organizations in the restoration of Democracy in Nigeria**

Civil Society Organizations played vital roles in the entrenchment of democracy and democratic tenets in Nigeria. Many of these groups like Campaign for Democracy (CD), Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), Committee for Defense of Human Rights (CDHR), Civil Liberties Organization (CLO) and National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), were instrumental in the restoration of civil rule. It would be recalled that between 1993 and 1999, the CSOs in collaboration with some professional bodies like Nigeria Labor Congress (NLC), Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) and students’ union like

the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) were mobilized for strikes and protest marches across the country which eventually led to the military departure from governance. Orji (2004) believes that these CSOs and other professional bodies were at the forefront in the fight against military rule and for the restoration of democracy and democratic governance in Nigeria.

For instance, NADECO was formed in May 1994, when it became clear that Abacha was going to renege on his promise of convening a constitutional conference ‘with sovereign powers’. According to Mustapha (2001), NADECO declared that it stood for the restoration of democracy and true federalism. It asserted that the military dictatorships of Babangida and Abacha exerted terrible consequences on the country. It described the Abacha political transition as insincere, and poorly managed. It, therefore, called for the validation of the June 12, 1993 Election, the formation of a broad-based national government led by Abiola, and the convening of a sovereign national conference with the objective of achieving true federalism and political stability. NADECO-Abroad, on the other hand, campaigned strenuously for strict observance of existing bans on arms sales and deliveries, strict observance of travel restrictions on members of the military junta and their collaborators, a freeze on foreign assets of members of the regime and their agents, and the imposition of comprehensive sporting and oil sanctions. On the whole, NADECO remained more vocal in its criticism of the Abacha junta, and joined other civil society groups to establish the umbrella United Democratic Front of Nigeria (UDFN). It published a journal, *Nigerian Liberation*, and its leaders were constantly featured on Radio Democrat International Nigeria (later renamed Radio Kudirat International), the underground anti-Abacha radio station beamed to Nigeria. To say the least, NADECO could be likened as a gadfly in the life of the Abacha military regime. It mounted vigorous campaign against the regime till Abacha’s unmitigated demise and subsequent disintegration of his dictatorship.

The Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (ASUU) and National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) also played commendable efforts in challenging the military dictatorship in Nigeria during the Babangida and Obasanjo regime. ASUU for instance unambiguously condemned the murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the sacking of 49 lecturers from Uni-Illorin by the Obasanjo regime in 2001 for refusing to break ASUU strike and return to work. Credit must also go to the CSOs and other organizations for pushing the

government of President Olusegun Obasanjo to concede to the idea of a National Conference. Even though the government opted for what was tagged the National Political Reform Conference, observers believe it was a result of the pressure from the CSOs (Iyayi, 2002). The Transitional Monitoring Group and other CSOs also played active and vital roles in the 2003, 2007 and 2011 General Elections (Transition Monitoring Group Report, 2011).

Similarly, the NLC and TUC and their affiliates in the civil society organizations, for instance, not satisfied with the conduct of the 2007 general elections after the announcement of the results, called for the cancellation of the elections and threatened to begin a nationwide strike in protest of some of the sharp practices inherent in the electoral processes that were sometimes regarded as less than democratic (European Union Report, on 2007 General elections). The involvement of civil society groups, as neutral observers separate from the interest of the ruling political elite and the opposition political party (i.e.) brought progressive and constructive engagements towards Nigeria's electoral process.

### ➤ **2.2.2 The Role of Civil Society in Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria**

Democracy is never a finished business, but rather work in progress. Its processes require gradual measures captured in not only the divide between democracies and non-democracies, but differences in degrees of democratic qualities (Lundberg, 2008). What is important in the democratic consolidation is that political, social and economic re-engineering efforts should bring about qualitative changes in the lives of the people, while the building and remodeling of political institutions and structures go on. CSOs therefore have important roles to play in ensuring all these, especially where opposition parties appear to be docile. In pursuing these goals, they may cooperate or disagree with the state with regards to its mode of operation regarding policies that bother on the lives of the citizenry (Igbokwe and Ibeto 2014).

Civil Society Organization (CSOs) are also involved in the civic and moral education of the citizens. This is one area which is crucial to the consolidation of democracy in all countries, including Nigeria. A number of innovative approaches have crystallized over the years. A good example is the introduction of "Town Hall Meetings", a forum which assembles the electorates and elected officers to discuss issues affecting them and finding solutions to them (Takpa, 2010). This innavitably brings the government and the people close and enable the governed to reap the benefit of democracy.

Another innovation by CSOs is engagement in voters' education. Uadile (2011) further averred that civil society organizations helps to enlighten the voting population on the need for free, fair and credible elections. They usually do this by working in consonance with the Election Management Body (EMB) carrying out extensive sensitizations on the electoral processes like the election day procedures as well as educating the voting public on their rights and responsibilities. This they do both at the rural and urban centres using various medium like the traditional television and radio networks, social media, printing of pamphlets, doing jingles etc. The benefit of this was clearly explained by Saheed O & Hayatula H. (2020) in their article- *Voter Education and Credible election in Nigeria*, they said:

*interest groups such as the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have been playing significant role since the reintroduction of civil rule in Nigeria to ensure that the nascent democracy is sustained. The CSOs ensure that there is peaceful conduct of the electorates before and during elections, which is mainly achieved through voters' education across the country,*

Furthermore, Civil society organizations engage in the struggle to ensure accountability and transparency in governance. Groups like Transparency International and Integrity Group have been mobilizing against corruption in Nigeria. According to Takpa (2010), the NLC and three other organizations led the formation of network of civil societies on public expenditure and budget monitoring. Part of the objective of the network was to find ways in which citizens could influence public expenditure (spending) through participation in the budgeting processes. It was in the same vein that the League for Human Rights, an NGO based in Jos, decided to be publishing the monthly federal revenue allocation meant for Plateau State, for citizens to know how much was being allocated to the state at the end of every month (Uadiale, 2011).

CSOs also carry out enlightenment campaigns or debates among presidential and vice presidential candidates to educate the people about candidates and political parties. Usually, these debates are organised for candidates of the leading political parties. For many voters and citizens, the debates offer them first opportunities to meet their candidates and some rely on the outcome of the outcome to decide upon which candidates will receive their vote. In speaking to the importance of this exercise, Bitrus K. (2022)

said it was to “ensure the evolution of transformation leaders with a broad knowledge of the issues and the political will to steer the ship of the nation towards shared economic prosperity”

As Abari (2013) argued that CSOs also send out observation teams on general election days to observe the conduct and outcome of elections. And more importantly, the civil society with its traditional role of restricting the state by its oversight activities, prevent the incumbent government from manipulating elections through the divesting of the electoral umpire's power to work independently. By so doing, civil society organizations help to ensure the acceptability and credibility of outcomes of elections which depend greatly on the measure of independence of purpose, neutrality and impartiality of the electoral umpire and election observers. According to reports from Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC -2012), key roles of CSOs in enhancing election process include advocacy and monitoring which enables them to take part in observer missions in the polling field and at the collation centers. To this end, CSOs have come together to form Election Observer Groups (EOG) to achieve a more coordinated approach. Not only does this ensure that due process is followed, but it also gives credibility to the process.

Civil society organizations engaged Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to enhance the conduct of the 2007, 2011 and 2015 general elections (Transition Monitoring Group, 2003). In fact, the INEC/Civil Society Desk was established in September, 2006 to coordinate a synergy between the two entities towards better election conduct and outcome (Uadiale, 2011)

Towards reforming the Electoral Act in 2007, CSOs made several presentations and recommendations to House Committee on Electoral Reform. It would be recalled that the persistent requests and protests by CSOs after the conduct of the 2007 General Election were instrumental to the setting up of Uwais Panel in August, 2007. Consequently, the report paved way for the significant Electoral Reforms after the 2007 elections. The CSOs were able to achieve this feat through constant advocacy and prodding of the government on the dire need to reform the electoral process. One of which included the use of electronic voting as one of the ways of addressing election malpractices in Nigeria.

On citizens' engagement with the electoral process, CSOs continually advocate to citizens to actively participate in all relevant electoral activities by encouraging them to take part in pre-election activities (like voter registration exercise) and election activities (like casting their ballots). Also, they take interest in post-election petitions and tribunals for the purpose of setting constitutional discourse that can pave way for constitutional amendment that will consequently improve the electoral system in the long run.

The engagements and re-engagements of CSOs with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and other election stakeholders for re-engineering of the electoral process has continued to strengthen the entire electoral process. One key example is the introduction of the use of technology in the Nigerian electoral process (Voter Enrolment Devices, Smart Card Reader) in 2015 and 2019 which, it is widely believed, will lead to the eventual introduction of electronic voting in future elections in Nigeria. Indeed, the CSOs facilitated greater understanding through establishing an interface between INEC and other stakeholder's like- the Media, Security Organisations and political parties as well as between INEC and coalition of CSOs. In particular, the CSOs actually engaged INEC at the different stages in the electoral process. One of such engagement platforms was the INEC's Roundtable on "Preparations Towards the 2015 General Elections: Enhancing Citizens' Participation through Civil Society Organizations" held on April 8, 2014 (Mohammed, 2018). It was one of the early engagements of CSOs with INEC that further added more strength to CSOs voter education as well as other electoral activities.

Also, efforts and contributions of the CSOs in the establishment of Electoral Acts Review, Constitution Review and the registration of more political organizations have one way or the other, enhanced electoral democratic principles, practices and procedures in Nigeria. (Abari, 2013)

### **2.3 Gap in Knowledge**

The chapter has been able to provide a conceptual framework of the major concepts used in the study, an empirical and a theoretical framework to guide the entire study. From this review, it can be seen that several studies have been reviewed on the subject matter of the role of Civil Society Organization (CSOs) in electoral democracy in Nigeria. However, there still remains a gap on the role of civil society in Nigeria, and the prospects of achieving better electoral democracy. While some similar studies have attempted to interrogate the role of Civil Society Organization in the attainment as well as deepening

of democracy in Nigeria, these studies did not identify or list out the specific roles or activities carried out by the CSOs around the electoral cycle that will enhance the conduct and outcome of election. That is, to consider the specific activities of CSOs from the pre-election to the post – election stages of the electoral process with a view to identifying how these activities contribute in enhancing the electoral process which is the vehicle for the consolidation of democratic tenets all over the world.

Also, none of the reviews has undertaken a clear case study particularly, so, they were interrogated using less empirical methodologies because of lack of particular focus. Furthermore, in most of the work done on the role of Civil Society Organization (CSOs) and democracy in Nigeria, the variables used were not completely related to electoral democracy, therefore they did not address the exact role(s) of Civil Society Organizations in electoral democracy in Nigeria. This study filled these gaps.

## **2.4 Review of Theoretical Frameworks**

One of the most dominant features in social sciences is the adoption, discussion, analysis and even understanding of concepts and phenomenon from theoretical point of view or orientation. This research is certainly no exception and therefore lends itself to a theoretical orientation.

### **➤ 2.3.1 Resource Mobilization Theory**

Resource mobilization theory is used in the study of social movements and argues that the success of social movements depends on resources (time, money, skills, etc.) and the ability to use them. When the theory first appeared, it was a breakthrough in the study of social movements because it focused on variables that are sociological rather than psychological. No longer were social movements viewed as irrational, emotion-driven, and disorganized. For the first time, influences from outside social movements, such as support from various organizations or the government, were taken into account.

In the 1960s and 1970s, sociology researchers began to study how social movements depend on resources in order to bring about social change. While previous studies of social movements had looked at individual psychological factors that cause people to join social causes, resource mobilization theory took a wider perspective, looking at the broader societal factors that allow social movements to succeed.

In 1977, John McCarthy and Mayer Zald published a key paper outlining the ideas of resource mobilization theory. In their paper, McCarthy and Zald began by outlining terminology for their theory: social movement organizations (SMOs) are groups that advocate for social change, while Social Movement Industry (SMI) is a set of organizations which advocate for similar causes. (For example, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch would each be SMOs within the larger SMI of human rights organizations.) SMOs seek out adherents (people who support the goals of the movement) and constituents (people who are involved in actually supporting a social movement; for example, by volunteering or donating money). McCarthy and Zald also drew the distinction between people who stand to directly benefit from a cause (whether or not they actually support the cause themselves) and people who don't benefit from a cause personally but support it because they believe it is the right thing to do.

According to Resource Mobilization Theorists, there are several ways that SMOs can acquire the resources they need: for example, social movements might produce resources themselves, aggregate the resources of their members, or seek out external sources (whether from small-scale donors or larger grants). According to resource mobilization theory, being able to effectively utilize resources is a determinant of the success of a social movement. Additionally, resource mobilization theorists look at how an organization's resources impact its activities (for example, SMOs that receive funding from an external donor could potentially have their choices of activities constrained by the donor's preferences).

According to sociologists who study resource mobilization, the types of resources needed by social movements can be grouped into five categories and these are Material resources, Human resources, Social - organisational resources, Cultural resources and Moral resources.



The theory emphasizes the importance of resources in social movement development and argues that social movements develop when individuals with grievances are able to mobilize sufficient resources to take action. This is fundamental here because the study agrees that CSOs in Nigeria have over the period under review, organized themselves as interest groups to aggregate their views and those of the masses and channel it to the state and the electoral process either as a demand or as a reaction to a public policy. This is done using the available resources; human and material at their disposal. The contributions of CSOs like PLAC in the Nigerian electoral cycle have help utilized resources in the development of Nigeria's democracy and electoral process. They mobilize resources for creating political awareness, public briefings, sensitizations, education and other electoral and even legislative engagements. In elaborating the relevance of Resource Mobilization for CSOs, Researcher, Bernadette Barker-Plummer investigated how resources allow organizations to gain media coverage of their work by looking at media coverage of the National Organization for Women (NOW) from 1966 until the 1980s. She found that the number of members NOW had was correlated with the amount of media coverage NOW received in *The New York Times*. In other words, Barker-Plummer suggests, as NOW grew as an organization and developed more resources, it was also able to gain media coverage for its activities. So ability to properly mobilize and effectively utilize needed resources helps determine the success of CSOs in carrying out their programs and activities towards the growth and development of electoral democracy in Nigeria.

### ➤ 2.3.2 Participatory Democratic Theory

Participatory Democracy has been embraced by a growing number of intellectuals, and by leaders and activists of the political Left and Center-Left throughout the world, as a means to directly address the problems of Elitist Democracy. It has also been adopted by many within the international development community, and even by a large number of ostensibly non-ideological municipal leaders and administrators in the United States. Proponents of Participatory Democracy are characterized, first, by their unwillingness to accept the antidemocratic and citizen-demobilizing conclusions of either “do-nothing” status quo conservatism, anti-State neo-liberalism or demagogic neo-populism. Second, they claim that such indicators of civic disengagement as low and declining voter turnouts, increasing distrust in democratic politicians and processes, and declining levels of participation in organized political society can be countered by actively promoting citizens' involvement in important decision-making processes— fostering what Avritzer calls

“participatory publics” especially at the local or grass-roots level where politics can more easily be seen to be relevant to peoples’ day-to-day lives.

The operative hypothesis here is that citizen participation produces “empowerment,” defined by Dagnino as “the construction of active social subjects, defining for themselves what they consider to be their rights and fighting for recognition of those rights.” More specifically, empowerment refers to the transformation of an individual’s prior mentality of fatalism and dependency on “higher ups” and/or an active disgust regarding all things political, to a new sense of personal responsibility to struggle against systemic exclusion and domination, and a belief in one’s efficacy to be successful in doing so. In the illustrative words of political theorists, Jane Mansbridge and Arnold Kaufman, “democratic participation by which meant exercising real power over the decisions that affect one would improve, generally, ‘one’s powers of thought, feeling and action. In terms more familiar, perhaps, to North American political scientists, empowerment means moving from “parochial” and “subject” mentalities toward a “participant” mentality.

Proponents of Participatory Democracy see political participation, therefore, not only as a collective action strategy necessary for furthering the interests of the repressed, excluded and ignored individuals and groups (i.e. power and persuasion through numbers), but as the vehicle for an individual’s psychological emancipation from the idea of natural sociopolitical hierarchies (e.g. class, gender, race, etc.) and the sense of personal impotence in breaking out of such hierarchies (e.g. perceptions of “natural” social hierarchy and/or of politics as inherently elitist generating nonelite passivity, stoicism, etc.).

The imputed importance of empowerment for the broader health and progress of democracy cannot be overstated. In the words of the American political scientist, Larry Diamond, “prominent theories of democracy, both classical and modern, have asserted that democracy requires a distinctive set of political values and orientation from its citizens: moderation, tolerance, civility, efficacy, and participation.” Theorists of political culture in the 1960s often theorized and many observers continue to believe to this day that, in the absence of such democratic values (as largely witnessed in third world countries), then there is no democracy. Contemporary proponents of Participatory Democracy reject such culturally deterministic logic, arguing in its stead that properly

designed and promoted opportunities for meaningful and efficacious political participation can generate empowered citizens, and that empowerment can generate something of a snowball effect of deepening citizen participation.

To the extent that empowerment takes place among previously excluded, ignored, and/or underserved sectors of the population, proponents of Participatory Democracy argue that politics becomes more pluralistic and democratic. Existing representative democracies become even more representative as they become more participatory. Another important, and related, claim is that an empowered and active civil society provides an oversight function, and therefore a democratic check, to the sort of corruption, backroom politics, and clientelistic log-rolling common to elitist politics anywhere.

### ➤ 2.3.3 Liberal Democracy Theory

Liberalism is a political and moral philosophy based on the rights of the individual, consent of the governed and equality before the law. Liberals support a variety of views depending on their understanding of these principles, but they generally support individual rights (including civil rights and human rights), liberal democracy, secularism, rule of law, economic and political freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, private property and a market economy. Liberalism became a distinct movement in the Age of Enlightenment, gaining popularity among Western philosophers and economists. Liberalism sought to replace the norms of hereditary privilege, state religion, absolute monarchy, the divine right of kings and traditional conservatism with representative democracy and the rule of law.

Liberals also ended mercantilist policies, royal monopolies and other barriers to trade, instead promoting free trade and marketization. Philosopher John Locke is often credited with founding liberalism as a distinct tradition, based on the social contract, arguing that each man has a natural right to life, liberty and property and governments must not violate these rights. While the British liberal tradition has emphasized expanding

democracy, French liberalism has emphasized rejecting authoritarianism and is linked to nation-building. Leaders in the British Glorious Revolution of 1688, the American Revolution of 1776 and the French Revolution of 1789 used liberal philosophy to justify the armed overthrow of royal sovereignty. Liberalism started to spread rapidly especially after the French Revolution. The 19th century saw liberal governments established in nations across Europe and South America, alongside republicanism in the United States. In Victorian Britain, it was used to critique the political establishment, appealing to science and reason on behalf of the people.

During 19th and early 20th century, liberalism in the Ottoman Empire and Middle East influenced periods of reform such as the Tanzimat and Al-Nahda as well as the rise of constitutionalism, nationalism and secularism. These changes, along with other factors, helped to create a sense of crisis within Islam, which continues to this day, leading to Islamic revivalism. Before 1920, the main ideological opponents of liberalism were communism, conservatism and socialism, but liberalism then faced major ideological challenges from fascism and Marxism–Leninism as new opponents. During the 20th century, liberal ideas spread even further, especially in Western Europe, as liberal democracies found themselves as the winners in both world wars. In Europe and North America, the establishment of social liberalism (often called simply liberalism in the United States) became a key component in the expansion of the welfare state.

Today, liberal parties continue to wield power and influence throughout the world. The fundamental elements of contemporary society have liberal roots. The early waves of liberalism popularized economic individualism while expanding constitutional government and parliamentary authority. Liberals sought and established a constitutional order that prized important individual freedoms, such as freedom of speech and freedom of association; an independent judiciary and public trial by jury; and the abolition of aristocratic privileges. Later waves of modern liberal thought and struggle were strongly influenced by the need to expand civil rights. Liberals have advocated gender and racial equality in their drive to promote civil rights and a global civil rights movement in the 20th century achieved several objectives towards both goals. Other goals often accepted by liberals include universal suffrage and universal access to education.

Civil Society Organization (CSOs) operate in the larger theory of liberal democracy theory. This is because the importance attributed to civil society relies to a large extent on how they contribute to the institution and practices of liberal democracy. Shively (2005) posits that liberalism is the highest good of society, that is, the ability of the members of the society to develop their individual capacity. It requires people to be maximally responsible for their actions. The inference here, according to liberalist is that collective decision making is what guides the state. This central assumption of liberalism has become the foundation for democratic government. John Stuart Mills, a major figure in liberal thought and an advocate of democratic government explains that the "chief end of all politics is to allow people to become responsible and mature, they can do this, only if they take part in decisions affecting their own lives" (Shively, 2005).

Therefore, activities of the state depending on the political perspective can be extensive or minimalist but when the State does intervene in the life of the political community, it must be guided by procedures that generally entail public deliberation, voting and majority decision rules. Thus, CSOs serve to preserve a robust sphere of liberal, free-state. These associations operate as centers of power that compete with the state and enable their members to critically deliberate and engage with the initiative of the state. The state must however guarantee the fundamental rights of free speech and free association which are pre-requisite for social mobilization and also allow some degree of transparency in policy making activities to enable civil society use democratic means to checkmate the State.

It can be deduced that civil societies and political parties are recognized with a high level in the democratization process in general. The higher the level of institutionalization of democratic institutions like the CSOs, the more instrumental they become in the process of electoral democracy. The idea is to understand the role of each actor in the democratic process and the changing nature of this role given the dynamics of political system, socio-economic and environmental factors. In the area of electoral process of liberal democratic societies, the liberal theory implies that CSOs are institutional partners in ensuring systematic change in the political process for the common good rather than the interest of the State, a clique within it or certain class in the society. Civil society represents a particular sector that sprouts from the associational life of the society.

Civil society Organizations have played vital roles in the entrenchment of democracy and democratic tenets in Nigeria, many of these groups like Campaign for Democracy (CD), Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), Committee for Defense of Human Rights (CDHR), Civil Liberties Organization (CLO) and National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), were instrumental in the restoration of civil rule. Thus, the involvement of civil society groups, as neutral observers separate from the interest of the ruling political elite and the opposition political party (ies) has brought in progressive engagements to the electoral process.

Some CSOs like The Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) and even Yiaga Africa are presently playing key roles of CSOs in our electoral democracy. These include, advocacy, sensitization, conflict management and election observation which enable them to take part in Observer Missions on the field of election and in the collation centers. These organisations, amongst others based on the liberal theory tenets, have come together to form Election Observers Group (EOG) to achieve a more coordinated approach. Not only does this ensure that due Guidelines and procedures are followed, but it also gives credibility to the electoral process.

Towards re-enacting the Electoral Act in 2022 CSOs were able to achieve great feat through constant advocacy and prodding of the government on the urgent need to reform the electoral process. One of which included the use of electronic voting as one of the ways of addressing election malpractices in Nigeria. Apart from this, CSOs continually advocate to citizens to actively participate in the electoral process.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This chapter looked at the methodology adopted by the researcher in acquiring salient information relevant to the subject matter “Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Electoral Democracy in Nigeria: A focus on Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) in the 2019 General Election”. The areas covered by the methodology include the research design, justification, study location, study population, sample and sampling technique, methods of data collection, research instrument, validity and reliability of research instrument as well as the approach to data analysis.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The study will adopt the experimental research design, which will involve the systematic collection, presentation and analysis of primary data on Civil Society Organisations and electoral democracy in Nigeria: A focus on Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC)

in the 2019 general election. It will adopt the qualitative research method, which will involve the collection of texts, interviews, observation and documentary evidences. It will therefore, analyse the qualitative data using qualitative techniques.

### **3.1.1 Justification of the Research Design**

The qualitative research is chosen for this study because it is a recognized and reputable method of enquiry in the Social Sciences for data collection and analysis (Asante-Kissi, 2012). The qualitative research method enables a thorough scrutiny of the researched topic which is not possible in quantitative research. Even within qualitative research, the researcher is provided with a vast range of options and opportunities for exploring diverse issues within the area of organizational research. The qualitative approach also allows for a thorough understanding of human behaviour and beliefs within the context in which they occur (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). The qualitative approach is also important to understand the “quality” and “nature” of how people behave, experience and understand certain phenomenon, it’s causes and effect. The qualitative approach is also adopted because it is the best approach to answer the main research question on the impact of the roles played by PLAC in the three stages of the 2019 electoral cycle on the outcome of that election. To achieve this, those who worked in PLAC during 2019 general election will be directly spoken to and read – this is only achievable and best done using the qualitative approach.

### **3.1.2 Study Location/Area**

The study location will be the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The location is purposive, since the research deals on PLAC, located in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Also, many of the key informant interviewees (KIIs) who are expected to provide relevant data for this study are based in (FCT). for these informants, a face-to-face interview will be conducted. However, for some of them who have moved on to other organisations outside the FCT, a telephone interview will be effectively adopted.

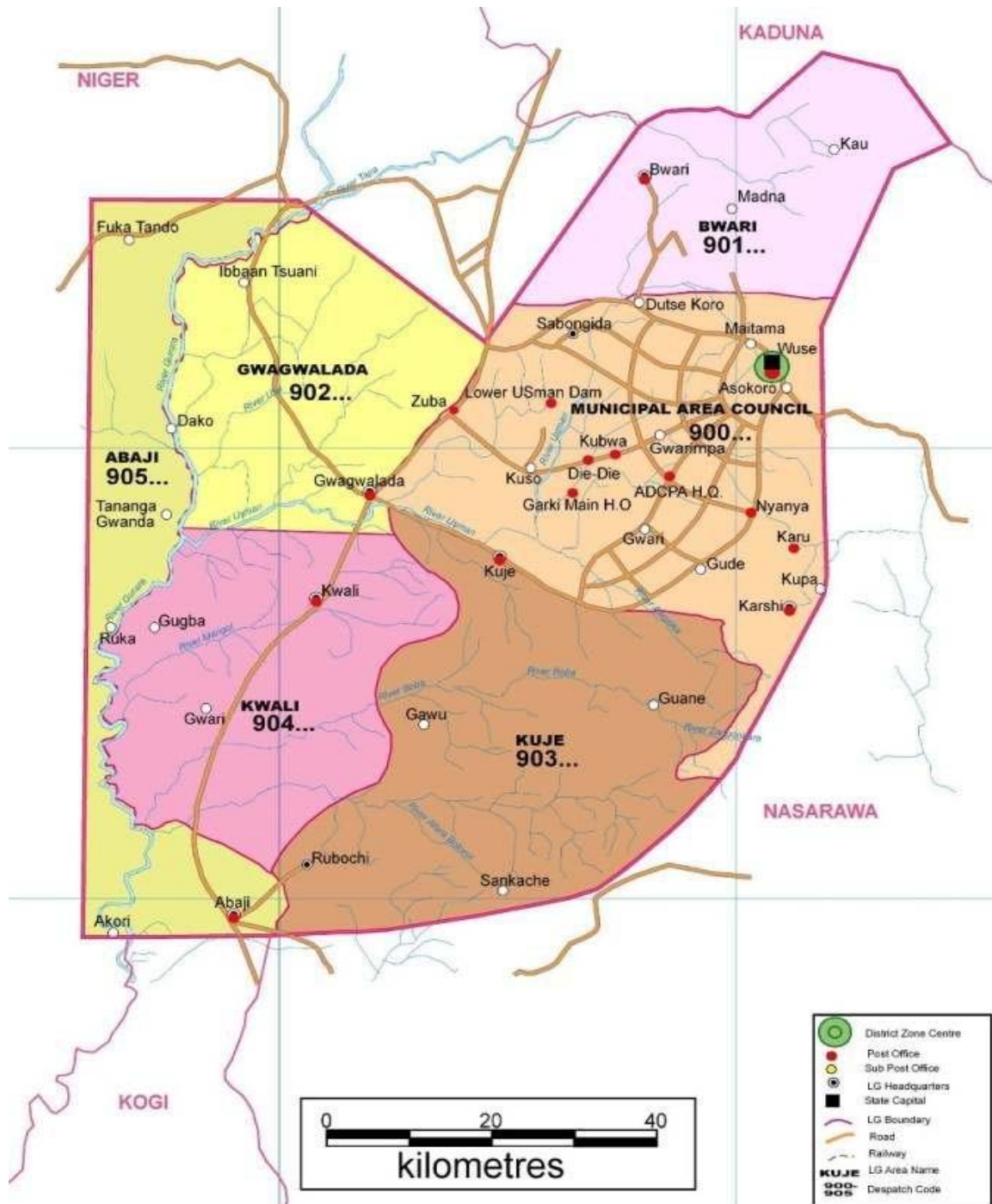


**Federal Capital Territory (FCT)**, also known as Abuja, administrative territory, central Nigeria, created in 1976. The territory is located north of the confluence of the Niger and Benue rivers. It is bordered by the states of Niger to the west and northwest, Kaduna to the northeast, Nassarawa to the east and south, and Kogi to the southwest. Abuja, the federal capital and a planned modern city, is located near the centre of the territory.

The region is underlain by crystalline rocks consisting of granites and gneisses. The vegetation is mainly savanna with limited forest areas. Agriculture, the economic mainstay, produces yams, millet, corn (maize), sorghum, and beans. The population comprises the Gwari, Koro, Ganagana, Gwandara, Afo, and Bassa ethnic groups, predominantly dairy farmers. Hausa and Fulani also live in the territory. Mineral resources include clay, tin, feldspar, gold, iron ore, lead, marble, and talc. Abuja has an airport and major road connections. Area 2,824 square miles (7,315 square km). Pop. (2006) 1,406,239; (2016 est.) 3,564,100.

Abuja is Nigeria's administrative and political capital. It is also a key capital on the African continent due to Nigeria's geo-political influence in regional affairs. Abuja is also a conference centre and hosts various meetings annually, such as the 2003 Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting and the 2014 World Economic Forum (Africa) meetings. Abuja joined the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities in 2016. FCT is divided into six which are; Gwagwalada, Abaji, Kwali, Kuje, Bwari and Abuja Municipal Council (AMAC) which is the central focus of this study.

The Figure 3.1 below shows the map of the study location/area.



Source: GIS Geography, 2022

## 3.2 Population, Sample and Sampling Techniques

### 3.2.1 Study Population

Since the study seeks to examine the Civil Society Organisations and electoral democracy in Nigeria: A focus on Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) in the 2019 general

election, the study population will therefore be purposively selected based on their experiences, knowledge, and expertise on the subject matter and the objectives of the study. The study population will hence, include the Staff and members of PLAC, particularly those in the employ of the organisation within the 2019 electoral cycle.

### **3.2.2 Sample and Sampling Techniques**

Since it is impossible to study the entire population, the study will rely on an appropriate sample size to collect primary data. For this study, the non-probabilistic or purposive sampling technique will be adopted. This is in order to make sure that only those respondents who have the requisite qualities and experiences relevant to the subject matter are selected to participate in the research. Hence, a total of ten (10) key informant interviewees (KIIs) will be purposively selected to participate in the study. The sample size is considered appropriate because in qualitative research such as this, emphasis is not on quantity, rather emphasis is on the quality of data, as such, respondents are carefully selected based on their potentials to provide these quality data (Patton and Cochran, 2002: 9). Furthermore, there is also the need to be mindful of redundant or repeated information from the sources.

### **3.3 Methods of Data Collection**

The study will rely heavily on primary source of data, and will be complemented by secondary sources. Primary data will be collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. Therefore, face-to-face as well as telephone interviews will be conducted with respondents, using open-ended questions. The researcher will be guided by a list of questions (interview guide, see Appendix I), but will not be restricted to those questions. The interview technique is important for such a study as this, because it allows for in-depth interrogation of the subject matter (Kvale, 2003). Complementarily, secondary data

will be sourced from relevant literature such as textbooks, journal and magazine articles, official documents and gazettes, conference papers, Newspaper reports, and the Internet.

### **3.3.1 Research Instrument**

The semi-structured interview will be adopted as the research instrument for this study. It will make use of a list of questions that will help to retrieve the relevant data on the roles played by PLAC in the three stages of the 2019 general election and the impact of their specific activities on the election outcome.. This is to allow for flexibility and in-depth interrogation, and to expand respondents' responses (Rubin and Rubin, 2005: 88).

### **3.3.2 Validity and Reliability of Research Instrument**

These are very important issues to take into consideration in any Social Science research. Therefore, the validity and reliability of the research instrument for this study will be determined in order to be sure that it measures and validates what it is intended to measure and validate. To ensure the validity and reliability of the research instrument for this study, a simultaneous analysis of the qualitative primary data and analysis of the secondary data sources on the subject matter will be done. Also, an interview guide (a list of questions) will be adopted. The questions for the interviews will be subjected under the strict scrutiny of the research supervisor and internal examiner, to ensure that they meet the objectives of the study. Recordings and note taking will be made of the responses from the interviewees. The recorded tapes will be transcribed into text and analysed. In a nutshell, the research instrument for this study will be further validated and reliability achieved over time, through the scrutiny and expert supervision of the research instrument by the research supervisor and internal examiner.

### **3.3.3 Data Analysis**

The study will adopt the thematic analytical approach of data analysis. Thematic analysis involves a systematic analysis of data. This will involve the first transcription of the recorded interviews, afterwards, the transcribed data is then grouped into themes in line with the research questions and objectives. Thereafter, extensive reading, prognosis, critics and conclusions will be made from the discussions of the relevant data gathered from primary source and complemented by secondary data.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

## DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

One of the primary expectations of this study is that its findings should highlight the roles of CSOs in elections and explain how their robust participation in the three (3) stages of every electoral cycle (especially that of 2019) improves positive electoral outcome and subsequently the development of electoral democracy in Nigeria. This chapter presented the data collected by the respondents who were Staff of the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC). Though the proposed number of participants were ten (10) only nine of them were reached. Also, while some participants were reached physically, some had to be reached via telephone. This is a result of the fact that they had been in the employ (engagement) of PLAC as at the time covered by this study but have since moved on to other organisations.

### 4.2 Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents,

Table 4.1

<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
18-30	5	55.6%
31-45	4	44.4%
46-60	-	-
60 and above	-	-
<b>Sex</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Male	5	55.6%
Female	4	44.4%
<b>Educational Qualification</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Primary Certificate	-	-
NCE/Diploma	-	-
Degree	8	88.9%
Post Graduate	1	11.1%
<b>Years of Experience</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Less than 1 year	-	-
1-2 years	-	-
2-3 years	4	44.4%
3-4 years	3	33.3%
4-5 years	-	-
Above 5 years	2	22.2%

### 4.3 DATA PRESENTATION

## **Question 1    What are the roles of Civil Society Organisations (CSO) in Electoral Democracy**

This question is geared towards ascertaining if CSOs involved in elections have roles to play round the electoral cycle. Virtually, all the respondents gave a ‘yes’ answer to this question thereby confirming that CSOs involved in elections have roles to play in the three stages of the electoral process, that is, the pre-election stage, the election stage and the post-election stage. It also buttresses the point that election is not an event carried out in a day but a set of interwoven activities carried out across (around) a set period of time with each set of activities in each stage building up to the other stages in a cyclical nature.

Various stakeholders have critical and unique roles to contribute during the electoral process. However, Civil society organizations (CSOs) have been recognized as important agents to electoral governance as observed from their roles and specific activities which have improved and still improving many democracies. They contribute immensely to the process by improving the quality of electoral governance, advocating for electoral reforms, developing capacity of election management bodies to apply the principles of transparency, openness, fairness and level playing ground for every electoral candidate.

CSOs are veritable institutions that work in the democratization process as their objectives and activities are remarkably reinforcing the development of democracy. According to (Respondent 3):

*CSOs play a watchdog role of making sure that the rights of citizens are upheld and honored at every stage of the electoral process as well as offering voter education. The importance of stake-holder engagement in the electoral process is key to ensuring that elections are held in a peaceful, free, fair environment, and that is paramount to have credible elections.*

Thus, Civil Society Organisations are key stakeholders in Nigerian electoral process and they have been playing pivotal roles complimenting the INEC’s activities in improving the electoral process. According to (Respondents 9),

*some of the CSOs coordinates efforts aimed at promoting the inclusion, equal treatment, and participation in democratic governance in the country to*

*ensure sustainable peace and development and at the same time ensuring that no one is left behind.*

According to (Respondents 1):

*there are three areas in which civil society organizations (CSOs) play vital roles in the process of electoral democracy. First, they are arenas through which citizens' preferences are formulated and aggregated. Second, they represent the sphere of the society in which citizens overcome collective action problems (exclusion), secure representation and inclusive participation in electoral process. Third, through CSOs' resistance to unpopular state actions and their role as whistle blowers, they regulate the conduct of election management bodies, political party in power and the opposition parties as well.*

**Question 2: What are some of these roles?**

This question sets out to identify the essential roles of CSOs in electoral democracy.

**Response:**

In response to this question the respondents gave varied answers to the roles played by CSOs in the electoral process. While all the respondents agree that CSOs play roles all through the electoral cycle, five of the nine respondents (Respondents 1, 2, 4, 6 & 8) laid more emphasis on the pre-election roles as they believe that those activities lay great foundation on the success or otherwise of the actual conduct of the election. The Specific activities listed by these respondents are voter education, civic and voter engagement and awareness, capacity building and training (for various election stakeholders), engage political parties and candidates on their manifestoes during campaign period, organise debates for candidates of leading political parties and sensitization in preparation for elections. For the second stage of the electoral cycle, which is the actual conduct of the elections, respondents 2, 4, 7, and 9 laid much emphasis on the role of CSO in the observation and reporting on the actual conduct of election on the day of election. According to ('Respondent 9): *all CSOs involved in the elections should endeavour to observe elections and submit detailed reports of their evaluation of the election to the EMB*"



According to him, “this is actual measurement of the extent of compliance of EMBs towards discharging their obligation towards holding free, fair and credible election. On the postelection roles of CSOs, two of the respondents (3 and 5) believe that while CSOs in the electoral process should perform functions in the three stages of the electoral process, they should pay close attention to post election activities of the EMB. (Respondent 5) stated that *“advocating for legal reforms after the conduct of any election can guarantee better election conducts and outcomes in subsequent elections”*

PLAC, as a Civil Society Organisation participated in the 2019 General Election. Thus, beyond just participating in the election, (Respondent 8) stated that: “PLAC is the secretariat of the Nigerian Civil Society Situation, which observed the 2019 General Elections, so PLAC was active in co-ordinating the observation exercise.”

### **Question 3:**

#### **What specific activities did PLAC carry out towards, during and after the 2019 General Election?**

This section set out to unravel what specific activities PLAC carried out from the pre-election stage of the 2019 General Election to the post- election stage. This is to enable the research work correlate these various activities to specific outcomes of the election so as to ascertain whether the roles of CSOs led to better election outcomes and subsequently to the development of electoral democracy.

### **Response**

The responses received showed that PLAC carried out its electoral activities round the three stages of the 2019 General election. These activities, as revealed by the respondents, were mapped out and planned for with expectations clearly set out at the end of the 2015 electoral cycle. This was alluded to by respondent (1) who stated that:

“At the end of the 2015 general election, PLAC engaged with policy makers, political parties and electoral authorities to advocate for

electoral reforms and improvements aimed at strengthening democratic processes, enhancing transparency and ensuring fair and credible future elections.”

Accordingly, it is clear that the planning of and preparation towards one election begins at the end of another, showing that election is actually a process not an event. Other very important pre-election activities carried out by PLAC and outlined by all respondents are the voter education and sensitization, zonal and town hall meetings with relevant stakeholders, observation of voter registration exercises, organisation of debates for presidential and vice-presidential candidates etc. Speaking to the importance of carrying out voter education and sensitization before the conduct of election, respondent (1) again stated that:

“PLAC conducted voter education campaigns to raise awareness about the electoral process, voter rights and responsibilities and the importance of participation in the election through social media, vox pop interviews, podcast series and awareness videos etc.”

A close look at the above statement shows that the purpose of carrying out voter education (pre-election) was to raise awareness of citizens (especially voters) on the coming election and to sensitize them on the relevant processes and procedures of the election-day activities. It is also geared towards educating them (through various means so as to reach as many citizens as possible) on their rights and responsibilities as well as on the importance of their participation in the electoral process. Furthermore, respondent (9) mentioned that towards the preparation for that election, PLAC “*reviewed the electoral environment (ahead of the election), identified risk factors to the elections and recommended minimum standards required to neutralize/mitigate those risks.*” According to him, these risk factors and the strategies for mitigating them were shared with relevant stakeholders for their information and necessary action”

One specific activity that all respondents agreed to as very critical in the success of every electoral process is the election day observation exercise. This activity is carried out by CSOs during the election in order to monitor the conduct of the election by the Election Management Body. According to respondent (2), “PLAC, in collaboration with various Civil Societies’ trained observers, monitored the 2019 general election, observed the electoral process, assessed the conduct of the elections and compliance with electoral laws and reported irregularities violations”. In the post - election stage of the election, respondents stated that PLAC compiled, published and released election reports to EMB as well as to the general public. These reports (according to respondent 2) highlighted the key findings, of the election as well as challenges and recommendations” He also stated that they also carried out “a robust legal reform advocacy to further strengthen various areas of the law that needs improvement for future elections”

Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) with support from MacArthur Foundation held a Roundtable Promoting Youth and Women Participation in the 2023 General Elections on Thursday, 9th February 2023 at Broadfield Hotel, Abuja.

At the Roundtable, an assessment of the Guidelines to the Electoral Act that improve on the participation of marginalised groups in Nigerian elections was discussed. The meeting also examined strategies to prevent and manage electoral violence in the 2023 elections. In addition, early strategies for women and young persons to engage the new administration to prioritise their needs and representation were deliberated at the meeting.

**Question 4:  
How did the various activities of PLAC impact the outcome of the 2019 General Election?**

One of the major objectives of this study was to find out if the activities of PLAC in the 2019 General elections had any impact in the overall outcome of the 2019 General Election.

## **Response**

In answering this, respondents pointed out some areas where the specific activity(ies) of PLAC directly or indirectly affected or influenced specific outcomes. Respondent (1) believed that the various activities engaged by PLAC directly affected the outcome of the election. According to him:

“The various activities engaged by PLAC during the 2019 General Elections increased voter awareness and engagement. The sensitizations empowered voters with knowledge about their rights, responsibilities and the significance of participating in the electoral process. As a result, there was a higher voter turnout and increased citizen engagement.”

Meanwhile, respondent (2) also agrees that there was direct correlation between the activities of PLAC and some noticeable improvements in the conduct of the 2019 General Elections. According to her “the monitoring and observation efforts made by PLAC helped promote transparency, fairness and accountability in the electoral process by independently assessing the conduct of elections, identifying irregularities and reporting violations.” Furthermore, being the secretariat of Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room and having deployed over 4,000 field observers directly (and over 20,000 by Situation Room member and partner -organisations), PLAC had field observers in all the 36 States of the federation and the FCT. According to this respondent (2),

“these field observers provided information and data from different parts of the country to a central hub where they were analysed and actions taken appropriately. The action-points from the real-time information gathered were also disseminated directly to relevant election stakeholders for immediate action and intervention. This helped mitigate the escalation of conflict and violence in many PUs and other areas on election day.

The respondents further noted that in establishing the election day Situation Room PLAC (and other partners) provided a common focus and a tool for advocacy and negotiation with election duty bearers and stakeholders involved in elections and democratic governance.

## **Question 5:**

**What were the challenges encountered by PLAC in the process of carrying out its activities in the 2019 general election and how can they be overcome**

This Question sought to find out from the respondents whether PLAC encountered any challenge(s) in the course of its activities in the 2019 general elections and how such challenges could be overcome.

## **Response**

In response seven out of the nine respondents admitted that the organisation had encountered varying challenges in the election and they listed some of them. Respondent (5) stated that “citizens were not sufficiently reached and informed on the election processes and procedures as PLAC did not have all the resources to reach larger number of citizens.” He further alluded to the fact that the decline of presidential assent to a new electoral law largely limited some of the activities mapped out in anticipation to the passage of the electoral law.

Other challenges listed out by Respondents (1 & 2) included “Militarization of the elections, inability of INEC to communicate its programs and challenges ahead of time to relevant stakeholders and insecurity. On ways of overcoming these challenges in preparation for future elections, the respondents suggested that: INEC (in collaboration with other relevant stakeholders) should prioritize voter education across the States of the Federation, INEC should clearly and transparently communicate its challenges and programs ahead of the election, Government should strengthen electoral institutions, promote the adoption of technology in all its processes, adequately provide and train election security personnel.

## **4.4 DISCUSSION ON KEY FINDINGS ARISING FROM DATA COLLECTED**

In this section, this research will discuss the understanding of the key themes and issues from field data collected from Staff of and members of PLAC. The following themes are discussed:

- Capacity building and stakeholders engagement underpin efficiency in elections
- Perceptions on Civic/voter education and voter behaviour on election day
- Electoral reforms and electoral accountability
- Measuring EMB’s compliance level through election day observation by CSOs
- The necessity of feedback mechanism for better outcomes in future elections

### **4.4.1 Capacity Building and Stakeholders Engagements Underpin Efficiency in Elections**

All participants ascertained that two very fundamental ingredients for efficiency in the conduct of elections are capacity building of all election personnel and fruitful engagements by all relevant stakeholders. Having engaged in intensive training for various categories of persons involved in the 2019 general election, especially Staff of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and field observers deployed on election day, PLAC also conducted stakeholders engagements with other CSOs as well as relevant election stakeholders. These engagements helped to facilitate discussions and to collectively develop mechanisms/strategies on how the election could be better conducted through the coordination of all the stakeholders. These active participation and engagements of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the 2019 general election was acknowledged as a very significant element in deepening and consolidating electoral outcome (Chisomaga, Bashiru & Innocent, 2020).

Also, in its report of the 2019 General election, the Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room (NCSSR), stated that “to help define a common expectation from the election, it issued a Threshold Document for a Credible Election which stipulated minimum requirements for credible election in 2019, drawing from local and international frameworks”. The report also explained that during its engagements, these Thresholds were further grouped under obligations to be fulfilled by each of the relevant stakeholders (INEC, political parties, security agencies and other relevant institutions). In the course of the interview also, Respondent (8) alluded to the above findings. According to her, “PLAC, through (NCSSR) organised zonal meetings with other CSOs, political parties and other relevant stakeholders towards the 2019 general elections”. These engagements, she further emphasised, were geared towards exchange of ideas about their various preparations for the election and to collectively develop strategies and mechanism for efficient and effective election conduct and monitoring

#### **4.4.2 Civic/Voter Education and the sustainability of electoral democracy**

In collaboration with INEC, PLAC carried out voter education as well as civic engagements and enlightenment. These are processes of giving necessary information, guidance and instruction to citizens and voters on how to effectively choose their candidates on election day. The main goal of this is to make the whole election day activities very effective and rancour free and to produce better electoral outcome. This

was alluded to by a number of the respondents. Particularly, Mr. ... Respondent (1) in his answer to a question put to him as to the impact of the involvement on the outcomes of the 2019 general election. He stated:

*The various activities engaged by PLAC during the 2019 elections increased voter awareness and engagement. These engagements empowered voters with knowledge about their rights, responsibilities and the significance of participating in the electoral process”.*

This fact was made clear by Saheed, Hayatulla and Sawaneh (2020) in their article on Voters' Education and Credibility of Elections in Nigeria. They submitted that “voters' education has been acknowledged as a means of sanitizing as well as educating citizens on democratic principles”. They further explained that this was one sure way of stopping the ugly trend of electoral misconduct and voter apathy in Nigeria. In other words, by educating, enlightening and sensitizing voters, PLAC was carrying out an activity that was (is) integral to the sustainability of the Nigerian electoral democracy because it stirred the willingness and zeal of eligible citizens to actively participate in the 2019 general elections. While commenting on the impact of the voter education activities PLAC carried out in 2019, Respondent (3) concluded that “on a positive note, the 2019 election was one in which citizens were determined to exercise their votes including excluded groups such as women, voters with disabilities, youths etc. This positive excitement was created by extensive mobilization, voter education as well as civic engagement and enlightenments carried out by PLAC and other CSOs”

#### **4.4.3 Electoral Reforms for electoral accountability and transparency**

Several of the Respondent strongly alluded to the fact that the reason for some lapses and challenges witnessed in the 2019 general election was- due to the non-assent to the Electoral Act (Amendment) Bill, meant to be used for the election, by the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. According to some of these respondents, the after the conduct of the 2015 general elections, some PLAC and some other CSOs noted the absence of robust enforcement of election rules due to some lacunas (loopholes) in the 2010 Electoral Act. They “*engaged with INEC, National Assembly, political parties, the media and other stakeholders to advocate for electoral reforms and improvements*”

(Respondent 1). This advocacy, according to the respondent was aimed at “*strengthening democratic processes, enhancing transparency and ensuring fair and credible elections*”.

Also, in his own contribution, Respondent (5) added that “*advocating for legal reforms after every electoral cycle will produce more robust legal framework that can guarantee free and fair elections*” Succinctly put, for continuous improvement in succeeding elections, the EMB should always commence the push for reforms in the electoral process after the conduct and review of every election. This, it needs to do with all critical stakeholders. One of the reasons for this activity (after every elections) is for to reduce post-election controversies (Niyi B: 2018). Niyi, while reviewing the 2019 general election stated that “the main aim (for electoral reform) was “to raise the level of transparency, credibility and acceptability of the electoral process.” It then goes without saying that when electoral reforms are carried out after every election (and the provisions honestly adhered to by INEC and all other electoral Stakeholders), all subsequent elections will be better than the preceding ones.

#### **4.4.4 Measuring EMB’s compliance level through election day observation by CSOs**

Globally, election observation has been accepted as an important mechanism for ensuring election integrity. According to the ACE Project report (2018 -2023), election observation (both domestic and foreign) “has received universal acceptance, and helps in raising voter confidence and evaluating the legitimacy of an electoral process and outcome. It has also become a learning opportunity for national electoral administrators and election participants to exchanges knowledge and information on electoral practices.

In defining election observation in its newsletter, ACE Project Report (2018-2023) submits that it is fundamentally an exercise in support of democracy and that field observers serve as impartial watchdogs who can assess whether the result of an election truly reflects the Will of the people. Again, the African Union (AU) in outlining the objectives of its Observation Mission stated that it is “*geared towards the provision of accurate and impartial reporting or assessment of an election including the extent to which the conduct of the election meets regional, continental and international standards of democratic elections*” (AU Election Observation in Africa: 2023). In other words, one of the major objectives of election observation is to ascertain the extent to



which the EMB of a democratic nation, like Nigeria, has complied with regional, continental and international standards of democratic tenets in the conduct of its elections. In the 2019 general election, PLAC trained and deployed field observers to all the 36 States of the Federation and the FCT to observe the elections. Also, PLAC was the secretariat of the NCSSR which also deployed over 20,000 field observers for the elections. They had a Situation Room hub located at Transcorp Hilton Hotel where all field officers provided information and data gathered from different parts of the country for immediate analysis and action by relevant stakeholders. This hub enabled the NSCCR to coordinate and share information, plan for anticipated problems and respond quickly to issues when they occurred during the election.

In responding to this interview, all the respondents had mentioned election observation as one of the key activities carried out by PLAC in the 2019 general election. Particularly, respondent (2) stated that PLAC in collaboration with various Civil Societies trained observers to monitor and observe the electoral process. These observers, she further mentioned, assessed the conduct of the elections and the compliance level of INEC to electoral laws”. In the cause of the observation, she continued, “irregularities and violations were promptly reported to the NCSSR hub for analysis and dissemination”. At the end of the election, PLAC (in collaboration with NCSSR) released a report which was issued to the general public and relevant electoral stakeholders, including INEC. A part of that report had read:

*This report presents the analysis of the various findings of the Situation Room in the course of the 2019 general elections. It has also taken steps to highlight the inconsistencies in the electoral process... Out of the 8 criteria set out in the Threshold, there was significant non-compliance with 5 of them. It is our reasoned conclusion that the election did not meet the credibility threshold based on the patterns of abuse of process and the consequent lack of integrity observed (NCSSR: 2019).*

#### **4.4.5 The Necessity of feedback mechanism for future elections**

All participants agree that at the end of every observation exercise, CSOs report back to the EMB on the outcome of their field observation. This report, which is usually analysed on identified thematic areas, make recommendations to the various stakeholders, most especially the EMB, on ways of improving their conduct in future

election conducts. These reports are evidence-based as they usually flow from information gathered from the field observed deployed to the field by accredited observer groups. For the 2019 general election, PLAC deployed 4,000 while the NCSSR (coordinated by PLAC) deployed about 20,000 field observers. So, in all the over 8,000 electoral wards in Nigeria, NCSSR had field observers who collected data, sent to their situation room hub for analyses and dissemination. These reports and recommendations that flowed from them were compiled in a booklet titled “Report of Nigeria's 2019 General Elections released soon after the elections in 2019. Among the reports contained in report are:

- i. That INEC should work together with CSOs to immediately commence the push for reforms in the electoral process, working closely with critical stakeholders
- ii. That the Electoral Act (Amendment Bill passed by the National Assembly and declined by the President should be re-introduced, passed by the National Assembly and transmitted to the President for Assent
- iii. That INEC should take steps to ensure the uniform and firm application of the electoral rules across the regions, stakeholders and institutions during elections

Following these recommendations, the Electoral Act, 2022 was passed and assented to in January 2022 in preparation for the 2023 general election. This, however, was not without several advocacies and rallies by CSOs, the EMB and other interest groups. While commenting on the long journey towards electoral reforms in Nigeria and the various refusals by the President to Assent, Yusuph O. (2022) said:

“While all these presidential rejections were going on, civil society groups, youth organisations, and human rights groups continued to mount agitations, open rallies, and protests to pressurize the President into signing the Electoral Act (amendment) Bill 2020 into law.

While all the respondents stated that the submission of report after field observation of elections was part of the basic roles played PLAC in the 2019 general election, respondent (3) particularly reported on the importance of the analysis contained in the report. He said:

“After the elections, PLAC conducted and issued a report on the analysis of the electoral process, including strengths, weaknesses and recommendations. These contributed to future electoral reform and improvements”.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter is the concluding part of this study, and it is divided into four parts: Summary, Conclusion, Recommendation and Limitation of the Study.

#### **5.1 Summary of findings**

The study was undertaken to establish the roles of CSOs in electoral democracy in Nigeria with particular emphasis on the roles and activities of PLAC during the 2019 general election cycle.

The basic questions set to be answered in this study were

- What roles did PLAC play in the 2019 General Elections
- What are the specific activities of PLAC in the three stages of the 2019 General Election?
- How did the involvement of PLAC in the three stages of the electoral cycle impact the outcome of the 2019 General Election?

These were geared towards ascertaining whether the roles played by PLAC in the three stages of the 2019 general election contributed in any way towards positive outcomes after that election. This was further to establish, in the long run, whether CSOs in electoral democracy play roles round the electoral cycle that lead to the development of electoral democracy, especially in Nigeria.

At the end of the research, this study established that by participating in the three stages of each electoral cycle, CSOs serve as stabilizing factor between the EMB and the citizens (voters), serve as watchdogs to the EMB and other relevant stakeholders as well as map out thresholds with which to measure the level of compliance of the EMB to regional and international standards in election conduct.

The study also established that some specific roles played by PLAC in the 2019 electoral cycle included as follows:

- Policy advocacy with policy makers, political parties and electoral authorities to advocate for electoral reforms and improvements;
- Voter education campaigns to raise awareness about the electoral process, voter rights and responsibilities and the importance of participation in elections
- Establishment of a central situation room hub for effective election observation to assess the conduct of the 2019 general election, compliance of the EMB with electoral laws and reporting irregularities and violations
- Election reporting to highlight key findings and make recommendations on areas of improvement for future elections

- Conduct of post-election analysis with relevant stakeholders to discuss identified areas of strengths, weaknesses and recommendations

The Impact of these activities and other roles by PLAC on the outcome of 2019 General Election were summarized as increased voter awareness and empowerment resulting in increased citizens' engagement, mitigation of escalation of conflicts and violence in many Polling Units on election day due to real-time reporting of events from PUs and the call for immediate action/response by relevant stakeholders as well as advocacy for electoral reforms arising from the reported shortfalls of the 2019 general election.

## **5.2 CONCLUSION**

The aim of this study was to assess the roles played by Civil Society Organisations in the electoral process with particular emphasis on the roles played by Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) in the 2019 general election. This study has discovered that PLAC (and other relevant CSOs) played very strategic roles in the three stages of the 2019 electoral cycle. These roles or activities included the activities at the pre-election stage (voter education and sensitization), during the election (observation of the actual conduct of the election) and post-election (advocacy for electoral reform). These roles also resulted in positive outcomes that helped in deepening the Nigerian democratic process. It is therefore strongly held here, that the involvement of CSOs in the three stages of the electoral cycle play very significant roles in deepening and consolidating electoral outcomes that enhance the development of electoral democracy in Nigeria. This has been validated by literature reviews and empirical research on the subject.

On the issue of challenges in CSO's involvement in electoral activities in Nigeria, the study noted that challenges like inability of government (including INEC and the National Assembly) to carry out necessary legal electoral reforms as well as militarization of election and insecurity amongst other challenges were identified. In spite of these challenges, the study found out that tremendous impacts was still made by PLAC in the 2019 General Election due to its ability to deploy its resources round the three (3) stages of the electoral cycle (pre-election, election and post-election).

## **5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Arising from findings in this study that the involvement of CSOs in the electoral environment is sacrosanct for sound and credible elections and consequently for the deepening of electoral democracy in Nigeria, the following recommendation are put forward for the attainment of better outcomes in future electoral conducts:

That all CSOs in the electoral process are to understand that election is a process and not an event and so they may endeavor to set effective agenda around the three (3) stages of each electoral cycle (pre-election, election and post – election). This agenda-setting is to be done at the end of one electoral cycle which marks the beginning of another. It is also to enable the CSOs appropriately allocate their resources effectively in each of the election stages

That CSOs engaged in the electoral process may wish to assess the overall impact of each of its specific set of activities in each election stage to ensure that such activities will, directly or indirectly, lead to desired election outcome at the end of that electoral cycle.

That at the end of every electoral cycle, the Election Management Body, INEC, and the National Assembly may embark on the amendment of the existing legal framework to help address the challenges and gaps reported from the outcome of concluded election.

#### **5.4 Limitation of the Study**

To understand the outcomes of this study, it is necessary to consider several circumstances that are beyond the researcher's control. CSOs and their roles on electoral democracy in Nigeria with a focus on Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) is an area that has dearth of related study in Nigeria. Getting responses of the questionnaire was difficult. Again, finding books, academic papers and articles on the role of CSOs in the electoral democracy in Nigeria with a focus on (PLAC) and the three (3) stages of electoral circle was challenging.

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