Introduction

In each of these dispensations, the state invariably pledged in tandem with the constitution to promote good government, and welfare of all persons in the country on the principles of freedom, equality, justice, and for the purposes of consolidating the unity of the people. After seventeen years of active democratic experimentation occasionally interrupted by several military coup d’etats, empirical evidence indicates that the health of our nascent democracies by and large remain traumatic. This shows that the Nigerian State is largely in effective towards meeting the needs of an estimated one hundred and forty million citizens.

The scenario above has engendered a critical question: Is traumatized democratisation responsible for the ineffectiveness of Nigerian State to fulfill its statutory obligation to the teeming citizenry? Or is the observe the case? Given the above poser, this paper in the main agues that state effectiveness is a pre-requisite for robust democratization in Nigeria, and by implication state ineffectiveness is largely responsible for traumatized democratic experience witnessed in Nigeria over the years. However, it is important to note that in part, democratic institutions have to some extent contributed to the ineffectiveness of the Nigeria State.

For the purposes of this study, the paper is organized under six sections. Section one is focused on introduction while section two presents on overview of Nigeria’s democratic experience, from 1960–2003. In section three, some theoretical framework is discussed. Section four presents the argument that state effectiveness is a pre-requisite for a viable democracy. Section five dweller
Overview of Nigeria’s Democratic Experience: First Republic 1960-1966

The attainment of independence by Nigeria on the 1st of October, 1960, marked a turning point in her struggle for self-determination and Africa’s emancipation. Prior to 1st October, 1960, there was a general election into the Federal Parliament in 1959. Nigeria then had three regions, the Eastern Region, the Western Region and the Northern Region. Each of these regions was dominated by a major political party and a major ethnic group. Okwudiba Nnoli in his treatise "Ethnic Politics in Nigeria," reports that the Eastern Region principally made up of the Igbo was controlled by the National Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC). The Western Region which was the Yoruba enclave was controlled by the Action Group (AG). The Northern Region which was predominated by the Hausa-Fulani was controlled by the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC).

In the election in 1959, of single party had a clear majority to enable it form the government. This development precipitated a coalition between N.C.N.C. and NPC in which NPC was the senior partner. Expectedly, the Action Group formed the opposition in the Federal Houses of Senate and House of Representatives inclusive. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe of the NCNC was made the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, while Sir Abubakar Tafawa Belewa of the NPC was made the Prime Minister. Chief Obafemi Awolowo became the leader of Action Group. It is important to note that the system of government adopted then was the parliamentary system. Each region had its Regional House of Assembly, a Judiciary, a Premier and a Governor. The above scenario sketched represented the political structure of Nigeria at independence in 1960.

Critical questions to be addressed at this juncture are what does democracy imply to post independent Nigeria? What was the character of our democratic institutions then and to what extent did the politicians fulfill their statutory obligations to the Nigerian citizenry?

The first question invariably suggests that sustainable and viable democratic practices should be characterized by key universally acceptable credentials. These credentials constitute what Okanya (1997)\(^2\) calls the essential strands of the concept of democracy. Two elements he exposes in his discourse include popular participation and accountability. Stressing the relevance of accountability in the process of democratization, Phillipe C. Smier, and Terry L. Karl (1988), aver that democracy is a system of governance in which “rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives”\(^3\).