

## DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC DISCONTENT IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC, 1999-2024

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### Abstract

This study examines the advancements, challenges, and pervasive discontent associated with democratic governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Although Nigeria has made notable strides in its democratic journey, it continues to grapple with significant obstacles, including economic mismanagement, rising poverty, corruption, electoral irregularities, ethno-religious tensions, insecurity, diminishing state capacity, and erosion of public trust, which undermine the effectiveness of democratic governance. The study draws data from secondary sources such as scholarly literature, books, and digital repositories. Theoretically, it employs Public Choice Theory as its foundational framework. Despite ongoing challenges, the findings reveal marked improvements in electoral processes and increased civic participation. However, public discontent remains widespread, driven by unmet expectations, perceived governmental inefficiency, and enduring socioeconomic disparities. This discontent manifests in various societal responses, including public protests, declining voter turnout, labor strikes, and widespread criticism of government institutions. The study concludes with recommendations for proactive policy measures to address these issues, including poverty reduction initiatives, wealth creation strategies, comprehensive electoral reforms, strengthened anti-corruption efforts, and policies to foster inclusive economic development. These strategic measures are essential not only for enhancing democratic governance but also for ensuring the long-term sustainability of Nigeria's democratic progress in the midst of complex sociopolitical challenges.

### Introduction

May 29, 1999, marks a pivotal moment in Nigerian history, marking the end of military rule and the beginning of a new era of democratic governance. On this date, the Nigerian military formally transferred power to the

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democratically elected administration led by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), following his electoral victory. This transition generated widespread optimism among Nigerians, who anticipated that the new democratic framework would entrench constitutionalism, uphold human rights, ensure the rule of law, and promote accountability, transparency, and public participation while also enhancing the economic welfare of the populace (Bello-Imam, 2004; Oke, 2010; Inokoba & Kumokor, 2011; Olu-Adeyemi, 2012; Adenuga & Akingbulu, 2023). The shift from autocratic military regimes, marked by systemic inefficiencies, infrastructural decay, and pervasive corruption, was seen as a profound departure that would herald a new era of governance capable of addressing the socio-economic and political disruptions that had long plagued the nation.

Despite the optimism about democracy, Nigeria's democratic journey has been fraught with significant challenges. Since 1999, the country has conducted at least seven general elections and numerous off-cycle elections. However, Asaju (2015) observed that the mere frequency of elections does not necessarily equate to the realization of representative democracy. Over two decades into the period of sustained democratic governance, the core principles of democracy-particularly those about popular participation and equitable representation-appear to remain inadequately realized, while the prospects for national development continue to elude fulfillment (Adenuga & Akingbulu, 2023). The failure of democratic governance to adequately address critical issues such as food security, employment, safety, access to potable water, healthcare, infrastructure, and quality education is well-documented (Ogundiya, 2010; Inokoba & Kumokor, 2011; Yagboyaju, 2011). The persistent challenges to Nigeria's democratic consolidation are deeply intertwined with its internal political and socioeconomic dynamics. Oke (2010) attributed these challenges to the prevalence of crude political practices, widespread corruption, and the selfishness and greed of political leadership. This argument is further supported by Anazodo et al. (2015), Fagbadabo (2007), and Ogundiya (2009), who collectively affirm that factors such as ethnicity, regionalism, religious intolerance, and a culture of corruption serve as significant impediments to democratic governance in Nigeria. These scholars argue that these entrenched issues not only undermine democratic processes but also act as a deadweight, preventing the country from employing democracy as a mechanism to rise from the doldrums of underdevelopment. These findings suggest that Nigeria's democratic struggles are not merely a result of external pressures or isolated incidents but are rooted in systemic issues that have persisted over time. Babalola and Akeem (2023) contend that Nigeria's democratic crisis is intricately linked to its historical antecedents, the prevailing political ideologies of influential actors, and the enduring legacy of colonialism. These factors have collectively forged the foundational dynamics of the nation's political landscape, thereby worsening the ongoing challenges of achieving stable and effective democratic governance in Nigeria.

In the context of prevailing poverty and deprivation, the rise and persistence of various security threats-such as armed robbery, kidnapping, abductions, and crude oil theft-are particularly comprehensible (Yagboyaju, 2011). These issues are further compounded by high levels of youth unemployment and the proliferation of small arms, which have intensified violence and insecurity during Nigeria's Fourth Republic (Lewis, 2011). Such challenges significantly erode the foundations of democratic stability and impede the process of democratic consolidation (Barret, 2004; Ogbonnaya, Omoju, & Udefuna, 2012; Kwasau, 2013; Odigbo, Ezekwelu, & Okeke, 2023).

Moreover, Omodia and Aliu (2013) noted that the Fourth Republic seems to replicate the deficiencies of its predecessors, failing to meet basic governance standards, deliver democratic benefits, or achieve substantial development. Compounding these challenges is the emergence of informal power structures, such as the

“kitchen cabinet” and “cabals,” which have exerted significant influence over Nigeria’s politics and governance, often to the detriment of democratic practices (Oduola, 2024). These informal structures have played a critical role in shaping the country's political landscape, thereby intensifying public disillusionment. The notion that democracy inherently carries elements of discontent is well-documented in scholarly discourse. Dahlberg et al. (2015) and Hernández (2018) asserted that dissatisfaction is an intrinsic aspect of democratic systems, often arising from unmet expectations and perceived failures in governance. Such discontent, as argued by Okeke and Mouneke (2022), can manifest in efforts to undermine or disrupt national democratic processes. This perspective is particularly relevant in the African context, where dissatisfaction with democratic governance has contributed to political instability, including increased military coups and other forms of insurgency (Odigbo, Ezekwelu, & Okeke, 2023).

Against this backdrop, this study aims to critically evaluate the accomplishments, persistent challenges, and manifestations of public discontent with democracy in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic. By examining these dimensions, this study seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the state of democracy in Nigeria and the broader implications for democratic consolidation in Africa.

### **Literature Review**

The concept of "democracy's discontent," as articulated by Odigbo et al (2023), provides a framework for understanding the profound societal dissatisfaction that emerges when there is a dissonance between the ideals of democratic governance and the actual outcomes experienced by citizens. This discontent is fueled by ineffective leadership, developmental shortcomings, and a pervasive culture of impunity and social injustice, which together create a significant disconnect between citizens and the state. The authors argue that these conditions have not only undermined democratic practices but have also intensified trust deficits, leading to a surge in military coups and violent crimes across Africa. Countries such as Sudan, Ethiopia, and the Central African Republic exemplify the consequences of this disconnect, which severely impede the efficacy of governance on the continent.

Complementing this analysis, Oke (2013) highlights the enduring influence of the military on Nigerian governance since the advent of the Fourth Republic in 1999. The militarization of politics has led to governance failures marked by authoritarian tendencies, limited respect for constitutional frameworks, and illiberal dispositions among the political elite. This military legacy has hindered the development of a genuinely democratic culture, resulting in a state that struggles to meet its developmental and democratic obligations.

Omodia and Aliu (2013) further explored the ramifications of poor political governance in Nigeria, focusing on the lack of people-centered leadership, inadequate institutionalization of democratic processes, widespread unemployment, persistent poverty, and infrastructural decay. These governance failures, they argue, have intensified the contestation for political power, posing a significant threat to the survival of the Nigerian state. This environment has fostered militancy, which has, in turn, had deleterious effects on national security. The authors advocate for establishing functional political leadership that is oriented toward the populace as a means to deepen democracy and enhance national security.

Dhikru and Adeoye (2019) added to this discourse by identifying the substantial challenges that hinder the promotion of the public good and the effective delivery of services in Nigeria. They argue that political leadership is predominantly shaped by self-interest and primordial considerations, which overshadow broader public interests. The state's failure to fulfill its fundamental responsibilities of ensuring security, upholding the rule of law, and providing visionary leadership reflects the deeper issues within Nigeria's governance structures.

The authors emphasize the need for a critical re-evaluation of leadership paradigms to address these persistent deficiencies.

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) (2022) further highlighted the democratic regression across several African countries, including Nigeria, with declines in civil liberties and the manipulation of elections and term limits. The Global State of Democracy (GSoD) Indices confirm this trend, noting a significant decline in democratic performance and civil liberties across the continent, underscoring the broader challenges facing democratic governance.

Adenuga and Akinbogu (2023) argued that despite two decades of continuous democratic governance, Nigeria has failed to achieve the expected national development. They attribute this stagnation to the persistence of autocratic practices within the democratic system, characterized by elitist leadership, a disregard for the rule of law, and a disconnect between the governing elite and the general populace. This pattern of governance, evident in the administrations of Obasanjo, Yar'Adua, Jonathan, and Buhari, has consistently undermined democratic principles, further deepening the challenges facing Nigeria's democratic project.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper is anchored in Public Choice Theory (PCT) as a framework of analysis. PCT, developed in the mid-20th century, represents a significant contribution by economists who applied economic principles to scrutinize political decision-making and public policy outcomes. The seminal work that solidified this theory was "The Calculus of Consent," published in 1962, authored by James M. Buchanan and Gordon Tullock. James M. Buchanan, an esteemed American economist and recipient of the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences in 1986, is widely acknowledged as a foundational figure in the development of the PCT. His research underscored the critical role of self-interested behavior among individuals, including politicians and bureaucrats, in shaping political outcomes within democratic systems. Gordon Tullock, another economist, contributed significantly to PCT by examining the influence of incentives, rent-seeking behavior, and the inherent limitations of governmental interventions on policy outcomes. Together, Buchanan, Tullock, and their contemporaries advanced PCT as a rigorous framework for analyzing political processes, governmental decision-making, and the complex behaviors exhibited by voters, politicians, and interest groups within democratic governance structures.

The theory integrates economic principles into the study of political science and rests on several key assumptions that help explain the behavior of individuals within political and governmental systems. These assumptions include the following:

- a.* Rational Self-Interest
- b.* Utility Maximization
- c.* Methodological Individualism
- d.* Rent-Seeking Behavior
- e.* Principal-Agent Problem
- f.* Collective Action Problem
- g.* Bureaucratic Behavior
- h.* Public Goods and Externalities
- i.* Institutional Analysis

***Application of the Theory to the Study***

***Rational Self-Interest:*** In the context of Nigeria's Fourth Republic, all political actors are assumed to act based on rational self-interest. Voters, for instance, make electoral decisions that they believe will maximize their benefits. This may involve supporting candidates who promise policies that will improve their economic standing or align with their social preferences. Politicians, on the other hand, seek to maximize their utility by pursuing re-election, increasing their political power, and accessing resources. Similarly, bureaucrats aim to enhance their career prospects, influence, and personal benefits.

***Utility Maximization:*** Utility maximization is a core tenet of PCT. For voters, this means casting their ballots for candidates or parties that they perceive will provide the greatest personal or communal benefit. Politicians and political parties strive to secure electoral victories and maintain power by appealing to the interests of their constituencies through patronage and clientelism. Bureaucrats seek to expand departments' budgets and influence, often leading to inefficiencies and corruption.

***Methodological Individualism:*** PCT emphasizes methodological individualism, focusing on individuals' actions and decisions rather than treating groups or institutions as monolithic entities. In Nigeria, collective outcomes, such as electoral results and policy decisions, are seen as aggregate results of individual actions and preferences. This approach highlights the diverse motivations and behaviors of various political actors, from voters to elected officials.

***Rent-Seeking Behavior:*** Rent-seeking behavior is prevalent in Nigeria's political landscape, where individuals and groups often seek to obtain financial gains through manipulation or exploitation of the political environment. This behavior leads to resource misallocation and economic inefficiencies. Politicians and bureaucrats may engage in corrupt practices to secure rents, undermining public trust and contributing to widespread discontent.

***Principal-Agent Problem:*** The principal-agent problem is evident in the relationship between Nigerian citizens (principals) and their elected representatives and bureaucrats (agents). Politicians and bureaucrats may pursue their interests, such as personal enrichment or power consolidation, rather than those of the public. This misalignment of interests results in governance challenges and fuels public discontent when citizens' needs and preferences are not adequately addressed.

***Collective Action Problem:*** Nigerians face significant challenges in organizing collectively to achieve common goals, such as political reform or anti-corruption initiatives. The costs and barriers associated with collective action are particularly high in large and diverse groups. This problem is exacerbated by the presence of free-riders, individuals who benefit from collective efforts without contributing to them, further complicating the mobilization of effective civic action.

***Bureaucratic Behavior:*** Bureaucrats in Nigeria, like other political actors, often act in their self-interest. This behavior can lead to inefficiencies and actions aimed at expanding power and budgets rather than serving the public good. Bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption are significant sources of public discontent because citizens face challenges in accessing public services and witnessing mismanagement of public resources.

***Public Goods and Externalities:*** The provision of public goods, such as infrastructure, healthcare, and education, is often suboptimal in Nigeria due to the free-rider problem and challenges in excluding non-payers. The management of externalities such as pollution and public safety is also problematic, leading to widespread public dissatisfaction. Without proper incentives and mechanisms, these issues remain persistent challenges in Nigerian governance.

***Institutional Analysis:*** Institutions and rules play a critical role in shaping the behavior of political actors and the outcomes of political processes. PCT examines how different institutional arrangements, such as electoral systems, party structures, and legal frameworks, affect individuals' incentives and constraints. In Nigeria, institutional weaknesses, such as inadequate checks and balances and weak enforcement of anti-corruption laws, contribute to governance issues and public discontent.

### **Research Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative research design, primarily relying on secondary data sources to explore the advancements, challenges, and pervasive discontent associated with democratic governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Data was gathered from a range of secondary sources, including scholarly literature, books, academic journals, and digital repositories. This approach ensures a comprehensive review of existing research and documentation related to democratic governance in Nigeria. The selection of sources was guided by relevance to the study's focus on democratic advancements, challenges, and public discontent. The collected data were systematically analyzed to identify patterns, trends, and key issues related to the effectiveness of democratic governance in Nigeria. This analysis examines improvements in electoral processes, civic participation, and the manifestation of public discontent through various societal responses.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **Milestones Achieved in Democratic Governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic**

*Improvement in Nigeria's electoral Process:* In Nigeria's Fourth Republic, significant advancements have been made in the electoral process, fundamentally enhancing its transparency, efficiency, and credibility. The introduction of biometric technologies, such as Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) and Smart Card Readers (SCRs), by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) marked a substantial improvement. These technologies effectively mitigated multiple voting and voter impersonation by ensuring that only registered voters could cast ballots, significantly reduce electoral fraud and enhance the process's credibility.

The implementation of Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) is another critical advancement. Initiated in April 2017, the CVR allows eligible citizens to register to vote at any time, expanding registration opportunities and increasing the number of registered voters from approximately 68.8 million in 2015 to over 84 million by the 2019 general elections. This expansion has made the electoral system more inclusive and accessible, ensuring broader participation in the democratic process.

Legal reforms, particularly the Electoral Act of 2010 and its subsequent amendments, have also played a crucial role in strengthening Nigeria's electoral framework. The Act addresses essential aspects such as campaign financing, technological integration in elections, and the establishment of electoral offenses. Notably, the 2018 amendment introduced provisions for the electronic transmission of results, aiming to curb result manipulation and enhance electoral transparency. These reforms have provided a more robust legal foundation for conducting free and fair elections.

INEC's improvements in electoral administration and logistics have contributed to a more effective electoral process. Enhanced training for electoral officials, improved distribution of electoral materials, and more comprehensive voter education campaigns have resulted in smoother and more orderly conduct of elections. The 2015 and 2019 general elections were generally regarded as more organized and credible due to these administrative advancements.

The cumulative effect of these reforms has been a gradual enhancement in the integrity of Nigeria's electoral process and the strengthening of democratic governance. Biometric technologies and CVR initiatives have

improved voter roll accuracy and inclusiveness, whereas legal reforms and better administrative practices have increased transparency and reduced fraud. This progress has bolstered public confidence in the electoral process and has contributed to more legitimate electoral outcomes. These findings are consistent with Public Choice Theory assumptions such as Rational Self-Interest, Utility Maximization, Principal-Agent Problem, Rent-Seeking Behavior, and Institutional Analysis, which elucidate how stakeholders' pursuit of personal interests, efforts to maximize utility, alignment of actions with interests, reduction of rent-seeking opportunities, and institutional reforms have collectively contributed to the observed advancements in the electoral process.

*Enhanced civic participation.* This represents a significant achievement in Nigeria's democracy during the Fourth Republic, as it underscores the deepening of democratic practices and the active engagement of citizens in governance processes. Since the transition from military rule in 1999, Nigeria has witnessed a marked increase in citizen involvement in the political sphere, which is crucial for the consolidation of democracy. This enhancement is evident in several key areas:

1. *Increased Voter Turnout and Electoral Engagement:* The Fourth Republic has seen greater emphasis on the electoral process, with more citizens participating in elections at various levels. This participation is not limited to casting votes; it also includes involvement in election monitoring, advocacy for free and fair elections, and engagement in political campaigns. This broad-based electoral participation has contributed to the legitimacy of elected governments and reinforced the principle of representative democracy.

2. *Growth of Civil Society and Advocacy:* The expansion of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Nigeria during the Fourth Republic has been a cornerstone of enhanced civic participation. These organizations have provided platforms for citizens to voice their concerns, advocate for policy changes, and hold the government accountable. CSOs have been instrumental in mobilizing public opinion on critical issues such as corruption, human rights, and electoral reforms, thereby strengthening democratic governance.

3. *Public Discourse and Media Engagement:* The rise of social media and other digital platforms has further amplified civic participation by enabling more inclusive and immediate public discourse. Citizens can now engage directly with their leaders, criticize government policies, and organize around shared interests. This digital engagement has democratized information flow and has made governance more transparent and responsive to the needs of the people.

4. *Participation in Governance beyond Elections:* Civic participation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic extends beyond the electoral process to include involvement in community-level decision-making, participation in public consultations, and active engagement in policy formulation. This broader participation has helped ensure that governance becomes more inclusive, reflecting the diverse needs and aspirations of the Nigerian populace.

### **Challenges to Democratic Governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic**

*Corruption:* Corruption continues to be a pervasive and formidable challenge in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, significantly undermining both governance and development, despite the establishment of anti-corruption agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC). Some former state governors, including Alamieyeseigha of Bayelsa State, Chimaroke Nnamani of Enugu State, Joshua Dariye of Plateau State, Orji Uzor Kalu of Abia State, and Idris Abubakar of Kogi State, were arrested and charged by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) for various acts of corruption committed during their tenure (Eze, 2009). Others include examples such as the 2019 arrest of former Attorney General Mohammed Adoke over allegations of corruption and money laundering related to the Malabu oil deal, and the 2016 arrest and trial of former National Security Advisor Sambo Dasuki, which revealed the diversion of \$2.1 billion intended for arms procurement to combat Boko

Haram, instead channeling it to political campaigns and personal enrichment. Oke (2010, p. 35), citing Falola (1999), reported that General Abacha embezzled over \$3 billion between 1993 and 1998. Additionally, Oke (2010, p.35) references Amalu (2006) to estimate that Nigerian leaders have misappropriated approximately \$500 billion over the past forty years, as reported by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

Ogundiya (2010) asserted that developments in Nigeria since 1999 have demonstrated that the forces of regression have continually challenged the country's democratic project. As a result, democracy remains highly unstable, with a bleak outlook due to pervasive bureaucratic and political corruption. Corruption has become so entrenched that the average Nigerian now likely equates democracy with corruption. The consequences of political corruption are evident in the recurring crises of legitimacy, the fragility of party structures, institutional decay, chronic economic challenges, unemployment, and, most notably, widespread democratic instability. The long-term consequence of such corruption is the significant erosion and decay of public institutions, intensified by the widespread entrenchment of a culture of impunity (Bach, 2004). Oko (2008) asserted that corruption is a principal underminer of democratic systems. This disrupts the integrity of governance, fosters incentives for maladaptive behavior, and ultimately degrades the quality of life by misappropriating funds intended for public services into personal gain. Corruption is consistent with the principle of rational self-interest, where individuals act to maximize their utility. This behavior is underpinned by methodological individualism, which holds that individual actions significantly influence collective outcomes. Corruption is often manifested through rent-seeking behavior, exploiting the principal-agent problem, where agents (e.g., public officials) pursue personal gains at the expense of principals (e.g., the general populace). In addition, it exemplifies a collective action problem, leading to inefficient bureaucratic behavior and adverse externalities that undermine the provision of public goods.

*Escalating Poverty:* Nigeria's Fourth Republic has witnessed a persistent and escalating poverty crisis that significantly challenges the nation's socio-economic development. Despite being one of Africa's largest economies, Nigeria has struggled to translate its economic potential into widespread prosperity, largely due to economic mismanagement and inconsistent policies. As of 2022, the World Bank estimated that approximately 40% of Nigeria's population lives below the national poverty line, translating to approximately 83 million people, given that Nigeria's total population is more than 200 million. In addition, data from the World Poverty Clock reveals that Nigeria has the largest number of people living in extreme poverty globally, with about 93 million Nigerians surviving on less than \$1.90 per day, the international threshold for extreme poverty. The country's overreliance on oil revenues has led to economic instability, with slow and insufficient diversification efforts resulting in high unemployment rates, particularly among the youth. Corruption remains a critical impediment to poverty alleviation, as public resources are often siphoned off by corrupt officials, undermining essential services such as education, healthcare, and social welfare. The infrastructure deficit further intensifies poverty, with poor road networks, unreliable power supply, and inadequate water and sanitation facilities limiting business productivity and quality of life. High inflation rates and rising living costs have eroded purchasing power, making it increasingly difficult for families to afford necessities. Additionally, the removal of fuel subsidies and subsequent increases in fuel prices further strained households' budgets. Government interventions and social programs aimed at poverty reduction, such as the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) and various conditional cash transfer initiatives, have been successful but have not been sufficient to address rising poverty levels.

*Insecurity:* Insecurity presents a profound challenge to democratic governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, significantly undermining stability and disrupting governance processes. The rise of various forms of insecurity,

including insurgency, banditry, and communal violence, has severely impacted the nation's democratic institutions. The insurgency led by Boko Haram, characterized by persistent violence and terrorist activities, has led to widespread displacement, loss of life, and destruction, creating an environment of fear that disrupts democratic processes and undermines the legitimacy of elections. Banditry, particularly in the northern and central regions, has further threatened democratic governance by fostering lawlessness and impeding the state's ability to maintain order and provide security. This climate of insecurity has eroded public confidence in the government and challenges its capacity to uphold democratic principles. Building on this perspective, Dauda and Avidime (2007) asserted that the prevailing security challenges in Nigeria represent a substantial barrier to the consolidation of democracy. They argue that widespread insecurity undermines the legitimacy of democratic efforts because an unstable environment is detrimental to foreign investment and is further aggravated by poor governance and political instability. Their analysis indicates that the severe security situation effectively negates any advances toward democratic consolidation, underscoring the imperative of a secure and stable environment as a fundamental prerequisite for the successful consolidation of democracy. Communal and ethnic conflicts are often driven by competition over resources, historical grievances, and political manipulation, and have intensified the insecurity situation. These conflicts undermine democratic processes by deepening divisions and fostering mistrust among different segments of society. The pervasive insecurity has weakened state institutions, diverting resources and attention away from essential democratic functions such as policymaking and service delivery, thereby diminishing the effectiveness of governance. Furthermore, insecurity threatens the rule of law, as responses to security challenges can lead to human rights abuses and the erosion of democratic norms, thus undermining public trust in the system. Insecurity, particularly in northern regions, has displaced communities and disrupted agricultural activities, pushing many into Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps where living conditions are dire and access to education and healthcare is limited (Omoraka, Ogoh & Yusufu, 2022). Efforts to address insecurity through military and police actions, as well as regional and international cooperation, have yielded mixed results. Inadequate resources, corruption, and political interference continue to hinder effective security management and democratic consolidation.

*Weakening State Capacity:* The deterioration of state capacity in Nigeria's Fourth Republic critically undermines democratic governance through several key dimensions. The decline in state capacity, marked by insufficient infrastructure, constrained financial resources, and ineffective public institutions, hampers the government's ability to deliver essential services and implement policies efficiently. This erosion in capacity diminishes the state's administrative and operational effectiveness, impairing its ability to maintain law and order, safeguard public welfare, and manage developmental initiatives. The repercussions for democratic governance are substantial. Resource constraints and operational inefficiencies result in suboptimal policy execution and a lack of responsiveness to citizen needs, thereby cultivating public disillusionment and eroding trust in governmental institutions. Additionally, the weakening of state capacity intensifies corruption by reducing oversight and accountability, leading to the misallocation of resources intended for development projects. This environment of diminished effectiveness and heightened corruption compromises democratic legitimacy, impedes civic engagement, and threatens the stability and functionality of Nigeria's democratic framework. The weakening of state capacity aligns with Public Choice Theory's assumptions by reflecting rational self-interest, utility maximization, and methodological individualism, which together drive rent-seeking behavior, exacerbate the principal-agent problem, create collective action issues, and result in inefficient bureaucratic behavior and diminished public goods provision.

*Electoral Irregularities:* In Nigeria's Fourth Republic, electoral irregularities pose a significant threat to the integrity and effectiveness of democratic governance. These irregularities, which include voter suppression, ballot stuffing, vote-buying, and manipulation of results, undermine the fundamental principles of democratic elections and erode public confidence in the electoral process. Voter suppression, through disenfranchisement and manipulation of registration lists, compromises the inclusiveness and fairness of elections, while ballot stuffing and result manipulation skew the accuracy of outcomes. Vote-buying undermines the integrity of elections by influencing voter behavior through financial incentives, collectively distorting the democratic process and resulting in outcomes that do not accurately reflect the electorate's will. The implications for democratic governance are profound and multifaceted. These irregularities erode the legitimacy of elected officials, as outcomes tainted by malpractice fail to represent the genuine preferences of the electorate, leading to a disconnect between the government and the populace and diminishing the effectiveness of policy implementation. The prevalence of electoral malpractice also fosters political instability and conflict, as disputed results and allegations of fraud can provoke public unrest, legal challenges, and political violence, further destabilize the democratic process, and disrupt governance. Additionally, persistent irregularities impede the development of a robust democratic culture because citizens may perceive the electoral process as inherently flawed, diminishing incentives for political participation and civic engagement.

*The Politics of Godfatherism:* Godfatherism poses a profound obstacle to democratic consolidation in Nigeria, where this practice has long dominated the political arena. Political godfathers and power brokers manipulate the system to install their preferred candidates, turning politics into a game of patronage. The phenomenon of godfathers has taken on a perilous dimension because of the monetization of politics (Oke, 2010). According to Ogundiya (2010), godfathers not only foster but also stem from the violence and corruption that pervades Nigeria's political processes. Public officials who owe their positions to the influence of a godfather are bound by an ongoing obligation to repay their benefactors, often at the expense of public interest. These godfathers wielded significant control over state resources and policymaking, frequently ignoring the state's collective well-being. Their influence undermines core democratic principles, impedes the rise of qualified candidates, and obstructs the development of genuine democracy in Nigeria. This observation aligns with the conclusions drawn by Ejoha et al (2024), who assert that political godfathers undermine electoral integrity by facilitating undemocratic practices and perpetuating substandard governance.

### **Manifestations of Public Discontents with Democratic Governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic**

*Militancy:* This form of political expression has emerged as a prominent channel for voicing grievances and dissatisfaction with the state, particularly in response to perceived failures in governance, economic marginalization, and social injustices. The prevalence of militancy as a form of protest underscores the deep-seated frustrations and systemic issues within the political and economic structures of the Fourth Republic, reflecting broader societal discontent and challenges to state authority and legitimacy (Ngara et al., 2014). This perspective likely influenced Omudia and Aliu's (2013) argument that insufficient governance, marked by the absence of people-centered policies, has fostered an environment in which marginalized groups, particularly local communities, have resorted to militancy as a means of drawing government attention to the allocation and effective management of state resources. This scenario has, without a doubt, exerted a harmful impact on the security of the Nigerian state. Militancy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic aligns with the assumptions of Public Choice Theory, reflecting a response driven by rational self-interest and utility maximization among individuals experiencing systemic neglect. This phenomenon is further explicated through methodological individualism, which underscores how personal grievances aggregate to collective action and is compounded by rent-seeking

behavior, principal-agent problems, collective action dilemmas, and bureaucratic inefficiencies, all of which converge to foster radical forms of political expression.

*Public Protest:* Public protests in Nigeria's Fourth Republic have emerged as a significant mechanism for articulating widespread public dissatisfaction with issues of governance, corruption, and economic adversity. These protests serve not merely as spontaneous outbursts of anger but as structured expressions of deep-seated discontent within the sociopolitical landscape. A paradigmatic example is the #EndSARS protests of October 2020, in which predominantly young Nigerians mobilized against endemic police brutality. This movement rapidly expanded into a broader critique of systemic governance failures, culminating in the tragic events at the Lekki Toll Gate, which starkly exposed the state's repressive tendencies.

Similarly, the "Occupy Nigeria" protests of January 2012 were triggered by the government's abrupt removal of fuel subsidies, a policy decision that precipitated a sharp increase in the cost of living. This action was perceived as emblematic of the government's insensitivity to ordinary citizens' economic plight, sparking widespread demonstrations across the country. These protests were not isolated occurrences but rather part of a continuum of public discontent that persisted throughout the Fourth Republic. Electoral malpractice has also been a potent catalyst for protests, with the aftermath of the 2007 general elections being regarded as one of the most flawed in the nation's history-sparking significant unrest. Similarly, the controversial 2019 elections, particularly in states like Rivers and Kano, further fueled public disillusionment with the electoral process, reflecting a broader crisis of confidence in the integrity of Nigeria's democratic institutions.

Labor-related protests have also been a recurrent feature, particularly those orchestrated by unions such as the Nigeria Labor Congress (NLC) and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). These protests have frequently highlighted grievances related to inadequate wages, unfavorable labor policies, and the government's failure to fulfill its obligations to public sector workers, underscoring the disconnect between state policies and the welfare of the populace. In the northern regions of Nigeria, particularly in states like Kaduna, Katsina, and Zamfara, public protests have been driven by escalating insecurity, with citizens demanding more robust government action to curb banditry and communal violence. In August 2024, the "#EndBadGovernance" protests erupted across several major cities. These protests encapsulated broader public discontent with the government's perceived failure to address worsening economic conditions, rampant corruption, and other pressing national issues.

Taken together, these diverse protests reflect a growing and deep-seated dissatisfaction with the state of governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. These findings underscore the citizenry's increasing demand for accountability, reform, and substantive change in the nation's governance structures.

*Labor Strikes:* Labor strikes in Nigeria's Fourth Republic are clear expressions of public discontent with democratic governance, particularly in response to socio-economic conditions and government policies. Workers across various sectors, from education to health, have frequently resorted to strikes because of dissatisfaction with wage levels, delays in salary payments, and the government's failure to meet their demands. The 2018 nationwide strike by the Nigeria Labor Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC) over the delayed implementation of a new minimum wage exemplifies this frustration. Similarly, the removal of fuel subsidies in 2012 triggered the "Occupy Nigeria" movement, a massive strike and protest that reflected widespread anger over policies perceived as harmful to ordinary Nigerians. Public sector workers, particularly those in education, have also expressed their dissatisfaction with prolonged strikes. The 2020 strike by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), which lasted nine months, highlighted the government's neglect

of critical sectors and its failure to honor agreements with unions. The health sector has also been affected, with strikes by the Nigerian Association of Resident Doctors (NARD) in 2021 emphasizing poor working conditions and inadequate funding, further worsening public discontent. Additionally, strikes in the oil and gas sector have been driven by broader governance issues, such as corruption and mismanagement, as seen in the 2014 strike by oil and gas workers protesting the government's failure to address these problems. Overall, these strikes underscore the gap between the expectations of the Nigerian populace and the performance of the government, revealing deep-seated challenges in the country's democratic governance.

*Voter Apathy:* Voter apathy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic serves as a critical indicator of widespread disillusionment with the democratic process, characterized by persistent disengagement from electoral participation. Empirical data highlight this trend, with notably low voter turnout rates evident in recent elections. For example, the 2019 general elections witnessed a turnout of approximately 35.6%, underscoring a substantial erosion of public interest and confidence in the electoral system. This apathy is intricately linked to systemic issues, including endemic corruption, electoral malpractice, and pervasive socioeconomic challenges (Babalola & Akeem, 2022). Persistent corruption scandals and governance failures have significantly undermined public trust, while allegations of electoral fraud and manipulation have intensified voter disillusionment. Furthermore, widespread poverty and inadequate public services have diminished the perceived significance of political engagement, contributing to a disengaged electorate.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study provides a comprehensive examination of the state of democratic governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, highlighting both the significant advancements and the persistent challenges that shape its current landscape. Through meticulous data collection and analysis, it is evident that despite notable improvements in electoral processes and increased civic engagement, democratic governance in Nigeria is still marred by deep-seated issues. Economic mismanagement, pervasive poverty, systemic corruption, and electoral irregularities continue to erode the foundations of democracy. Furthermore, ethno-religious tensions, widespread insecurity, and a weakening state capacity contribute to a growing public discontent, manifested in protests, voter apathy, labor strikes, and widespread criticism of government institutions. The application of Public Choice Theory has elucidated the dynamics of these challenges, providing a nuanced understanding of the interplay between individual interests and collective governance outcomes. This theoretical framework has been instrumental in uncovering the underlying causes of governmental inefficiency and socioeconomic disparities that fuel public dissatisfaction.

Based on the analysis and findings presented in this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance democratic governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic:

1. The government should design and implement comprehensive strategies to alleviate poverty by improving access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. Targeted social safety nets and economic assistance programmes for vulnerable populations can help mitigate poverty and its adverse effects on democratic stability.
2. The government should foster economic growth by promoting entrepreneurship, supporting Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), and investing in critical sectors such as agriculture, technology, and manufacturing. Enhancing private sector development and creating a conducive business environment can drive wealth creation and economic diversification.
3. The government should enact reforms to ensure that elections are conducted with integrity, fairness, and transparency. This includes strengthening the independence and capacity of the Independent National Electoral

Commission (INEC), adopting advanced voting technologies, implementing stringent measures to combat electoral fraud, and ensuring equitable representation of all demographic groups.

4. The government should enhance anti-corruption efforts by improving the effectiveness of institutions dedicated to fighting corruption, such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC). This entails rigorous enforcement of anti-corruption laws, increasing transparency in public financial management, and fostering public engagement in accountability processes.

5. The government should implement policies that ensure the equitable distribution of economic benefits across various regions and socio-economic groups. Emphasizing the reduction of regional disparities, supporting marginalized communities, and promoting social inclusion can contribute to a more cohesive and harmonious society.

6. The government should invest in enhancing the capacity of state institutions to deliver public services efficiently and effectively. Strengthening security forces to address challenges such as insurgency, crime, and ethno-religious conflicts is crucial for maintaining stability and fostering public trust in governance.

7. The government should also cultivate transparency, accountability, and responsiveness within its institutions to restore public trust. This can be achieved by creating avenues for increased civic engagement, promoting civic education, and supporting civil society organizations.

8. The government should promote national unity and cohesion through policies designed to address the underlying causes of ethno-religious conflicts. Initiatives such as dialogue, conflict resolution mechanisms, and a unifying national identity are essential for bridging ethnic and religious divides.

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