



## ABSTRACT

The study explores the influence of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) on political participation in Chanchaga Local Government, Niger State. CSOs, as non-governmental and non-profit entities, play a vital role in fostering civic engagement, promoting inclusive governance, and influencing public policy. The study adopted Liberal theory of Civil

# THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN ENHANCING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND ELECTORAL INTEGRITY: EVIDENCE FROM CHANCHAGA LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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## Introduction

Civil society serves as a bridge between citizens and the state, fostering political engagement, accountability, and advocacy for public interests (Diamond, 2019). Although the definition of civil society varies, it generally encompasses non-governmental entities such as community organizations, religious groups, labor unions, and the media (Edwards, 2021). These actors are crucial in shaping political, economic, and social landscapes, complementing formal democratic processes (Salawu, 2020).

Globally, the prominence of CSOs in governance has grown, particularly since the post-World War II era. Organizations such as Amnesty International and the Red Cross have played key roles in international advocacy and humanitarian work (Smith, 2020). In Nigeria, the



Society as a framework. This research investigates the extent to which CSOs drive political awareness, mobilize citizens, and advocate for democratic processes. The study adopted survey research design, involving 379 distributed questionnaires. The data were analyzed using SPSS (Version 25.0). The findings reveal that CSOs significantly enhance political participation by increasing awareness, fostering public engagement, and amplifying marginalized voices. The study recommends strengthening partnerships between CSOs and government institutions to deepen civic participation and promote sustainable democratic governance.

**Keywords:** Civil Society Organizations, Political Participation, Electoral process, Electoral integrity, Political Party.

emergence of modern CSOs gained momentum in the 1980s and 1990s, focusing on democracy, human rights, and governance (Chukwudi & Ojo, 2023).

In Nigeria, where democratic institutions are still evolving, CSOs act as watchdogs, advocating for transparency and equitable representation (Musa & Okafor, 2021).

However, the effectiveness of CSOs can vary. While vibrant CSOs can drive positive reforms, passive or compromised organizations may inadvertently hinder development (Ademola, 2020). Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) played vital role in changing the political culture of the people, enhanced their political participation and reduced political apathy or increased engagement in policy process and promote good governance. This study investigates the role of CSOs in enhancing political participation in Chanchaga Local Government Area, underscoring their contributions to civic engagement and democratic governance. To effectively assess the influence of CSOs on political participation, the study used promotion of issue based campaign, kicking against electoral violence, craving for peaceful political atmosphere and sensitization on voters' education as sub-topics.

### **Theoretical Approach**

The study adopted liberal theory to analyze the role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in enhancing political participation, governance, and democratic engagement, with a focus on Chanchaga Local Government Area (LGA). Liberal



theory propounded by John Stuart Mill (1806- 73) and Harriet Taylor (1807-58 ) Within this framework, CSOs are positioned as essential vehicles for fostering inclusive governance, ensuring accountability, and empowering citizens to participate in the political process.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

The first concept to be review is Civil society organisation which is often described, as the "third sector" distinct from the government and private market, consisting of voluntary, self-regulating organizations bound by legal frameworks (Diamond, 2019). Krishna (2016) highlights that CSOs operate independently of the state and serve as platforms for collective action and advocacy. CSOs include professional associations, faith-based organizations, non-profits, and community groups (Edwards, 2021).

In the Nigerian context, CSOs have been pivotal in advocating for democratic reforms, good governance, and electoral transparency (Afolabi & Eze, 2021). These organizations mobilize citizens, promote civic education, and influence public policy (Salawu, 2020). Civil society function as an intermediary between households and the states, fostering voluntary associations and public engagement. Their ability to bridge the gap between the marginalized community and the policy make enhances social justice, empowers citizens and, cultivate democratic resilience. (Fowler, 2020). CSOs enhance political participation through public engagement by ensuring that the voices of the underrepresented groups are heard, reinforcing liberal ideals of inclusivity and equal representation. (Gyimah-Boadi, 2017). CSO's play an essential role in promoting civic engagement, ensuring transparency, and fostering inclusive governance.( Diamond, 2019) This is to attest to the fact that, CSO's are that potion of the larger society that is vibrant and an efficient watchdog of the government activities and insist, each reflect the needs of the people.

CSOs encompass a diverse array of actors, including trade unions, student associations, professional bodies, and grassroots organizations (Nnamdi, 2022). While non-governmental organizations (NGOs) represent a significant portion of civil society, they are not synonymous with it (Chukwudi & Ojo, 2023). Traditional groups, such as market associations and religious institutions, also play a role in advocacy and social justice (Ademola, 2020). CSOs influence policy by mobilizing citizens, advocating for reforms, and holding governments accountable (Edwards,



2021). Their activities range from electoral monitoring to public awareness campaigns (Afolabi & Eze, 2021).

### **Defining Political Participation**

Political participation encompasses activities intended to influence governance, including voting, protesting, and engaging with policymakers (Brady, 1995). Norris (2002) expands this definition to include civic activities aimed at shaping public policies and societal norms. Political participation can be classified into: Electoral Participation,

Protest Activities and Direct Engagement. While electoral participation is centre on those activities that concerned Voting, Political party membership, engaged or align with the activities of the party and campaign. (Teorell et al, 2007), protest activities is the manifestation of demonstration, strikes and advocacy while, direct engagement involves contacting public officials and participating in community dialogues. (Ekmam and Amma, 2012). These categories highlight both formal and informal avenues for civic engagement (Salovaara, 2015).

### **The Role of CSOs in Political Participation.**

Chukwudi and Ojo (2023) in Civil Society Organization and sustenance of democratization in Nigeria, observed that various economic and political development in Nigeria have necessitated avalanche of intervention of several civil society organization (CSOs) with which they sustained democratic practices by ensuring moral values, fundamental human rights protection, transparency and rule of law.

While, Danladi and Adihikon (2020) in civil society organization and Democratic Governance in Nigeria's 4<sup>th</sup> Republic: A Historical Reflection, examined CSOs and Democratic Governance in Nigeria from the caboose of history. The paper interrogate and illuminates the changes and continuity of civil society groups as it impinge on the pursuit of, and discovery of the dividends of democracy in Nigeria. Ofoneme and Amorji-Nike (2018) on "the impact of Civil Society Organization in Nigeria's socio-political development: An appraisal of civil liberty organizations the paper observed that CSOs have scarified their existence, goals and objectives to the course of the fight towards socio-political development in Nigeria and have made relentless effort and provoking arrangement to ensure that the goals and objective for which they are set up are achieved. With aim to ascertain the impact



CSOs make on Nigeria socio-political development, the paper adopted structural functional theory as a theoretical framework while secondary method and documentary research were used for gathering and analyzing data. The paper discovered there are lots of factors undermined socio-political developments in Nigeria. Oke, et al (2021) on the study “the role of Civil Society Organizations in deepening Democratic Tenets in Nigeria” The paper examined the role of CSOs in bridging the gap between the people and the government, particularly the contributions of CSOs on the three basic fundamental pillars of democracy which are: periodic election, adherence to rule of law and respect for human right.

### **Political Party:**

They are normally platforms where credible citizenship representation can be processed in addition to providing policy choices for the people (Edoh, 2018). In fact, political parties are critical instruments for mass mobilization of the citizenry for an all-inclusive process of democratic governance.

Political party is a political platform in which representatives emerged to contest for elective posts in government institutions. The platform mobilizes funds for campaign, creates awareness, provide postal /banners, organizes rallies to promote the image of the party and the candidates with aim to win at the poll.

A political party is an organized group of people with similar political aims and opinions that seek to influence the public policy by getting its candidate elected to public office (Likoti, 2005).

### **Electoral Integrity**

Electoral integrity can be defined "as a holistic or comprehensive observance of the electoral laws guiding electoral conduct of a country throughout the electoral cycle through which a collective will of the people can be achieved and upon which the election can meet international standard"

Electoral Integrity is a composite of the legal framework and internal regulations that guide the election procedure as well as the general conduct and administration of the elections constitute the yardstick to measure integrity.

Norris (2014), Bishop & Hoeffler, (2014) were in alliance that when elections were held and concluded without intimidation and violence and the citizens were convinced that their votes translated into the results that were announced then it would be said to have credibility. They opined that when elections conform to the



prescription of the UN and it is acclaimed by the political actors, the electorates, journalists and scholars, it would be said to uphold integrity. They insisted that conformity to the process of the elections is what constitutes integrity.

### **Electoral Process and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Political Participation**

The electoral process is a fundamental component of democracy, functioning as the primary mechanism through which citizens express their political preferences and select their leaders. It is widely recognized as central to the sustenance of democracy, as it shapes governance, ensures accountability, and legitimizes political authority (Ariwoola, 2013). However, the electoral process is complex, involving various phases and procedures, each contributing to the overall integrity of the election (Elekwo, 2018)

The electoral process can be understood as a series of interconnected stages that include voter education, candidate nomination, voting, and post-election adjudication (Elekwo, 2018). Elekwa (2008) emphasizes the procedural aspects of this process, noting phases such as voter registration, election campaigns, and result declaration, all of which are necessary for ensuring the legitimacy of the electoral outcome. These stages reflect both the aspirations of democratic governance and the challenges faced, including electoral fraud, violence, and voter suppression (Idike, 2014).

Idike (2014) and Ariwoola (2013) offer complementary views of the electoral process. While Elekwa and other scholars focus on the procedural framework, Ariwoola's (2013) approach highlights the electoral process as a structured method for selecting leaders in democratic societies, where the integrity of elections is pivotal to their credibility. Similarly, Babalola (2019) sees elections as key mechanisms for leadership selection, situating them within broader governance systems that include vote counting and declaration phases.

Obi and Abutu (2009) view elections as tools of accountability, enabling citizens to select leaders, demand transparency, and challenge authoritarian tendencies. Iyayi (2007) reinforces this by emphasizing the need for a competitive, periodic, inclusive, and transparent electoral process to ensure democratic health.

### **Components of the Electoral Process**

Electoral process is multifaceted, consisting of distinct but interdependent phases. The phases include: Pre-Election Phase, Election Phase and Post-Election





Phase. Pre-Election phase involves those activities carried out by the people in preparation for the conduct of the election. This include Voters' registration, Party primaries, Candidate nomination and Voter education while, Election Phase is the stage where those activities linked to the Election took place. These are Campaigns, Voting and Security monitoring and Post -Election phase are those activities that includes Result announcements, dispute resolution, and tribunal activities. These stages are intricately connected, and failures in any phase, such as irregularities during voting or issues in result declaration, can undermine the legitimacy of the electoral process.

### **The Role of CSOs in the Electoral Process**

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are crucial in promoting political participation and ensuring the integrity of the electoral process. CSOs operate at multiple levels within the electoral process, these are Voter Education and awareness, Election Monitoring and observation, advocacy for Electoral Reforms and conflict mediation and dispute resolution. CSOs engage in civic education campaigns, raising awareness about voting rights, responsibilities, and the importance of electoral participation. These efforts are essential in combating voter apathy and enhancing informed participation (Musa & Okafor, 2021). CSO's engages in Voters' Education and sensitisation routine to enlightened the citizens on the importance of participating in Electoral process as, it the only means through which the citizens could determine those to lead or assume leadership position and get the right policies implemented. CSO's also play an essential role in observing elections to ensure they are free, fair, and transparent. Their independent monitoring often leads to increased accountability and influences electoral reforms (Ibrahim et al., 2021). CSO's observe electoral processes and the vote counts and the result, reflect the wish of the people. CSO's are instrumental for giving the electoral institutions an independent status by the government. This is the outcome of their insistent for the independent Electoral body that could not be influence by the government or its agencies nor by a political party. In the aftermath of elections, CSOs mediate electoral disputes, promoting peaceful resolutions and helping to mitigate post-election violence (Okon & Adebayo, 2022). This effort as go along way to mitigate electoral violence and escalation of same to the barest minimum.

### **Electoral Process and Political Participation in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, the electoral process reflects both the challenges and opportunities for democratic engagement. Despite CSOs' substantial involvement in advocating for electoral integrity, the country continues to face significant obstacles, including



electoral fraud, violence, and institutional weaknesses (Salawu, 2020). This is evident at every phase of Electoral processes. At the pre- Election phase where party membership and voters' registration, candidate nomination and voter education take place, CSO's embarked on sensitisation and awareness tours to ensures every eligible citizens participate in the process, crave for peaceful political atmosphere, frowned at manipulation in the process and insists to adherence to the electoral laws. Nonetheless, CSOs remain instrumental in shaping the political landscape by mobilizing voters, advocating for reforms, and enhancing public discourse on governance (Afolabi & Eze, 2021). Their involvement is crucial for ensuring a more transparent, accountable, and inclusive electoral process. This, to some extent as reduced the cases of electoral fraud, vote buying and stuffing of Ballots papers in favour of a political party or to influence the outcome of election.

In a note shell, electoral process is at the heart of democratic governance, acting as a conduit for political participation and leadership selection. However, its credibility depends on the integrity of each phase of the process. CSOs, through their diverse roles in voter education, election monitoring, advocacy, and conflict resolution, significantly enhance the legitimacy of the electoral process and foster political participation. As Nigeria continues to grapple with its democratic challenges, the role of CSOs in strengthening the electoral process remains indispensable for building a more inclusive and accountable governance system.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employs survey research design to explored the role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in influencing political participation and development in Chanchaga Local Government Area. The quantitative instrument utilizes structured questionnaires to gather demographic data and assess perceptions of CSOs using Likert-scale questions. This method ensures a comprehensive analysis by integrating measurable trends with contextual insights, addressing the complexities of CSOs' contributions to political participation and development.

The research targeted a diverse population of 220,670 registered voters across Chanchaga LGA, employing Simple Random Sampling to select 379 respondents for the questionnaire. Data is analyzed using SPSS 25.0 version and employed chi-square tests to examine relationships between variables. This methodological





approach enhances the reliability of the findings, contributing to a robust understanding of the impact of CSOs on political participation and development.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

#### Promote issue based campaign

Table 1		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	12	3.2
	Undecided	42	11.1
	Agree	228	60.2
	Strongly Agree	84	22.2
	Total	366	96.6
Missing	System	13	3.4
Total		379	100.0

Field Work, 2023

The results show that 60.2% of the population agrees with promoting issue-based campaigns, with 22.2% strongly agreeing. A smaller portion is undecided (11.1%), while 3.2% strongly disagree. The cumulative percent reaches 100% after including all responses, with 13 missing cases (3.4% of the total). The valid percent highlights strong support for issue-based campaigns, excluding missing data.

#### Kick Against Electoral Violence

Table 2		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	12	3.2
	Disagree	30	7.9
	Undecided	30	7.9
	Agree	180	47.5
	Strongly Agree	114	30.1
	Total	366	96.6
Missing	System	13	3.4
Total		379	100.0

Field Work, 2023

The results show that 47.5% of the population agrees with kicking against electoral violence, with 30.1% strongly agreeing. A smaller portion is undecided (7.9%), while



7.9% disagree and 3.2% strongly disagree. The cumulative percent reaches 100% after including all responses, with 13 missing cases (3.4% of the total). The valid percent indicates strong overall support for combating electoral violence, excluding missing data.

### Crave For Peaceful Political Atmosphere

Table 3		Frequency	Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Strongly Disagree	12	3.2
	Disagree	36	9.5
	Undecided	72	19.0
	Agree	114	30.1
	Strongly Agree	132	34.8
	Total	366	96.6
<b>Missing</b>	System	13	3.4
<b>Total</b>		379	100.0

Field Work, 2023

The results show that 34.8% of the population strongly agrees with craving a peaceful political atmosphere, and 30.1% agree. A significant portion is undecided (19.0%), while 9.5% disagree and 3.2% strongly disagree. The cumulative percent reaches 100% after including all responses, with 13 missing cases (3.4% of the total). The valid percent highlights strong overall support for a peaceful political environment, excluding missing data.

### Create Awareness/Sensitization On Voters' Education

Table 4		Frequency	Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Disagree	18	4.7
	Undecided	36	9.5
	Agree	90	23.7
	Strongly Agree	222	58.6
	Total	366	96.6
<b>Missing</b>	System	13	3.4
<b>Total</b>		379	100.0

Field Work, 2023



The results show that 58.6% of the population strongly agrees with creating awareness and sensitization on voter education, and 23.7% agree. A smaller portion is undecided (9.5%), while 4.7% disagree. The cumulative percent reaches 100% after including all responses, with 13 missing cases (3.4% of the total). The valid percent indicates strong support for voter education initiatives, excluding missing data.

### **HYPOTHESIS: Civil Society Organization do not Enhanced Political Participation of the people of Chanchaga L. G.**

We analyze the association between the statement "*Civil society organizations do not enhance political participation of the people of Chanchaga local government*" and the following sub-categories:

### **Chi-Square Test Table for CSOs and Political Participation**

Here are the detailed results:

**Table 5**

Political Participation Role	Test	Chi-Square Value	Degrees of Freedom (df)	p-value
Promote Issue-Based Campaigns	Pearson Chi-Square	451.377	9	0.000
	Likelihood Ratio	312.828	9	0.000
	Linear-by-Linear Association	211.749	1	0.000
Kick Against Electoral Violence	Pearson Chi-Square	590.480	12	0.000
	Likelihood Ratio	404.979	12	0.000
	Linear-by-Linear Association	257.878	1	0.000
Crave for Peaceful Political Atmosphere	Pearson Chi-Square	638.344	12	0.000
	Likelihood Ratio	495.714	12	0.000
	Linear-by-Linear Association	284.696	1	0.000
Create Awareness/Sensitization on Voter Education	Pearson Chi-Square	613.545	9	0.000
	Likelihood Ratio	534.185	9	0.000
	Linear-by-Linear Association	312.100	1	0.000



### **Decision**

**Pearson Chi-Square:** The significant chi-square values ( $p\text{-value} < 0.05$ ) indicate a strong association between civil society organizations and the political participation roles listed.

**Likelihood Ratio:** The likelihood ratio values confirm the significant relationships, consistent with the Pearson Chi-Square test results.

**Linear-by-Linear Association:** The strong significance ( $p\text{-value} < 0.05$ ) indicates a clear linear trend in the association between CSOs and political participation roles. This analysis demonstrates that civil society organizations significantly enhance political participation in Chanchaga LGA by promoting issue-based campaigns, reducing electoral violence, fostering peaceful political atmospheres, and creating awareness through voter education initiatives.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

### **Conclusion:**

The findings from this study underscore the critical role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in enhancing political participation and promoting electoral integrity in Chanchaga Local Government Area, Niger State. CSOs have proven to be vital in fostering awareness, educating the public on electoral rights, and advocating for democratic reforms. The study highlights that CSOs significantly influence political engagement by encouraging citizens to participate in democratic processes, promoting issue-based campaigns, and combating electoral violence. Despite challenges such as civic apathy and resource constraints, the efforts of CSOs have led to notable improvements in voter education, election monitoring, and advocacy for electoral reforms.

The research confirms that CSOs are instrumental in mitigating electoral fraud and violence, ensuring a peaceful political atmosphere, and strengthening the legitimacy of the electoral process. The findings reveal that, in the absence of robust political party activities or One party dominance, CSOs played crucial roles in sensitizing and mobilizing citizens for political participation, especially in rural areas where political awareness is typically low. Overall, this study reinforces the importance of CSOs as a mechanism for fostering democratic governance and improving electoral integrity in Nigeria.

### **Recommendations:**

1. **Strengthen Partnerships Between CSOs and Government Institutions:** For sustained democratic engagement, it is essential that government institutions collaborate more effectively with CSOs. Such partnerships can



enhance the impact of voter education campaigns, foster greater political awareness, and ensure a more inclusive electoral process. The government should support CSOs through funding, capacity building, and access to resources for their initiatives.

2. **Expand Voter Education and Awareness Campaigns:** CSOs should continue to expand their efforts to educate the public on the importance of political participation, particularly in marginalized and rural communities. This can be achieved through more localized campaigns that address specific concerns of the electorate and promote the benefits of active civic engagement.
3. **Increase Support for Election Monitoring Activities:** To further enhance electoral integrity, CSOs should be encouraged and supported in their election monitoring and observation roles. This can include facilitating access to election data, training more observers, and ensuring that their findings are given due attention in post-election reviews.
4. **Promote Legal and Electoral Reforms:** CSOs should continue to advocate for electoral reforms that address systemic issues such as voter suppression, electoral fraud, and lack of transparency. Their role in pushing for reforms in the electoral process, including the use of technology for e-voting and results transmission, is vital for ensuring free and fair elections.
5. **Combat Civic Apathy and Political Disengagement:** Addressing the barriers to political participation, such as civic apathy and a lack of trust in the electoral system, is crucial. CSOs should develop strategies to engage and mobilize apathetic segments of the population, ensuring that all voices are heard in the democratic process.

In conclusion, while challenges persist, the continued involvement of CSOs in political processes remains a cornerstone for achieving democratic stability and strengthening governance in Nigeria. Their role as advocates for transparency, accountability, and electoral reform is indispensable for fostering a more participatory and inclusive political environment.

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