

Citizens Impact Analysis of Nigeria's Democratic Process – 2015-2025

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Abstract

Original Research Article

This study examines citizens' impact analysis of Nigeria's democratic process, focusing on how democratic quality, electoral integrity, institutional checks and balances, and press freedom are perceived within the period 2015–2025. Using a descriptive survey design, quantitative data were obtained from 902 valid questionnaires administered across Lagos, Abuja (FCT), Kaduna, Bauchi, Enugu and Delta, while the study's measures were structured around key democratic indicators and media-performance constructs. Results show overwhelming dissatisfaction with political representation since 2015 and a dominant perception that elections are not free and fair. Perceptions of separation of powers were mixed but leaned negative, while views on the partisanship of security agents during elections were divided with a slight majority affirming bias. Press freedom indices further suggest a constrained media environment characterised by perceived harassment, intimidation, legal pressures, and fear of publishing politically sensitive stories. The study concludes that weak perceived democratic performance and restricted media operating space jointly undermine democratic consolidation and citizen confidence. Strengthening electoral integrity, improving institutional independence, and guaranteeing press freedom are recommended as essential for enhancing democratic quality and citizen impact in Nigeria.

Keywords: Democratic process, Electoral integrity, Press freedom, Citizen Perception, Nigeria.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Democracy is commonly evaluated not only by the occurrence of periodic elections, but by whether political competition is meaningful, rights and freedoms are protected, and public power is effectively constrained by institutions and citizens (Dahl, 1971; Huntington, 1991; Diamond, 1999). In this sense, a “citizens’ impact analysis” of democratic process focuses on how democratic rules and outcomes translate into lived realities trust in electoral institutions, willingness to participate, perceived responsiveness of government, and the civic freedoms that enable citizens to associate,

protest, and express dissent without fear. Electoral integrity scholarship also notes that when elections are undermined by administrative failures, security pressures, weak dispute resolution, or uneven enforcement of rules, citizens may experience democracy as unstable or unfair, reducing legitimacy and increasing alienation (Norris, 2015). Nigeria's democratic trajectory between 2015 and 2025 provides a rich context for examining citizen-level impacts because the decade spans historic electoral turning point, multiple contested election cycles, and major civic episodes that tested state responsiveness. The 2015 general elections were highly competitive

and produced Nigeria's first democratic alternation of power at the federal level, but election observers also documented systemic weaknesses, including violence risks and attempts at manipulation, indicating that consolidation challenges persisted even during an important milestone (EU EOM, 2015). By 2019, international observation again emphasized competitiveness alongside serious operational and transparency shortcomings, election security problems, and low turnout conditions likely to shape public confidence and the perceived value of participation (EU EOM, 2019). The 2023 elections marked a further turning point through intensified reliance on election technology (including BVAS and results viewing processes), yet observer assessments highlighted significant challenges in transparency and process consistency, while domestic debate about technology performance became central to public evaluation of election credibility (EU EOM, 2023; INEC, 2023 General Election Report).

A key feature of the 2015–2025 period is that democratic “impact” on citizens cannot be reduced to election-day events. Citizen experience also depends on the broader freedom environment and the state's tolerance for dissent and civic mobilization. The 2020 #EndSARS protests, driven by demands for accountability and police reform, were met by allegations of excessive use of force and calls for investigations, becoming a defining episode in citizen-state relations and public trust (Amnesty International, 2020). Subsequent protest cycles linked to governance and economic conditions continued to raise questions about civic space and the right to peaceful assembly, reinforcing the importance of treating democratic quality as a continuous, lived experience rather than a periodic vote (Reuters, 2024). Institutional reforms during the decade also matter for citizen impacts because they shape procedural fairness and transparency. Nigeria's Electoral Act 2022 introduced or strengthened provisions affecting timelines, party primaries, and the use of technological devices in elections, aiming to improve credibility and reduce recurring administrative disputes (Electoral Act, 2022). The 2023 cycle then became a practical test of reform implementation especially technology use

prompting official reviews that documented both gains (e.g., reduced certain forms of accreditation-related fraud) and unresolved concerns (notably public controversy over result upload processes) that influence citizens' confidence in electoral management (INEC, Review of the 2023 General Election; INEC, 2023 General Election Report). Measuring citizens' impacts and perceptions is especially important because public opinion often forms through mediated information, social discussion, and salient political cues rather than direct observation of complex processes. Classic work on public opinion argues that citizens rely on simplified “pictures” of political reality, making information environments central to how democracy is judged (Lippmann, 1922). Agenda-setting research further demonstrates that media emphasis influences what issues citizens regard as important, shaping how they evaluate governance performance and democratic priorities during and between elections (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In Nigeria, where election credibility, security, economic hardship, and corruption debates frequently dominate public discourse, shifts in issue salience can plausibly affect participation, trust, and the perceived legitimacy of outcomes across the 2015–2025 decade. Because citizen impacts depend heavily on information flow and accountability, media freedom and the safety of journalists are also integral to democratic experience. Freedom-monitoring assessments continue to rate Nigeria as “Partly Free,” reflecting ongoing constraints affecting political rights and civil liberties (Freedom House, 2024). Press freedom monitors and journalist-protection organizations document threats to investigative journalism and recurring attacks or harassment of reporters particularly during elections and protests conditions that can weaken citizens' access to verified information and reduce the effectiveness of public accountability (RSF, Nigeria country profile; CPJ, 2024 feature on attacks/harassment). Legal and regulatory environments also shape civic expression: debate around Nigeria's cybercrime framework, and related legal judgments and controversies, illustrates how digital regulation can intersect with political criticism and journalistic work, affecting citizen

willingness to speak and participate publicly (Electoral Act, 2022; reporting on cybercrime-law concerns and judgments).

In addition to narrative assessments, cross-national datasets indicate that democracy quality fluctuates over time and is multidimensional. V-Dem's liberal democracy measures (as disseminated through widely used data portals) conceptualize democracy as combining electoral competitiveness with civil liberties and constraints on executive power dimensions directly relevant to citizens' lived democratic experience (V-Dem/Our World in Data). Meanwhile, Afrobarometer surveys show that Nigerians value elections as a method for choosing leaders while expressing limited trust in electoral institutions at key moments an attitudinal pattern that directly motivates a citizen-focused impact analysis of Nigeria's democratic process (Afrobarometer, 2022 summary; Afrobarometer, 2023 news release). Against this backdrop, Citizens' Impact Analysis of Nigeria's Democratic Process (2015–2025) is timely for three reasons. First, the period captures a full decade of electoral cycles (2015, 2019, 2023) and post-election governance dynamics with documented strengths and weaknesses in credibility, logistics, transparency, and security (EU EOM 2015, 2019, 2023; INEC reviews). Second, it includes pivotal civic episodes (notably #EndSARS and later protest waves) that illuminate whether citizens experience democracy as responsive, rights-protecting, and accountable (Amnesty International; Reuters). Third, it spans significant legal-institutional reform efforts (Electoral Act 2022) and major technology adoption that shaped public debate about election integrity likely influencing trust, participation, and perceived legitimacy (Electoral Act 2022; INEC reports; EU EOM 2023).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Democracy, Citizens' Perception, and Democratic Consolidation*

Democratic consolidation extends beyond the mere conduct of elections to encompass citizens' sustained belief in the legitimacy, fairness, and effectiveness of democratic institutions (Schumpeter, 2013; Linz & Stepan, 1996). Scholars argue that democracy is

consolidated when citizens internalize democratic norms and regard democratic procedures as the “only game in town” (Diamond, 1999; Norris, 2011). Consequently, citizens' perceptions serve as critical indicators of democratic quality and institutional trust. Dalton (2004) emphasizes that citizens' evaluations of democracy are shaped by both procedural elements, such as free and fair elections, and substantive outcomes, including governance performance, accountability, and protection of civil liberties. In developing democracies, weak institutions, elite dominance, and governance failures often generate democratic dissatisfaction, even where electoral processes are formally observed (Lipset, Seong & Torres, 2013). Thus, public perception becomes a crucial analytical lens for understanding democratic resilience or fragility. In the Nigerian context, studies have shown that citizens' perception of democracy is influenced by electoral credibility, corruption, security challenges, and economic performance (Eronke, 2012; Olutokun, 2016). Between 2015 and 2025, Nigeria experienced significant political transitions, policy reforms, and social upheavals, making citizens' perception particularly relevant for evaluating the trajectory of democratic consolidation during this period.

B. *Conceptualising the Democratic Process*

The democratic process refers to the institutional, procedural, and normative mechanisms through which political authority is constituted, exercised, and legitimised within a political system. At its core, the democratic process encompasses competitive elections, political participation, representation, accountability, rule of law, and the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms (Schumpeter, 2013; Dahl, 1989). Beyond elections, democratic processes involve continuous interactions between the state and citizens, including policy formulation, governance delivery, and mechanisms for public scrutiny. Contemporary democratic theory distinguishes between procedural democracy and substantive democracy. Procedural democracy emphasizes formal rules such as periodic elections, party competition, and constitutional guarantees, while substantive democracy focuses on outcomes,

including social justice, responsiveness, accountability, and citizens' lived experiences of governance (Diamond, 1999; Norris, 2011). This distinction is particularly relevant in developing democracies where formal democratic structures may exist without corresponding democratic dividends. In Nigeria, the democratic process since 1999 has been marked by regular elections and constitutional governance, yet challenged by issues of electoral malpractice, weak accountability, corruption, and governance deficits (Eronke, 2012; Olutokun, 2016). Consequently, evaluating democracy solely through institutional arrangements is insufficient; attention must also be paid to how citizens experience and interpret democratic practice over time.

C. Conceptualising “Citizen Impact” in Democratic Analysis

Citizen impact refers to the extent to which democratic processes influence citizens' political attitudes, trust, participation, and perceptions of legitimacy. It captures how democracy affects citizens and, conversely, how citizens respond to and shape democratic outcomes. In this sense, citizen impact reflects both democracy's effects on citizens and citizens' evaluative judgments of democracy (Dalton, 2004; Norris, 2011). Scholars argue that citizens' perceptions are central to democratic sustainability because democracy ultimately derives its legitimacy from popular consent (Lipset, Seong & Torres, 2013). Where citizens perceive democratic processes as fair, inclusive, and responsive, democratic consolidation is strengthened. Conversely, perceptions of exclusion, manipulation, or bias can lead to political apathy, distrust, and democratic backsliding. Citizen impact is therefore multidimensional, encompassing political trust, satisfaction with democracy, perceived electoral integrity, freedom of expression, and confidence in democratic institutions (Dalton, Beck & Huckfeldt, 1998). In media-mediated societies, these perceptions are significantly shaped by information flows, particularly through newspapers and other mass media platforms.

D. The Media and Democratic Governance

The media occupies a central position in democratic theory as a facilitator of political communication and accountability. Lasswell (1948) and Wright (1960) identify surveillance, correlation, and transmission of political culture as core media functions in society. Building on this foundation, McQuail (2005) conceptualizes the media as a critical democratic institution responsible for informing citizens, scrutinizing power, and enabling public debate. The press, in particular, has been widely described as the “Fourth Estate of the Realm” because of its oversight role over the executive, legislature, and judiciary (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1963). By providing information about political actors and institutions, newspapers empower citizens to make informed judgments and participate meaningfully in democratic processes (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Iyengar, 1994).

Empirical studies across democracies indicate that media exposure significantly influences political knowledge, civic engagement, and trust in democratic institutions (Dalton, Beck & Huckfeldt, 1998; Norris, 2000). However, the effectiveness of the media in promoting democracy depends largely on its independence, professionalism, and commitment to public interest.

E. Media Framing, Agenda-Setting, and Citizens' Impact

Media framing theory provides a useful framework for understanding how newspapers influence citizens' perceptions of democracy. Entman (1993) defines framing as the selection and salience of certain aspects of reality to promote particular interpretations, evaluations, or solutions. Through framing, the media shapes how political events are understood and how responsibility is attributed. Closely related is agenda-setting theory, which posits that the media may not tell people what to think, but it significantly influences what they think about (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Repeated emphasis on particular issues elevates them in public consciousness, thereby shaping political priorities and perceptions of democratic performance (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). In Nigeria, scholars

have observed that newspaper framing of elections, governance, and political conflicts strongly influences public opinion (Akinfeleye, 2002; Alabi, 2014). Headlines, story placement, and editorial commentary often reflect ideological leanings and ownership interests, which in turn shape citizens' interpretation of democratic developments (Uganwa, 2014; Kari, 2018). Given Nigeria's ethnic, religious, and regional diversity, such framing practices carry significant implications for democratic stability and legitimacy.

F. Watchdog Journalism and Accountability

Watchdog journalism constitutes one of the most critical democratic functions of the press. It involves investigative reporting, exposure of corruption, and continuous scrutiny of public officials to promote accountability and transparency (Amodu et al., 2016). In democratic theory, the watchdog role is essential for constraining abuse of power and safeguarding public interest (Alozieuwa, 2012). Studies on Nigerian media performance reveal a mixed picture. While newspapers have historically played prominent roles in exposing corruption and challenging authoritarianism, recent scholarship suggests a decline in investigative rigor due to economic pressures, political intimidation, and ownership interference (Popoola, 2015; Kayode-Eesula, 2016). This decline undermines the media's capacity to serve as an effective watchdog and weakens democratic accountability. Citizens' perception of watchdog journalism is therefore crucial. Where the public perceives the press as compromised or partisan, trust in both the media and democratic institutions diminishes (McQuail, 1976). Conversely, credible watchdog journalism enhances civic engagement and democratic confidence.

G. Media Ownership, Press Freedom, and Objectivity

Media ownership remains a contentious issue in democratic discourse. Altschull (1984) and McQuail (1991) argue that media content inevitably reflects the interests of those who finance and control media organizations. In Nigeria, ownership of major newspapers by political and economic elites has been shown to influence editorial priorities and constrain

objectivity (Sobowale, 1974; Akinsanya, 1981; Babarinsa, 2003). The social responsibility theory of the press maintains that media organizations must transcend proprietorial interests to serve the broader public good (Siebert et al., 1963). However, empirical studies indicate that economic survival, advertising dependence, and political patronage often undermine this ideal in developing democracies (Isola, 2008; Popoola, 2015). Press freedom further conditions media performance. Although Nigeria's constitution guarantees freedom of expression, journalists frequently face harassment, censorship, legal intimidation, and economic sanctions, particularly during politically sensitive periods (Pierni & Mayr, 2013; Afrobarometer, 2015). Such constraints foster self-censorship and weaken objective reporting, thereby limiting citizens' access to credible democratic information (Amodu et al., 2016).

H. Empirical Gaps in the Literature

Existing literature on media and democracy in Nigeria has largely focused on content analysis, institutional frameworks, and elite perspectives, with limited longitudinal analysis of citizens' perceptions across extended democratic periods (Berelson & Janowitz, 1953; Idowu, 2013). Few studies systematically examine how citizens evaluate democratic processes over a decade-long period, particularly in relation to media performance between 2015 and 2025. This gap is significant because democratic consolidation ultimately rests on citizens' belief in the legitimacy and effectiveness of democratic institutions. By focusing on citizens' impact analysis of Nigeria's democratic process over this period, this study contributes to the literature by foregrounding public perception as a central measure of democratic health and media effectiveness.

3. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design was considered appropriate because the study sought to measure respondents' opinions, attitudes, and perceptions regarding newspaper reportage and democratic processes

rather than to manipulate variables or establish causal relationships. The survey design enabled the researcher to collect data from a large and geographically dispersed population, thereby facilitating generalisation of findings. The study generated both quantitative data, obtained through structured questionnaires, and qualitative data, obtained through in-depth interviews with senior newspaper editors. The integration of these two data sources enhanced methodological robustness and provided triangulation for the findings.

B. Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised adult Nigerian citizens, with particular emphasis on individuals who are exposed to newspapers and political information. This population was deemed appropriate because exposure to newspaper content forms the basis upon which citizens construct perceptions of Nigeria's democratic process. Given Nigeria's large and heterogeneous population, the study recognised the importance of capturing views across different regions, socio-economic backgrounds, and political contexts. Consequently, the population frame covered multiple states and the Federal Capital Territory.

C. Sample Size

The basic sample size of 601 respondents was initially determined using the Australian Sample Size Calculator. In line with Onyebuchi and Fink (as cited in Nnadozie, 2017), an oversampling of 40–50% was recommended to account for non-response. Consequently, the sample size was increased by 50%:

$$601 + (0.50 \times 601) = 902$$

Thus, the final sample size for the survey was 902 respondents.

D. Sampling Technique

The study employed a multistage cluster sampling technique, combining both probability and non-probability sampling methods. This approach was adopted primarily for feasibility, given Nigeria's vast geographical size and administrative complexity. At the first stage, Nigeria's six

geopolitical zones South-West, South-East, South-South, North-West, North-East, and North-Central were considered. At subsequent stages, selected states and Local Government Areas (LGAs) were chosen through cluster sampling. Within these clusters, simple random sampling was applied to select individual respondents. The simple random sampling procedure involved clearly defining the population, determining the sample size, randomly selecting respondents, and collecting data from the selected sample. This ensured that each eligible respondent had an equal chance of being selected, thereby minimising sampling bias.

E. Distribution of Sample

The sample was proportionally distributed across 18 Local Government Areas selected from six states and the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja), namely Lagos, Delta, Enugu, Kaduna, Bauchi, and Abuja. Population figures used for proportional allocation were derived from the 2006 National Population Census and statistics published by the National Bureau of Statistics. In total, 903 questionnaires were distributed. One questionnaire was found unsuitable for analysis, resulting in 902 valid instruments, which formed the basis for data analysis.

F. Instrument for Data Collection

The questionnaire was designed to elicit respondents' perceptions of Nigeria's democratic process and media performance. It contained closed-ended items structured on a Likert-type scale, allowing respondents to indicate degrees of agreement or disagreement. The questionnaire measured key constructs, including: Perceived quality of Nigeria's democracy, Watchdog role of newspapers, Level of press freedom, Objectivity and balance of newspaper reportage, Relationship between media performance and democratic consolidation. Qualitative data were collected through face-to-face interviews with senior editors of selected newspapers. The interviews provided expert insights into editorial practices, institutional constraints, and professional challenges affecting media performance in Nigeria's democracy.

G. Validity of the Research Instruments

Validity was treated as a critical component of the research process. Both internal and external validity were considered. External validity was addressed through the use of scientifically grounded sampling procedures, which ensured that findings could be generalised from the sample to the broader population. Content validity was ensured by subjecting the questionnaire to expert review by scholars and experienced supervisors. Their feedback helped confirm that the instrument adequately covered the study objectives and measured the intended constructs.

H. Reliability of the Research Instruments

Reliability was assessed using the test-retest method. Fifteen copies of the questionnaire were administered to selected respondents at the National Assembly. After a two-week interval, the same questionnaire was re-administered to the same respondents. Responses from both administrations were analysed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.74, which indicates acceptable consistency and dependability of the instrument.

I. Method of Data Collection

Data collection involved the recruitment and training of research assistants to facilitate questionnaire administration across the selected locations. Questionnaires were administered directly to respondents, with some respondents allowed a period of one week before retrieval. The researcher closely monitored the data collection process to ensure adherence to ethical standards and methodological consistency.

J. Methods of Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using both quantitative and qualitative techniques: Quantitative Analysis: Quantitative data were analysed using frequency counts and simple percentages, presented in tabular form. Hypotheses were tested using the Chi-square statistical technique with SPSS version 17.0. Qualitative Analysis: Qualitative data from in-depth interviews were analysed using the explanation-building technique, which involved identifying emerging themes and patterns to support or clarify quantitative findings (Yin, 2009).

K. Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the research process. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were free to withdraw at any stage without consequences.

L. Methodological Strength and Limitations

The strength of this methodology lies in its large sample size, mixed-methods approach, and nationwide coverage across geopolitical zones, which enhance the credibility and generalisability of findings. However, limitations include reliance on self-reported perceptions and logistical constraints associated with nationwide data collection.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

A. Gender of Respondents

This table presents the gender composition of the study sample. The purpose is to show whether the survey responses reflect a reasonably mixed demographic base and to clarify the dominant respondent category for interpretation of perception outcomes.

Table 1: *Gender of respondents*

Gender	F	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Male	544	60.3	60.3	60.3
Female	358	39.7	39.7	100.0
Total	902	100.0	100.0	

The distribution shows that male respondents constituted 60.3% of the sample, while female respondents accounted for 39.7%. This indicates that responses were obtained from both genders in substantial proportions, though males were the dominant group. The implication is that perception outcomes reflect a more male-skewed respondent pool, which should be considered when interpreting views on democratic practice and media performance.

B. Educational Qualification of Respondents

This table reports respondents' educational attainment. Since the study relies on citizens' perceptions of democracy and newspaper reportage, educational level is an important indicator of respondents' capacity to understand political content, evaluate media narratives, and respond meaningfully to the questionnaire items.

Table 2: *Educational qualification of respondents*

Educational qualification	F	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Non-formal education	17	1.9	1.9	1.9
Basic education level	109	12.1	12.1	14.0
Secondary school leaving certification	415	46.0	46.0	60.0
Tertiary level education	243	26.9	26.9	86.9
Postgraduate certification	118	13.1	13.1	100.0
Total	902	100.0	100.0	

The table indicates that most respondents possessed at least secondary education, with 46.0% reporting secondary school leaving certification. Respondents with tertiary education constituted 26.9%, while 13.1% held postgraduate qualifications. Only 1.9% reported non-formal education. This profile

suggests that the sample is largely literate and capable of engaging the subject matter of democratic processes and newspaper reportage, thereby strengthening the validity of the perception measures used in the study.

C. State Distribution of Respondents

This table shows the geographical spread of respondents across the selected states and the Federal Capital Territory. The objective is to

demonstrate the distribution of opinions across multiple political and socio-cultural contexts in Nigeria, consistent with the sampling approach reported in the study.

Table 3: *State distribution of respondents*

State	F	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Abuja	236	26.2	26.2	26.2
Bauchi	119	13.2	13.2	39.4
Delta	74	8.2	8.2	47.6
Enugu	84	9.3	9.3	56.9
Kaduna	114	12.6	12.6	69.5
Lagos	275	30.5	30.5	100.0
Total	902	100.0	100.0	

The distribution shows that Lagos contributed the highest proportion of respondents (30.5%), followed by Abuja (26.2%). Bauchi (13.2%) and Kaduna (12.6%) accounted for notable portions of the sample, while Enugu (9.3%) and Delta (8.2%) had smaller shares. This spread indicates that respondents were drawn from both northern and southern contexts as well as the FCT, supporting the study's claim of a geographically diverse sample. The concentration in Lagos and Abuja is also

consistent with their high population density and stronger newspaper access patterns.

D. Age Distribution of Respondents

This table presents respondents' age categories. Age is relevant because political awareness, exposure to democratic cycles, and media consumption habits often vary across age groups, thereby influencing perceptions of democracy and newspaper reportage.

Table 4: *Age distribution of respondents*

Age group	F	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Below 20 years	104	11.5	11.5	11.5
20–29 years	238	26.4	26.4	37.9
30–39 years	340	37.7	37.7	75.6
40–49 years	47	5.2	5.2	80.8
50–59 years	133	14.7	14.7	95.6

60–69 years	36	4.0	4.0	99.6
70–79 years	4	0.4	0.4	100.0
Total	902	100.0	100.0	

The dominant age group is 30–39 years, constituting 37.7% of respondents, followed by 20–29 years at 26.4%. Respondents aged 50–59 years accounted for 14.7%, while those below 20 years formed 11.5%. The remaining categories collectively constitute a smaller proportion of the sample. This distribution suggests that the survey captured views largely from respondents in the most politically active and economically engaged age brackets, who are more likely to follow governance issues, elections, and media narratives.

E. Source of News

This table identifies respondents' main source of news. Since the study investigates perceptions of newspaper reportage and democratic processes, it is methodologically important to establish whether respondents depend substantially on print media, thereby validating the relevance of their perceptions about newspapers.

Table 5: *Source of news*

Source of news	F	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Electronic media	135	15.0	15.0	15.0
Social media	238	26.4	26.4	41.4
Print media	529	58.6	58.6	100.0
Total	902	100.0	100.0	

The results show that print media is the dominant source of news for respondents, with 58.6% relying primarily on print. Social media accounts for 26.4%, while electronic media accounts for 15.0%. This distribution supports the study's focus on newspaper reportage because a majority of respondents obtain their information from print media, suggesting a direct exposure base upon which perceptions of newspaper objectivity, watchdog role, and democratic narratives can reasonably be formed.

F. Political Representation of Electorate Interests Since 2015

This table assesses citizens' perception of whether political actors have represented and appropriated the interests of the electorate since 2015. The item is positioned as a proxy for responsiveness, representation, and substantive democratic performance.

Table 6: *Political Representation of Electorate Interests Since 2015*

Response	F	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Strongly Disagree	873	96.8	96.8	96.8
Disagree	26	2.9	2.9	99.7
Agree	3	0.3	0.3	100.0
Total	902	100.0	100.0	

The results reveal an overwhelmingly negative perception. A total of 96.8% strongly disagreed, while 2.9% disagreed, indicating that 99.7% rejected the claim that political actors have represented electorate interests since 2015. Only 0.3% agreed. This suggests a profound legitimacy and representation deficit in citizens' evaluation of democratic performance, with strong implications for public trust and democratic satisfaction within the study period.

G. Separation of Powers Across the Arms of Government

This table measures respondents' perception of whether separation of powers exists across the arms of government. Separation of powers is a core indicator of constitutional democracy and institutional checks and balances, and citizens' perception of it reflects their confidence in democratic safeguards.

Table 7: *There has been the separation of powers across the arms of government.*

Response	F	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Neutral	40	4.4	4.4	4.4
Strongly Disagree	391	43.3	43.3	47.8
Disagree	207	22.9	22.9	70.7
Agree	82	9.1	9.1	79.8
Strongly Agree	182	20.2	20.2	100.0
Total	902	100.0	100.0	

The results indicate more variation than in Table 6 but still a generally negative assessment. Respondents who strongly disagreed and disagreed total 66.2%, while those who agreed and strongly agreed constitute 29.3%. Neutral responses constitute 4.4%. The implication is that while a minority perceive separation of powers as functioning, a substantial majority do not, suggesting public concern regarding institutional

autonomy and checks and balances across the arms of government.

H. Perception of Electoral Integrity (Free and Fair Elections)

This table evaluates citizens' perception of whether elections are free and fair. This indicator is foundational to democratic legitimacy, and citizens'

assessments here directly influence the perceived credibility of electoral outcomes and democratic consolidation.

Table 8: *Elections are free and fair.*

Response	F	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Strongly Disagree	618	68.5	68.5	68.5
Disagree	96	10.6	10.6	79.2
Agree	178	19.7	19.7	98.9
Strongly Agree	10	1.1	1.1	100.0
Total	902	100.0	100.0	

The table shows that 68.5% strongly disagreed and 10.6% disagreed, producing a combined 79.1% who rejected the claim that elections are free and fair. Conversely, 19.7% agreed and 1.1% strongly agreed. This result reflects a dominant public perception that elections during the period under review lack integrity. The presence of nearly one-fifth agreement indicates that perceptions are not uniform, yet the overriding position remains that electoral processes are widely viewed as compromised.

I. Perception of Security Agents' Partisanship During Elections

This table presents responses to whether security agents act in a partisan manner during elections. Security agencies are expected to provide neutrality and protection of electoral integrity; perceptions of partisanship signify institutional bias and can undermine election legitimacy and democratic confidence.

Table 9: *Security agents are partisan in conduct during the elections*

Response	F	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Neutral	8	0.9	0.9	0.9
Strongly Agree	305	33.8	33.8	34.7
Agree	165	18.3	18.3	53.0
Disagree	307	34.0	34.0	87.0
Strongly Disagree	117	13.0	13.0	100.0
Total	902	100.0	100.0	

The results show a competitive distribution of opinion. Agreement levels total 52.1% (33.8%

strongly agree and 18.3% agree), while disagreement levels total 47.0% (34.0% disagree

and 13.0% strongly disagree). Neutral response is minimal at 0.9%. The implication is that perceptions are divided but lean towards viewing security agents as partisan. This division may reflect variations in regional experiences and exposure to election-day conduct, but the slight majority agreement indicates that perceived security bias is a salient concern in the democratic process.

J. Descriptive Values for Press Freedom

This table provides descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) for the press freedom indicators operationalised in the study. The items capture perceived victimisation, harassment, threat, legal intimidation, and fear of publishing sensitive stories. The mean values reflect the general direction of respondents' perceptions across the press freedom dimensions measured.

Table 10: *Descriptive values for press freedom*

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Political actors can victimize journalists easily now	902	1.8769	1.19903
Pressmen face harassment for coverage not favourable to government	902	2.0055	1.22993
Journalists are likely to go to jail over trumped-up charges now than before 2015	902	1.6729	1.07979
Legal considerations determine news coverage of offending political actors	902	1.9102	1.11678
Newspaper journalists' rights are easily violated under this dispensation	902	2.4523	1.12555
Newspaper reporters have less freedom now than before 2015	902	2.2051	1.25233
Journalists feel threatened in coverage now than before 2015	902	1.7761	1.14961
Newspaper publishers fear publishing stories that will offend those in power	902	1.7417	1.13114

The descriptive profile indicates that respondents perceive press freedom constraints as substantial. The means cluster in the lower range of the scale reported in the study, indicating that respondents tended towards agreement with negatively framed statements about press conditions. The highest mean is recorded for the item concerning violation of journalists' rights (mean = 2.4523), suggesting that this dimension was most strongly expressed among

respondents. The standard deviation values indicate variability in perceptions across respondents, but the overall pattern remains consistent with a constrained press environment, shaped by fear of victimisation, harassment, and legal intimidation.

5. DISCUSSION

The results indicate generally low confidence in Nigeria's democratic process. Respondents

overwhelmingly rejected the view that political actors have represented electorate interests since 2015, and most also disagreed that elections are free and fair, signalling weak perceived legitimacy of electoral outcomes. Perceptions of separation of powers were mixed but leaned negative, suggesting limited confidence in checks and balances. Views on security agents' partisanship during elections were divided, with a slight majority agreeing, implying concerns about neutrality in election-day administration. Press freedom indicators further suggest a constrained media environment. Respondents tended to agree with negative statements on harassment, intimidation, legal pressure, and fear of publishing politically sensitive stories, implying that the informational environment needed for accountability and citizen participation remains weak.

6. CONCLUSION

Overall, the findings show that citizens perceive Nigeria's democracy between 2015 and the study period as procedurally present but substantively weak, especially regarding representation and electoral credibility. The evidence also suggests that limitations on press freedom remain significant, which can undermine the press' watchdog role and weaken citizens' capacity to evaluate governance effectively. Strengthening electoral integrity, institutional independence, and press freedom is therefore essential to improving democratic quality and citizen impact.

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