

**AN EVALUATION OF J. J. ROUSSEAU SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY: ANY
RELEVANCE TO NIGERIAN SOCIO-POLITICAL CULTURE**

BY

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FACULTY OF ARTS
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BENIN CITY**

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**AN ORIGINAL ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project work titled; was carried out by **AN EVALUATION OF J. J. ROUSSEAU SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY: ANY RELEVANCE TO NIGERIAN SOCIO-POLITICAL CULTURE** with matriculation number **ART2101058** of the Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin- City.

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(Supervisor)

DATE

DR. W. T. OSEMWEGIE

(Head of Department)

DATE

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to God Almighty for his infinite mercies and grace.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

That I have successfully completed this project work is worthy of note, but more worthy of note is the fact that I could not have achieved this feat without the mercies of God.

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ABSTRACT

This study presents an evaluation of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Social Contract Theory and explores its relevance to the Nigerian socio-political culture. Rousseau's theory, expressed in his classical work, emphasizes that individuals give up certain freedoms in exchange for protection and civil order under a collective agreement. This contract creates a society governed by the general will, which represents the interest of all, thereby ensuring justice, equality, and the preservation of liberty. His ideas on sovereignty, popular participation, and the primacy of the common good remain central

to political philosophy and provide a framework for understanding modern democratic governance. In the Nigerian context, the application of Rousseau's Social Contract Theory reveals both its significance and its challenges. Nigeria, as a multi-ethnic and diverse nation, aspires to uphold democratic ideals, yet often faces political instability, corruption, and weak institutions that undermine the social contract between government and citizens. Rather than reflecting the general will, political power frequently serves personal or sectional interests, creating a disconnect between leadership and the governed. By drawing upon Rousseau's vision of collective responsibility and accountability, Nigeria's political culture can be critically examined with a view to reinforcing participatory governance, social justice, and inclusivity. However, the study also highlights limitations in directly applying Rousseau's theory to Nigeria's pluralistic society. The assumption of a unified will among citizens contrasts with Nigeria's reality, where ethnic and religious divisions complicate the pursuit of a common purpose. The challenge, therefore, lies in adapting Rousseau's principles to a diverse environment while ensuring respect for pluralism. The study concludes that Rousseau's Social Contract Theory provides a useful philosophical framework for critiquing governance in Nigeria. While not a perfect fit, its ideals of equality, justice, and accountability offer a valuable lens for strengthening Nigeria's democratic culture and addressing its socio-political challenges.

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The concept of the social contract has played a pivotal role in the development of political philosophy and modern governance. Among the most influential theorists of the social contract is Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose 18th-century work *The Social Contract* laid the groundwork for the idea that legitimate political authority arises not from divine right or force, but from the general will of the people.¹ Rousseau argued that individuals come together to form a collective body politic, agreeing to be governed by laws that reflect the common interest. This contract is seen as a foundation for liberty, equality, and civic responsibility. In the context of modern-day Nigeria, a country with a complex colonial history, multi-ethnic composition, and fluctuating democratic experiences, the relevance of Rousseau's ideas has become a subject of intellectual interest.² Nigeria's socio-political culture is characterized by deep-rooted challenges, including corruption, political instability, ethnic divisions, lack of transparency, and a fragile sense of national unity.³ These issues raise fundamental questions about the legitimacy of authority, the

¹ Rousseau, J.J. (2004), *The Social Contract*, (London: Penguin Books) p. 50–75

² Appadorai, A. (2004), *The Substance of Politics*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press) p. 120–145

³ Ake. C. (1996) *Democracy and Development in Africa* (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press) p. 1–25

participation of citizens in governance, and the role of the state in ensuring social justice and equality.

Given these challenges, Rousseau's theory offers a philosophical lens through which to evaluate the current state of governance and citizenship in Nigeria. His emphasis on the general will, civic participation, and the moral basis of political authority presents a potentially valuable framework for assessing and improving Nigeria's socio-political institutions. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the relevance and applicability of Rousseau's social contract theory to Nigeria's contemporary political and social realities. It aims to critically evaluate whether Rousseau's ideas can inspire a more just, participatory, and accountable political culture in Nigeria.

Ultimately, by drawing parallels between Rousseau's theoretical propositions and the practical challenges facing Nigeria, this study intends to highlight how philosophical insights can inform the restructuring of national values, promote responsible leadership, and encourage active citizenship. It also seeks to provoke a rethinking of the relationship between the Nigerian state and its people, questioning whether a true social contract exists or needs to be rebuilt. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing discussions about democratic consolidation, national identity, and sustainable governance in Nigeria.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite Nigeria's adoption of democratic governance and constitutional rule since independence, the country continues to grapple with fundamental issues that call into question the legitimacy, functionality, and responsiveness of its political system. Widespread corruption, electoral malpractice, insecurity, ethno-religious conflict, marginalization, and poor service delivery are persistent challenges that have weakened the social fabric and undermined citizens' trust in the state. This growing disillusionment raises important philosophical and political questions about the nature of the relationship between the Nigerian state and its citizens. The social contract, as articulated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, presupposes that the authority of the state is based on a mutual agreement between the governed and those in power, guided by the "general will" and a commitment to the common good. However, in Nigeria's socio-political context, there appears to be a significant disconnect between the rulers and the ruled. Political elites often pursue personal and sectional interests at the expense of national development, while the masses are largely excluded from meaningful political participation. This situation suggests that the foundational elements of a genuine social contract—consent, representation, accountability, and collective well-being—are either absent or severely compromised.

Furthermore, there is little evidence that governance in Nigeria is rooted in any broadly shared conception of the "general will" as Rousseau envisioned. Instead,

decisions are frequently driven by ethnic loyalties, patronage systems, and elite bargaining, rather than by democratic deliberation and the pursuit of justice for all. The legitimacy of political authority is thus questioned, and the obedience of citizens is often secured through coercion, fear, or necessity rather than through moral or civic duty. This study is therefore driven by the need to interrogate whether Rousseau's social contract theory has any relevance or applicability to the Nigerian socio-political environment. If the social contract is meant to guarantee liberty, equality, and mutual responsibility, to what extent can these ideals be seen in Nigeria's political culture? Does the Nigerian state reflect the general will of its people, or has it become an instrument of domination and exploitation? And more importantly, can Rousseau's theory offer a pathway for rethinking political obligation, citizenship, and governance in Nigeria? By addressing these questions, this project seeks to identify the gap between political theory and practical governance in Nigeria and to evaluate whether Rousseau's philosophical model can serve as a normative guide for building a more inclusive, just, and accountable society.

This problem is especially urgent in a context like Nigeria, where the state's moral authority is frequently challenged, and where the people's loyalty to the state is often overshadowed by ethnic, religious, and regional affiliations. The absence of a clearly defined social contract undermines national unity and creates a vacuum in civic responsibility, allowing impunity and lawlessness to thrive. Citizens are frequently

alienated from the political process, and leadership is often reduced to a struggle for control of state resources rather than a duty to serve the public good.

Consequently, this study does not only highlight the relevance of Rousseau's theory in understanding Nigeria's governance crisis, but also raises the need for a reimagined social contract — one that reflects the collective aspirations, values, and realities of the Nigerian people. By evaluating the current political culture against Rousseau's ideals, this research aims to provoke critical reflection on how to reconstruct the foundations of political legitimacy, public trust, and social cooperation in Nigeria.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The primary purpose of this study is to critically evaluate Jean-Jacques Rousseau's theory of the Social Contract and examine its relevance to Nigeria's socio-political culture. Rousseau's central idea—that legitimate political authority rests not in monarchs or elites but in the collective will of the people (*volonté générale*)—provides a powerful foundation for discussing contemporary issues of governance, democracy, and civil responsibility in modern Nigeria.

This study aims to :

1. Analyze the core principles of Rousseau's Social Contract theory, especially as articulated in his seminal work, *The Social Contract* (1762)⁴. The theory promotes the ideals of freedom, equality, and popular sovereignty, suggesting that legitimate government must be founded on the consent of the governed.
2. Examine the relevance of these principles to Nigeria's political system, especially in light of ongoing challenges such as corruption, weak institutions, electoral malpractice, political elitism, ethnic tensions, and the marginalization of the masses. By doing so, the study hopes to show how Rousseau's ideas can serve as a philosophical tool for understanding Nigeria's struggles with democratic governance.
3. Evaluate whether Rousseau's vision of a people-driven state can be adapted to a diverse, pluralistic society like Nigeria, which is characterized by multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-lingual communities.⁵ The study will draw insights from political commentaries and African political thought, such as Claude Ake's *Democracy and Development in Africa* and Ali Mazrui's *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*, to compare Western political ideas with the African context.

⁴ Rousseau J. J. *Op. cit.*, pp. 49–101.

⁵ Ake C. (1996), *Democracy and Development in Africa*. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1996.), pp. 1–35.

4. Investigate the implications of Rousseau's theory for nation-building, civic education, and constitutional reform in Nigeria. In this regard,⁶ the study will also consult contemporary African political philosophy texts such as Kwasi Wiredu's *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*⁷ and Innocent Asouzu's *Ibuanyidanda: New Complementary Ontology* to integrate indigenous philosophical perspectives into the analysis.
5. Contribute to academic and policy discussions on democratic renewal in Nigeria by using Rousseau's work as a springboard for rethinking the social contract between Nigerian citizens and their government. The study ultimately seeks to offer practical suggestions for promoting active citizenship, justice, accountability, and political legitimacy in Nigeria.

Through this multi-dimensional approach, the study will not only evaluate the philosophical merits of Rousseau's theory but also test its practical relevance to the Nigerian political environment—highlighting its potential to inspire reforms and encourage civic-minded leadership.

⁶ Wiredu, K. (1996), *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press) pp. 22–70

⁷ Asouzu, I. (2007), *Ibuanyidanda: New Complementary Ontology Beyond World Immanence*. (Zürich: LIT Verlag GmbH & Co. KG), pp. 17–66.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant for several academic, philosophical, and practical reasons. It offers a bridge between classical political philosophy and contemporary African political challenges, especially those facing Nigeria—a country marked by its pluralism, history of colonialism, and ongoing struggles with governance, justice, and democratic accountability. The significance of the study can be outlined as follows:

1. Philosophical Contribution to Political Theory

The study contributes to the growing discourse on the relevance of classical Western political thought to African realities. By revisiting Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Social Contract theory,⁸ the research encourages philosophical reflection on the nature of political legitimacy, authority, and social justice. It sheds light on how the general will and popular sovereignty, as discussed by Rousseau, can inform African political systems and democratic aspirations.

2. Contextual Relevance to Nigeria's Political Challenges

Nigeria is often confronted with issues of weak democratic institutions, electoral malpractice, ethnic and religious divisions, corruption, and a widening gap between government and citizens.⁹ This study offers a philosophical lens through which these

⁸ Rousseau, J.J. (1968), *The Social Contract*. (London: Penguin Books), pp. 49–55.

⁹ Ake, C. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 21–38.

challenges can be understood and addressed. It explores whether Rousseau's principles—like collective will, social equality, and participatory governance—can help guide Nigeria toward more effective, inclusive, and accountable political systems.

3. Educational and Intellectual Value

For students, educators, and scholars in the fields of philosophy, political science, African studies, and public administration, this study provides a valuable intellectual resource. It stimulates critical thinking about how imported political theories can be adapted, critiqued, or redefined to suit local contexts. It also encourages the integration of philosophical knowledge with real-world political analysis.

4. Guidance for Policy and Civic Reform

By emphasizing concepts such as civic responsibility, public accountability, and participatory governance, the study provides insights that may influence policy formation and civic reform. It could inform the development of programs aimed at civic education, constitutional review, and nation-building in Nigeria. Rousseau's ideas could help reframe the citizen-government relationship in ways that promote unity, justice, and the common good.

5. Encouragement of Active Citizenship

Rousseau's idea of the social contract places responsibility not only on leaders but also on citizens. This study underlines the role of Nigerian citizens in shaping their own political destiny through participation, vigilance, and civic engagement. It advocates for a political culture in which citizens are not passive subjects but active agents of change.

In sum, the significance of this study lies in its timely and profound engagement with both classical and contemporary political thought. By critically examining Rousseau's Social Contract theory within the context of Nigeria's socio-political realities, this research contributes to bridging the intellectual gap between European political philosophy and African governance challenges. It underscores the enduring relevance of ideas such as the general will, popular sovereignty, and civic responsibility in addressing systemic issues of corruption, political exclusion, and democratic fragility in Nigeria.

Furthermore, this study provides a platform for deeper philosophical discourse that goes beyond theory, offering practical implications for civic education, policy reform, and active citizenship. It invites policymakers, scholars, and citizens alike to reimagine Nigeria's political future through a lens that values participation, justice, and mutual accountability. By incorporating both Western and African political thought, the study promotes a culturally sensitive, dialogical approach to governance that can strengthen national cohesion and democratic resilience.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study focuses on evaluating the central tenets of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Social Contract Theory and analyzing its relevance to the socio-political culture of Nigeria. The research draws from both classical Western political philosophy and contemporary African political experiences to assess the applicability, limitations, and insights Rousseau's ideas may offer to Nigeria's evolving democratic and institutional framework.

1. Philosophical Scope

The study primarily examines the philosophical foundations of Rousseau's Social Contract, particularly his notions of:

1. The General Will
2. Popular Sovereignty
3. Civic Freedom and Moral Obligation
4. The idea that legitimate political authority is derived from the consent of the governed.

In "Rousseau and the General will", David Lay Williams opines that Rousseau's principles of political right can be best described as a reformulation of Hobbes' conception of the

social contract.¹⁰ David argues that the General will as formulated by Rousseau has a good intention, hence it is "grounded on nothing more than the consent and functions as the first principle of all legitimate political societies"¹¹.

These concepts are critically analyzed and interpreted in relation to Nigerian realities such as centralized governance, constitutional crises, civic disengagement, and the manipulation of public will by political elites.

2. Geographical Scope

The geographical focus is on Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, with a diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious landscape. Nigeria's complex federal structure, history of colonialism, and persistent issues like corruption, electoral malpractice, and weak democratic institutions provide a rich context for testing the relevance of Rousseau's ideas. Rousseau's insistence is that for a state to achieve its purpose, essence and aspirations of her people, individuals are bound by its very nature (contract) to submit self interest, ethnic and regional interests and focus on things that will promote the common good¹²

3. Thematic Scope

¹⁰ Williams. D. L. (2000), "*Rousseau and the General will*" in *Journal of History of Ideas* Vol. 66, No.3, ed. Donald R Kelly, (Baltimore: Hopkins University Press), 384

¹¹ Williams. D. L. ' *Rousseau and the General will*', pp 384

¹² Rousseau, J. J. *The Social Contract*, pp 29

The study covers a variety of themes, including:

- i. The relationship between citizens and the state.
- ii. Legitimacy of authority in a pluralistic society.
- iii. Public accountability and participation.
- iv. The role of civic education in shaping democratic values.
- v. Moral and ethical implications of leadership and governance in Nigeria

These themes are explored to assess how Rousseau's philosophy can be critically adapted—not transplanted—into Nigeria's political discourse.

In essence, this study operates at the intersection of Western political philosophy and African political realities. It focuses on evaluating the relevance and limitations of Rousseau's Social Contract theory in contributing to Nigeria's quest for stable, just, and participatory governance. It is both philosophical and practical, aimed at deepening our understanding of political authority, civic responsibility, and nation-building in an African context.

1.6 METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative and philosophical research methodology. The nature of the research is conceptual, analytical, and interpretative. It seeks not to generate statistical data, but to examine, critique, and reflect on theoretical and normative ideas

relevant to Nigeria's socio-political reality through the lens of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Social Contract Theory.

It begins with a systematic exposition of Rousseau's Social Contract theory—its background, key principles, and philosophical implications—followed by a critical evaluation of how these ideas relate to Nigeria's political and cultural environment. The study does not test hypotheses in the scientific sense but instead develops a philosophical argument grounded in textual analysis and contextual application.

In summary, this study adopts a qualitative, philosophical, and comparative methodology. It is grounded in textual interpretation, critical reasoning, and socio-political contextualization. It contributes to a deeper understanding of how Western political theory can interact with African political experiences to produce new insights into governance, legitimacy, and the citizen-state relationship in Nigeria.

1.7 CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

This defines and clarifies key concepts and terms used in this study to ensure clarity, consistency, and a proper understanding of their contextual meaning.

1. Social Contract Theory

The Social Contract Theory is a philosophical idea that political authority and legitimacy arise from an implicit agreement between individuals and the state. John

Rawls also gave his views on the social contract Theory. For him, the social contract Theory, projects a society consisting of free citizens who holds equal basic right and cooperate within the framework of an egalitarian economic system.¹³

2. General Will

This term, central to Rousseau's philosophy, refers to the collective will of the people aimed at the common good. Unlike the individual will or the will of a group, the general will represents what is best for the whole society, even if individuals may not personally agree. It is the moral and political compass for just governance.

3. Sovereignty

Sovereignty in Rousseau's context means the absolute and collective authority of the people. It is inalienable and indivisible, meaning that no ruler or institution can claim power outside the will of the people. In modern political thought, sovereignty also refers to a state's full right and power to govern itself without outside interference.

4. Legitimacy

Legitimacy refers to the rightfulness of a government or political system, as accepted by the people it governs. In Rousseau's theory, legitimacy stems not from force or tradition, but from the consent of the governed and alignment with the general will. In

¹³ Rawls J. (1971). *A Theory of Justice*, (London: Oxford University Press), p. 17.

Nigeria's context, legitimacy is often questioned due to electoral malpractice, corruption, and public distrust in institutions.

5. Political Culture

Political culture refers to the set of attitudes, beliefs, values, and practices that shape the political behavior of a people or society. It includes how citizens view authority, participate in politics, and engage with governance. In Nigeria, political culture is influenced by colonial legacies, ethnic diversity, clientelism, and growing demands for accountability.

6. Democracy

Democracy is a system of governance where power ultimately resides with the people, often through elected representatives. It emphasizes participation, freedom, rule of law, and accountability. While Nigeria practices a form of representative democracy, the study evaluates how Rousseau's more participatory vision of democracy might inform or improve Nigeria's democratic development. Godfrey onah, wrote that the Nigeria democracy, is at best pluralistic dictatorships in which unscrupulous tyrants ride on the shoulders of the people in order to defend only their personal interests ¹⁴

7. Authoritarianism

¹⁴ Onah. G.I. (2004) *Africa and the illusion of Democracy" in Democracy and Responsible Governance in Africa*, ed. J.O. Oguejiofor (Enugu: Delta Publishers),p. 283.

Authoritarianism refers to a form of government characterized by strong central power and limited political freedoms. In many African states, including Nigeria at times, authoritarian tendencies appear through suppression of dissent, rigged elections, or lack of accountability. The social contract theory is fundamentally opposed to authoritarianism, as it demands power be rooted in the people's will.

1.8 LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of the social contract has long been central to political theory and philosophy. Thinkers like Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau laid foundational ideas that continue to shape modern understandings of state authority, legitimacy, and the relationship between the individual and the state. Among these, Rousseau's interpretation stands out for its emphasis on the general will, popular sovereignty, and participatory governance. This literature review examines relevant scholarship around Rousseau's theory and critically engages with literature that explores its applicability within the Nigerian socio-political context.

1. Rousseau's Social Contract Theory

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Social Contract* (1762) remains a fundamental text in Western political philosophy. Rousseau posits that human beings, though born free, are bound by societal chains. To overcome inequality and authoritarianism, individuals must enter into a collective agreement—the social contract—where they submit their

individual wills to the general will for the common good.¹⁵ Rousseau's emphasis on direct democracy, popular sovereignty, and moral freedom distinguishes his theory from that of Locke or Hobbes.

According to Cress in *Introduction to Rousseau's The social contract*,¹⁶ Rousseau envisions a political society where laws are legitimate only when made by the people themselves. This democratic ideal, though noble, faces challenges in large, pluralistic societies. However, thinkers like Macpherson argue that Rousseau's ideas provide the normative foundation for egalitarian democratic theory.

2. The Social Contract in African Political Thought

African political philosophy has long debated the relevance of Western political concepts in post-colonial contexts. Scholars like Kwasi Wiredu and Claude Ake argue that while the social contract can serve as a useful model for democratic development in Africa, it must be reinterpreted through African communal and participatory traditions.

Claude Ake in *Democracy and Development in Africa*¹⁷ maintains that traditional African political systems were often inclusive and consensus-driven, qualities echoed in Rousseau's emphasis on participation. However, Ake criticizes post-colonial African

¹⁵ Rousseau, J.J (1968) *The Social Contract*, (London: Penguin Books) pp. 49-86.

¹⁶ Cress, D.A (1987), *Introduction to Rousseau's The Social Contract*.(Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing). p. 10

¹⁷ Ake C. (1996), *Democracy and Development in Africa*. (Washington D.C. Brookings Institution Press,). pp. 24- 35

states—including Nigeria—for mimicking Western political forms without integrating indigenous values. Wiredu in *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*¹⁸ similarly, promotes a consensual form of democracy that resonates with Rousseau's general will, while rejecting adversarial politics.

3. Nigeria's Socio-Political Structure and Contractual Legitimacy

In Nigeria, issues of governance, legitimacy, and public participation remain deeply contested. Scholars have questioned whether a true “social contract” exists between Nigerian citizens and their government. Ojo in his article *Nigeria's Democracy and the Crisis of Political Instability: The Way Forward*.¹⁹ notes that political power in Nigeria is often secured through clientelism, ethnic politics, and election rigging, rather than genuine public consent. This raises serious concerns about the legitimacy of state authority.

Ikelegbe critiques Nigeria's political culture as authoritarian and elite-driven. He argues that civic apathy, corruption, and weak institutions hinder the development of a meaningful social contract. However, scholars like Elaigwu contend that democratic

¹⁸ Wiredu, K. (1996), *Cultural Universal's and Particarss: An African Perspective*. (Bloomington Indiana University Press). pp 90-100.

¹⁹ Ojo. E. O. (2008), "Nigeria's Democracy and the crisis of political instability: The way Forward". *African Journal of political science and international Relations*, Vol 2, No. 1, pp. 1-9.

consolidation is possible if the state returns to the people's will—a point reminiscent of Rousseau's doctrine of popular sovereignty.

4. Contemporary Applications of the Social Contract in Nigeria

Recent scholarship has explored the possibility of reviving Rousseau's principles in Africa's governance systems. Adejumo argues that good governance in Nigeria demands a renewed social contract based on accountability, transparency, and citizen engagement. Similarly, Ezeani sees civic education and political awareness as critical to empowering citizens to uphold the general will.

Yet, critics caution against a literal application of Rousseau's ideas in a post-colonial context. Nnoli emphasizes the need to reconstruct the social contract to reflect Nigeria's ethnic diversity, colonial history, and contemporary challenges.

From the foregoing review, it is evident that Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Social Contract Theory continues to provide a rich philosophical framework for understanding political authority, legitimacy, and citizen engagement. His emphasis on the general will and participatory governance resonates deeply with the democratic aspirations of many modern states. In the context of Nigeria, however, these ideals confront a range of challenges, including authoritarian political culture, weak civic institutions, and widespread disillusionment with the political class. While scholars such as Ake and Wiredu advocate for the blending of indigenous African political values with democratic

principles, others like Ojo and Ikelegbe highlight the persistent gap between the governed and those who govern in Nigeria. Despite this, recent academic discourse shows a growing interest in reconstructing Nigeria's political order in ways that reflect genuine public will and civic accountability—an endeavor that closely mirrors Rousseau's vision.

5 Interrogating structural conflicts and constitutionalism in Nigeria

This work focuses on structural conflicts and constitutionalism in Nigeria. The research shows that structural conflict is endemic in Nigeria. The work gives many examples of this action as they occur. Constitutionalism for Aborisade Olasunkanmu is a commitment to the laid down rules. Constitutionalism seeks to provide for a politico-economic order that is inclusive, equitable and responsive to the divergent interests in the society through the instrumentation and institution of limited government.²⁰ With this, the paper identifies structural conflicts as a major peace and security challenges confronting Nigeria and identifies the potentialities of constitutionalism as a Preventive, ameliorative, and curative mechanism for new and emerging threats to peace and security in Nigeria. The paper concludes that to achieve a compliance with the dictate of constitutionalism that can put an end to structural conflicts in Nigeria, the government will have to make it a deliberate action, such as evolving a mechanism where technocrats would be empowered to ensure compliance with ethos of constitutionalism that will guarantee a country free of structural conflicts.

²⁰ Aborisade O.. *Access library Journal*, vol 6, pp 6

6 The Substance of Politics"

It is a classic political science textbook that explores fundamental concepts of politics, using Nigeria as a case study to illustrate these principles. The book emphasizes that the state exists to serve the individual, not the other way around. It covers topics like the nature of the state, forms of government, political theory, and the relationship between the state and its citizens. Core Concepts:

Appadorai's work delves into the core concepts of political science, such as the nature of the state, its functions, and the different forms of government.

Nigeria as a Case Study:

The book uses Nigeria as a practical example to illustrate the application of these concepts within a specific national context. It examines various political theories, providing a framework for understanding different perspectives on power, governance, and the role of the state. State and Individual: A central theme is the relationship between the state and the individual, with Appadorai arguing that the state's primary purpose is to serve the needs and well-being of its citizens.²¹ Practical Application: By examining Nigeria, the book aims to make political theory more accessible and relevant to students and readers interested in understanding the practical aspects of politics.

²¹ Appadorai. A. (1975), *The Substance of Politics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 247

In essence, "The Substance of Politics" provides a comprehensive introduction to the field of political science, utilizing Nigeria's political landscape to demonstrate key concepts and theories.

7 Justice as Fairness

Rawls's theory centers on the idea that a just society is one where principles of justice are chosen under conditions of fairness and equality. This hypothetical situation places individuals behind a "veil of ignorance," where they are unaware of their own characteristics and social standing. In essence, Rawls's theory argues that a just society is one where:

Basic liberties are equally distributed and protected for all citizens. Socioeconomic inequalities are structured to benefit the least advantaged members of society. Equal opportunities are available to all, regardless of background.

What Is the Social Contract?

Conceptual Clarification, a form of hypothetical or real agreement between society and its state is what the social contract theory is all about.²² The foundation of our moral judgments and positions has allegedly been traced back to this agreement. To put it

²² Rawls, J. (1971) *A Theory of Justice*, (London: Oxford University Press), p. 45.

another way, we just follow the laws and rules of the government in the hopes that others will do the same, which will ultimately lead to a safer and more comfortable living. To investigate whether it is accurate that our moral obligations may be described by a social contract, this theory draws on a number of philosophers, including Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Rousseau, Kant, and Rawls.

Paz-Fuchs states that:

early conceptions of the social contract, such those put out by Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, place a strong emphasis on examining concepts of social cooperation and, to a greater extent, political obligation. Arguments from the social compact were initially employed to support the requirement to follow the law or, more broadly, the acceptance of government decisions as final. On the other hand, contemporary models of the social compact assume that the modern state already exists.²³

²³ Paz-Fuchs, A. (2007), *Welfare to Work: Conditional Rights in Social Policy*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press) p, 3

CHAPTER TWO

J.J ROUSSEAU'S SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY

2.1. OVERVIEW OF THE SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY

Social contract theory, nearly as old as philosophy itself, is the view that persons' moral and/or political obligations are dependent upon a contract or agreement among them to form the society in which they live. However, social contract theory is rightly associated with modern moral and political theory and is given its first full exposition and defense by Thomas Hobbes. After Hobbes, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau are the best known proponents of this enormously influential theory, which has been one of the most dominant theories within moral and political theory throughout the history of the modern West. In the twentieth century, moral and political theory regained philosophical momentum as a result of John Rawls' Kantian version of social contract theory, and was followed by new analyses of the subject by David Gauthier and others. More recently, philosophers from different perspectives have offered new criticisms of social contract theory. In particular, feminists and race-conscious philosophers have argued that social contract theory is at least an incomplete picture of our moral and political lives, and may

in fact camouflage some of the ways in which the contract is itself parasitical upon the subjugations of classes of persons.²⁴

Furthermore, Social contract theory is a philosophical concept that explores the idea that individuals implicitly agree to give up certain freedoms in exchange for the benefits of living in an organized society, under the rule of law.²⁵ This agreement, whether explicit or implicit, outlines the moral and political obligations of both the citizens and the government. It's a way to understand the foundation of political authority and the justification for government, often contrasting the advantages of society with the potential disadvantages of a "state of nature".

Core Idea: Individuals willingly give up some freedom and autonomy to the state (or governing body) in exchange for protection, order, and the benefits of social cooperation.

Key Concepts:

State of Nature: A hypothetical pre-social and pre-political condition where individuals exist without any governing authority. Philosophers like Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau had different views on what this state was like, ranging from brutal and chaotic to relatively peaceful.

²⁴ Distefano, C. (1991) *Configurations of Masculinity: A Feminist Perspective on Modern Political Theory*. (New York: Cornell University Press),p, 45.

²⁵ Rousseau. J.J. (1998) *The Social Contract Theory*. H.J Tozer, (N.P. Words worth Editions) p. 14.

Social Contract: The implicit or explicit agreement by which individuals consent to be governed. This contract defines the rights, duties, and limitations of both the rulers and the ruled.

Political Obligation: The moral duty of citizens to obey the laws and the authority of the government, based on their consent to the social contract.

The social contract has various importance. They includes,

1. Foundation for Government:
2. Provides a philosophical basis for the legitimacy and authority of government.
3. Justification for Political Obligation:
4. Explains why citizens should obey the law and support their government.
5. Framework for Analyzing Political Systems:
6. Helps in understanding the relationship between citizens and the state, and evaluating the fairness and effectiveness of different political structures.

We could therefore say Social contract theory has been a major influence on the development of modern political thought, including ideas about individual rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

2.2. J.J ROUSSEAU'S VERSION OF THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was a philosopher and writer who was born in Geneva, Switzerland. He lived from 1712 until 1778. He was a radical thinker whose ideas about liberation and the negative effects of civilization made him a controversial figure. He was even banned from Paris, in part due to his criticisms of government and also feuds with other intellectuals. Many of his writings were only published in France after his death.

In many ways, Rousseau was a critic of the Enlightenment's faith in reason. The Enlightenment was an intellectual movement centered in Europe that advanced the view that individuals should use their own reason and criticized superstition and faith. For Rousseau, much of what the Enlightenment offered was a kind of servitude devoid of feeling and sentiment. Nevertheless, he could be viewed as a part of the Enlightenment insofar as he advanced detailed criticisms of the governments and society of his time that remain relevant today.

Rousseau's version of the social contract, also known as contractual theory of society, as detailed in his work "The Social Contract," posits that legitimate political authority comes from the collective will of the people, known as the "general will".²⁶ This general will represents the common good and is distinct from the sum of individual desires. Screenivasan have an articulated philosophical review of Rousseau's contract

²⁶ Rousseau, *Op. Cit.*, p. 68.

theory that entering into a social contract is not about surrendering individual freedom to a sovereign, but rather about creating a society where individuals can exercise their freedom under laws that reflect their collective interests.²⁷

Rousseau's conception of citizenship was much more organic and much less individualistic than Locke's. The surrender of independence, or natural liberty, for political liberty meant that all individual rights, including property rights, are subordinate to the general will.²⁸ For Rousseau the state is a moral person whose life is the union of its members, whose laws are acts of the general will, and whose end is the liberty and equality of its citizens. It follows that when any government usurps the power of the people, the social contract is broken; and not only are the citizens no longer compelled to obey, but they also have an obligation to rebel.

In *The Social Contract*, Rousseau sets out to answer what he takes to be the fundamental question of politics, the reconciliation of the freedom of the individual with the authority of the state. This reconciliation is necessary because human society has evolved to a point where individuals can no longer supply their needs through their own unaided efforts, but rather must depend on the co-operation of others. The process whereby human needs expand and interdependence deepens is set out in the *Discourse on Inequality*. In that work, a decisive moment of Rousseau's conjectural history involves

²⁷ Screenivasan. (2000), "what is the General will?" *Philosophical Review* 109:545-81

²⁸ Rousseau J.J (1978), " Legacy in Two conceptions of the General will: Democratic and Transcendent". *Review of politics*, 74:403-419

the emergence of endemic conflict among the now-interdependent individuals and the argument that the Hobbesian insecurity of this condition would lead all to consent to the establishment of state authority and law. The Social Contract aims to set out an alternative to this dystopia, one in which, claims Rousseau, each person will enjoy the protection of the common force whilst remaining as free as they were in the state of nature. The key to this reconciliation is the idea of the general will: that is, the collective will of the citizen body taken as a whole. The general will is the source of law and is willed by each and every citizen. In obeying the law each citizen is thus subject to his or her own will, and consequently, according to Rousseau, remains free.

2.3 THE GENERAL WILL, FREEDOM AND EQUALITY, SOVEREIGNTY AND LEGITIMACY

General Will

The General Will is central to Rousseau's program of political construction. As Judith Shklar famously remarked, "it conveys everything he most wanted to say."²⁹ The most famous definition of General Will comes in the social contract: "from these same particular wills, one takes away the pluses and minuses which cancel each other out, what is left as the sum of the differences is the General will."³⁰ The General Will secures the goals of the state, the common good, and the lack of dangerous extreme individualism.

²⁹ Rousseau, J.J *The Social Contract Theory 10*

³⁰ Rousseau, J.J *The Social Contract Theory 10*

Rousseau grounded legitimate society in the General will such that both are founded upon a strict principle of egalitarianism. Rousseau's aim in placing the people under the authority of the General Will is not to defeat or replace justice, but to make justice to be binding on persons so that no one may violate its principles with immunity or economic power.

In his masterpiece, *The Social Contract*, Rousseau laid the foundations for the emergence of civil society and the basis for popular sovereignty in government. He affirms that democracy is the form of government by which the sovereign power resides in the people as a whole. It is the conviction of Rousseau then that men should participate actively in their government. He stressed that participatory democracy is essential for the realization of the common good for which the state was originally formed. This common good is ensured in the liberty and equality of the right of the people to control their destiny in a state where they belong. It behoves any democratic government to ensure and guarantee the freedom of the individuals as one of the main objectives of a social and political system. Freedom is an inalienable right of the individual, thus, Rousseau deduced that "man is born free".³¹ Therefore, in the state of Rousseau, the people must exercise this freedom.

Consequently, as the state works hard to preserve the freedom and liberty of its people, Rousseau opines that the people have to be trained to be patriotic, loyal and devoted to

³¹ Rousseau, J.J *The Social Contract Theory 10*

the state. They should be made to follow the General Will by removing all personal considerations in their deliberations and considering those things that promote the common good. “What this different interest has in common is what forms the social bond, and if there were not some points on which all interests agree no society could exist.”³² Accordingly, Rousseau agrees that the general voice is always right and always tends to the public advantage. Therefore, all the people, for him, must work to ensure that their individual wills conform to the general will, arguing that:

it is in obeying the general will that the individual gains his freedom, whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be constrained to do so by the whole body; which means nothing else than that he shall be forced to be free.³³

In “Rousseau and the General Will”, David Lay Williams opines that Rousseau’s principles of political right can be best described as a reformulation of Hobbes’ conception of the social contract. He stressed that what contributes to the conflicting interpretations of Rousseau can be attributed to different understanding of the relative priority and relationship of two central concepts in his writings, one of which, he argues, is the general will, which he said is the “conventional substitute for natural law or transcendent ideas”.³⁴ Accordingly, David argues that the General Will as formulated by Rousseau has a good intention, hence it is “grounded on nothing more than the consent

³² Rousseau, J.J. *The Social Contract Theory*, 29.

³³ Rousseau, J.J. *The Social Contract*, 18

³⁴ Rousseau, J.J. *The Social Contract*, 12.

and functions as the first principle of all legitimate political societies”.³⁵ He, however, stressed that it would be foolish to dismiss the importance of the general will to Rousseau’s political philosophy and political societies, since it is the bed-rock on which Rousseau built his social contract. Thus, he views the “General Will as the true impetus of his Social Contract”.³⁶ This contract, concludes David, is designed explicitly to counter Hobbesian absolutism and his brutish Leviathan with a morally grounded social contract and egalitarian state.

Freedom

Rousseau believed that true freedom is not simply the absence of external constraints but also the freedom to participate in the formation of the laws that govern society. This freedom is realized when individuals align their will with the general will.

Equality:

Rousseau's concept of equality means that all citizens are equal before the law and have equal rights to participate in the political process.

What then of Rousseau’s key claim that freedom and authority can be reconciled in his ideal republic through obedience to the general will? The opening words of The Social

³⁵ David, L.W. (2000), “*Rousseau and the General Will*” in *Journal of History of Ideas* Vol.66, No.3, ed. Donald R. Kelly, (Baltimore: Hopkins University Press), 384.

³⁶ David, L.W. “*Rousseau and the General Will*”, 384.

Contract themselves refer to freedom, with the famous saying that ³⁷ “Man is born free, but is everywhere in chains”. This ringing declaration, however, is almost immediately followed by a note of paradox, as Rousseau declares that he can make this subjection “in chains” legitimate. The thought that Rousseau’s commitment to freedom might not be all that it first appears is strengthened by other passages in the book, most notably his notorious declaration in Book 1 chapter 7 of *The Social Contract* that those subject to the general will are “forced to be free.” The value of freedom or liberty is at the center of Rousseau’s concerns throughout his work, though he uses the term in various different ways. He regards the capacity for choice, and therefore the ability to act against instinct and inclination, as one of the features that distinguishes humans from animals’ species and makes truly moral action possible.

In the *Discourse on Inequality*, for example,³⁸ he characterizes animals in essentially Cartesian terms, as mechanisms programmed to a fixed pattern of behavior, in contrast to humans, who are not tied to any particular mode of life and can reject the promptings of instinct. This makes possible both the development of the human species and also its fall from grace, since individuals can ignore benign impulses (such as *pitié*) if they wish to. The freedom to act contrary to the “mechanism of the senses”, and the power of willing and choosing is, for Rousseau, something entirely outside the laws of the physical world and is therefore not subject to scientific explanation. Rousseau also

³⁷ Rousseau J. J, *The Social Contract Theory*. Book 1 chapter 7

³⁸ Rousseau, J.J. *The Social Contract Theory*. Book 1 chapter 8

takes this freedom to choose to act as the basis of all distinctively moral action. In *The Social Contract* the connection between freedom of choice and morality is central to his argument against despotic government, where he writes that the renunciation of freedom is contrary to human nature and that to renounce freedom in favour of another person's authority is to "deprive one's actions of all morality". Rousseau tries to illuminate his claim that the formation of the legitimate state involves no net loss of freedom, but in fact, he makes a slightly different claim. The new claim involves the idea of an exchange of one type of freedom (natural freedom) for another type (civil freedom). Natural freedom involves an unlimited right to all things, an idea that is reminiscent of Hobbes's "right of nature" in *Leviathan*. Since all human beings enjoy this liberty right to all things, it is clear that in a world occupied by many interdependent humans, the practical value of that liberty may be almost nonexistent. This is because any individual's capacity to get what they want will be limited by their physical power and the competing physical power of others. Further, inevitable conflict over scarce resources will pit individuals against each other, so that unhindered exercise of natural freedom will result in violence and uncertainty.

The formation of the state, and the promulgation of laws willed by the general will, transforms this condition. With sovereign power in place, individuals are guaranteed a sphere of equal freedom under the law, with protection for their own persons and security for their property. Provided that the law bearing equally on everyone is not

meddlesome or intrusive (and Rousseau believes it will not be, since no individual has a motive to legislate burdensome laws) there will be a net increase in freedom compared to the pre-political state. Rousseau makes a further claim in the same chapter of *The Social Contract*, namely that in conditions of civil society the citizen achieves “moral freedom,” by which he means obedience to a law that one has prescribed to oneself. Although this latter claim is presented almost as an afterthought, it is the form of freedom most directly responsive to the challenge Rousseau had set for himself, which involved finding “a form of association” in which each citizen would “obey only himself.” Naturally, this raises the question of whether the citizen does in fact obey only himself when he obeys the general will.

On the face of it, this claim looks difficult to reconcile with the fact of majorities and minorities within a democratic state, since those citizens who find themselves outvoted would seem to be constrained by a decision with which they disagree. Rousseau’s solution to this puzzle is found much later where he argues that those who obey laws they did not vote for remain bound by a will that is their own, since the democratic process has enabled them to discover the content of a general will in which they share.³⁹ Many commentators have found this argument unconvincing. Rousseau’s invocation of three types of freedom (natural, civil, and moral) in the text of *The Social Contract* can appear confusing. The picture is further complicated by the fact that he also

³⁹ Rousseau, J.J. *The Social Contract Theory*. Book 4 chapter 3

relies on a fourth conception of freedom, related to civil freedom but distinct from it, which he nowhere names explicitly. This is “republican freedom” and consists, not in my being subject to my own will, but rather in the fact that the law protects me from being subject to the will of any other particular person in the manner that a slave or a serf is. To find Rousseau’s explicit endorsement of this idea, we have to look not to *The Social Contract*, but rather to some of his unpublished notes and to his Letters from the Mountains. Yet the concept is clearly implicit in the notorious “forced to be free”⁴⁰ passage in Book 1 chapter 7, since he there explains that when each citizen is constrained to obey the general will, he is thereby provided with a guarantee against “all personal dependence

Sovereignty and Legitimacy

According to Rousseau's theory of the social contract, legitimate sovereignty specifically means “the exercise of the general will” by a legislative assembly made of a state's citizens, or in other words, the active passage and implementation of laws that advance the common interests of a nation.

Understanding Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s Concept of Sovereignty

Sovereignty in the general sense means supremacy. while linking sovereignty to the state and as well as in legal authority asserted that “to say that a state is sovereign is to say that

⁴⁰ Rousseau, *J.J Social Contract Theory*. Book 1 chapter 7

its rules, the laws, have a final authority; there is no appeal from them to any more ultimate set of rules, while the rules made by other associations and communities are subordinate to the authority of the state”. Corroborating D. D. Raphael, Pollock (1895) notes that “Sovereignty is that power which is neither temporary nor delegated nor subject to particular rules, which it cannot alter, nor answerable to any other power on the earth”.⁴¹

In the Geneva Manuscript already, Rousseau defines sovereignty as the notion that cannot belong to the individual: “From this it becomes clear that the sovereignty is, by its nature, only a corporate entity, that it has only an abstract and collective existence, and that the idea which is attached to this word cannot be united to that of a single individual”.⁴² Rousseau in the Social Contract is not so resolute, but he gives the following statement from which the popular sovereignty can be deduced: “Each of us places his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will; and as one we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole. ...this public person, formed, thus, by union of all others formerly took the name city, and at present takes the name republic or body politic, which is called state by its members when it is passive, sovereign when it is active, power when it is compared to others like itself. As to

⁴¹ Raphael, D.D (1895). *The Problems of Political Philosophy*, (New York: MacMillan Press), p. 64.

⁴² Geneva Manuscript (1993)

the associates they collectively take the name people, they are called citizens insofar as participants in the sovereign authority...”⁴³

The sovereign came into existence from the sanctity of the Social Contract. Rousseau made allusions to that in chapter VII of book I when he stated that “since the body politic or the sovereign derives its being exclusively from the sanctity of the contract, it can never obligate itself, not even to another power, to do anything that derogates from the original act, such as alienating some portion of itself or submitting to another sovereign. Violation of the act whereby it exists would be self-annihilation, and whatever is nothing produces nothing”⁴⁴. He further asserted that “since the sovereign is formed entirely from the private individuals who make it up, it neither has nor could have an interest contrary to theirs. Hence, the sovereign power has no need to offer a guarantee to its subjects, since it is impossible for a body to want to harm all of its members, and, as we will see later, it cannot harm any one of them in particular.

2.4. COMPARISON WITH OTHERS SOCIAL CONTRACT THINKERS (E.G HOBBS, LOCKE)

Citizens consent to government’s authority because the alternative – life without government – would be far worse. This relationship between citizens and their

⁴³ Rousseau, J.J (1987) *Social Contract in the Basic Political Writings*.(Translated and Edited by D.A. Cress, (New York: Macmillian), p. 57.

⁴⁴ Rousseau, J.J Rousseau, *Law and the Sovereignty of the People* pp 167

government forms the foundation of the state. Exponents of social contract theories attempt to explain why citizens form government and are obliged to obey its law.⁴⁵ Thomas Hobbes and John Locke were the most important proponents of social contract theories. However their theories were almost completely opposed on human nature, the nature of government power and the rights of citizens against the sovereign. Hobbes used the social contract in defence of absolutism, while Locke used it in support of limited constitutionalism.

Thomas Hobbes' Social Contract Theory

Thomas Hobbes was a staunch monarchist, and his political beliefs were strongly influenced by the English Civil War. Hobbes's social contract theory, primary detailed in his work "Leviathan" (1651),⁴⁶. posits that individuals, driven by self- interest and living in a "state of nature" characterized by chaos and conflict, agree to surrender some of their freedoms to an absolute sovereign in exchange for protection and order.

His concept of the social contract was predicated on his theory of human nature. Hobbes believed that it was human nature to be in a state of war, where every person was

⁴⁵ Greenwalt, K. (1987), *Conflicts of Law and Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) p. 62.

⁴⁶ Hobbes, T. (1985), *Leviathan*. Ed. C.B. MacPherson. (New York: Penguin Books), p. 56.

in a permanent state of conflict with every other person for the limited resources available. In this state of nature, everyone has a right to everything and therefore there can be no security for anyone to enjoy his or her life.⁴⁷ People realise that if everyone were to exercise their right to everything, this would be self-defeating and amount to a constant state of war of everyone against everyone. The natural law dictates that everyone should seek peace, or live sociably, as much as possible, by laying ‘down this right to all things; and [being] contented with so much liberty against other men as he would allow other men against himself’.⁴⁸ In Hobbes’ opinion, natural law was founded on pragmatic self-interest, rather than any innate morality. People limit their natural right to everything for the sake of obtaining peace and self-preservation. People form social covenants with each other out of pragmatic self-interest and these covenants form the basis for civil society. Hobbes’ social contract entailed subjugation to the sovereign. The sovereign’s power, in whatever form it takes, must be absolute and undivided. Hobbes’s social contract is only between subjects; the sovereign itself is not a party to the contract.⁴⁹ Therefore the sovereign’s subjects have no rights to enforce against it arising out of their contract with each other.⁵⁰ Hobbes believed that a powerful central authority, rather than one which rules by consent, was necessary to enforce this social covenant in the context of persons

⁴⁷ Samek, R. (1974), *The Legal Point of View* (New York: Philosophical Library) p. 98.

⁴⁸ Haakonssen, K. (1996), *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) p. 32.

⁴⁹ Kelly, J. (1992), *A Short History of Western Legal Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) p. 212.

⁵⁰ Samek, R. *Op. Cit.*, p. 100.

who naturally compete and disagree with one another. In his opinion democracies were too weak to survive war. The sovereign's vague and unenforceable duty in this relationship is protecting the citizen's safety and the internal cohesion of the state; most other forms of intervention supersede the sovereign's role. In Hobbes's social contract rebellion was not justifiable, because if citizens accept their sovereign's protection they must also accept their sovereign's law.⁵¹

John Locke's Social Contract Theory

John Locke proposed a very different theory of the social contract in his *Two Treatises of Government*. Locke's theory was developed as a legal philosophy to underpin the English Revolution of 1688, which put an end to the divine right of kingship and its denial of a popular base for government.⁵² Like Hobbes, Locke's social contract was also based upon his conception of human nature. Locke wrote in *Two Treatises of Government*:

The State of Nature has a law of Nature to govern it, which obliges every one, and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possession ... Therefore man used his reason to live according to the law of nature. Under this law he was bound not to injure the life, liberty or property of others and would

⁵¹ Kelly, J. *Op Cit.*, p. 213.

⁵² Kelly, J. *Op Cit.*, p. 216.

protect himself from the encroachment of others upon his rights.⁵³ In Locke's opinion, people resigned their power into the hands of a government to protect their natural rights and adjudicate disputes between them. Locke stated that: Those who are united into one body, and have established law and judicature to appeal to, with authority to decide controversies between them, and punish offenders, are in civil society with one another.⁵⁴ Locke believed that people are moral beings who will generally live peacefully with each other through reason.⁵⁵ According to Locke, property rights were insecure; people remedied this by giving up some of their liberty to a sovereign whose purpose was to protect its subject's entitlements.⁵⁶ In Locke's social contract, the community's government is constituted for 'their good and the preservation of their property'. The community acts according to the will of the majority,⁵⁷ while the sovereign's power is 'employed for [the] good and the preservation of [citizen's] property'. The Sovereign's power is not arbitrary, but rather 'is limited to the public good of the society'.⁵⁸ Should the government exceed, neglect or oppose the legitimate limits of its power it can be altered or removed by the people for a breach of its trust and replaced with another.

Comparison and Critique of Hobbes' and Locke's Social

⁵³ Laslett, P. (ed), (1960), *Locke: Two Treatise of Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) p. 7.

⁵⁴ Freeman *Op. Cit.*, 112.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Laslett, *Op. Cit.*, 15.

⁵⁷ Kelly, *Op. Cit.*, p. 216.

⁵⁸ Laslett, *Op. Cit.*, p. 15.

Contract Theories

Hobbes and Locke both believed that in nature people would come together to form a state for some form of protection. However, from this point on their theories diverge. Hobbes and Locke offered different hypotheses about why people formed a state.⁵⁹ Hobbes argued that people formed a state out of pragmatic self-interest to protect themselves from each other. Locke's theory of human nature, however, was far more optimistic. He proposed that people were fundamentally moral beings that would form a state in order to protect their inalienable natural rights of 'life, liberty and estate' and adjudicate disputes between them.

Hobbes and Locke were also divided on the nature of government.⁶⁰ Hobbes advocated the sovereign's absolute and undivided power. In *Leviathan* Hobbes wrote: 'The only way to erect a 'Common power ... is to confer all their power and strength upon one man, or one Assembly of men, that may reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices, unto one Will ... ⁶¹ In contrast, Locke wrote in *Two Treatises of Government*: '[The] legislative ... though it be the supreme power in every commonwealth, yet first, it is not, nor can possibly be, absolutely arbitrary over the lives and fortunes of the people'. The divergence between both Hobbes' and Locke's theories on the sovereign's power can also be traced back to their theories of human nature. Hobbes' pessimistic beliefs of

⁵⁹ Kelly, *Op. Cit.*, p.218.

⁶⁰ Hobbes, T. *Op Cit.*, p. 23.

⁶¹ Locke, J. *Op Cit.*, p. 100.

human nature required a strong central authority in order to protect the sovereign's citizens from each other and foreign powers. In contrast, Locke's optimistic beliefs advocated that people in a state of nature would have stronger moral limits and would be able to live in relative harmony without a strong central authority.

Both Hobbes' and Locke's social contract theories share similar problems of binding the original parties' successors to duties which they had never consented to assume. Hobbes and Locke dealt with this problem in different ways. According to Hobbes, the sovereign is not a party to the social contract and therefore citizens have no recourse against the sovereign. Hobbes believed that if the people wish for the sovereign's protection, they must abide by its law. Alternatively Locke proposed that the sovereign rules on behalf of its citizens and these citizens have a right to dissolve or modify the government for a breach of this trust. Locke's doctrine of government as a trust, breach of which will forfeit the right to govern further paved the way for modern constitutional and responsible government. Both Hobbes' and Locke's theories are not without their flaws. Hobbes makes no allowance for the moral side of people and society. His theory implies that people without states would have no moral limits. Whilst areas without effective government do present many issues, not all these people are the amoral sociopaths Hobbes describes. His theory disregards the natural tendency of people to associate without violence.

Locke's optimistic theory of human nature also fails to consider how an entire population, such as in Nazi Germany, can support genocide. Locke believed that remaining in a country amounted to tacit agreement to obey the laws.⁶² People stay in their homelands because of language, culture, employment, friends, and family. Their inertia does not indicate approval or acceptance of government and laws.

2.5. CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON J.J ROUSSEAU SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY

Rousseau's theories, particularly his social contract and concept of the "general will," have faced substantial criticism. Critics question the practicality and potential for abuse of the general will, the nature of the social contract, and concept of the "general will," have faced substantial criticism. Critics question the practicality and potential for abuse of the general will, the nature of the social contract, and Rousseau's views on education and gender. The concept of the general will, while aiming for the common good, can suppress individual liberties and potentially justify authoritarianism. Critics argue that Rousseau's emphasis on the general will can lead to the tyranny of the majority, where the interests of the collective override the rights of individuals.

Rousseau's idea that individuals must be "forced to be free" (by following the general will) is often cited as a problematic aspect of his theory. Social Contract and the

⁶² Murphy, J. (1981) 'Consent, Coercion and Hard Choices' *Virginia Law Review* 79, 67-90.

State of Nature: The assumption of a pre-social "state of nature" is questioned as being historically inaccurate and based on idealized notions.

Scholars argue that human societies have always been social, and the idea of a solitary individual in a state of nature is a philosophical abstraction. Social Contract of Rousseau is quite systematic and outlines how a government could exist in such a way that it protects the equality and character of its citizens.⁶³ In the chapter one of the Social Contract, it begins with one of Rousseau's most famous quotes, which echoes the claims of his political philosophy "Man was/is born free; and everywhere he is in chains."⁶⁴

Rousseau's *Du contract social* was epoch-making in its argument that law legitimately comes only from the sovereign people legislating for itself: from the general will. Rousseau followed in the social contract tradition of Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), John Locke (1632–1704), and others, but sought to find a form of political association in which naturally free individuals can join with others and yet remain as free as before. His solution was direct democratic self-legislation in which each citizen, as a member of the sovereign, makes laws that apply equally to all. "Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will; and in a body we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole"

⁶³ Rousseau, J.J *Social Contract Theory* I.6

⁶⁴ Rousseau J.J (*social contract* Vol. iv, p. 131.)

Rousseau pressed a radically voluntarist principle into service as the binding force of the political community. Although he recognized a "universal justice emanating from reason alone," he argued that this justice is ineffective for want of a natural sanction. Rousseau's general will was confined to the limits of the state. "The general will is always right," claimed Rousseau. His statement has often been taken to imply a kind of mystical popular will in whose name the force of the state can be exercised.⁶⁵ The general will is not something that transcends the state, but is the will of the citizens qua citizens in their capacity as members of the sovereign. Immediately after claiming that the general will is always right, Rousseau pointed to what he saw as the central problem of the state: "But it does not follow that the people's deliberations will always have the same rectitude".⁶⁶ The people may err in their deliberations for several reasons, but the rectitude of the general will is distorted most importantly by the natural tendency of individuals to consult the particular will they have qua individuals. "Indeed, each individual can, as a man, have a private will contrary to or differing from the general will he has as a citizen. His private interest can speak to him quite differently from the common interest." Such a person, Rousseau infamously concluded, "will be forced to be free."

While this paradoxical statement has been interpreted as an authoritarian element in Rousseau's thought, less noticed is the continuation of the passage: "For this is the

⁶⁵ Rousseau *Contract II.6*.

⁶⁶ Rousseau *Contract, II.3*

condition that, by giving each citizen to the fatherland, guarantees him against all personal dependence" The mutual obligations of the political association ensure that the citizens are dependent only on the law of their own making, and not on the will of another individual. The law must come from everyone and apply equally to all. The general will is always directed toward the common justice and utility by virtue of its very generality: "the general will, to be truly such, should be general in its object as well as in its essence; that it should come from all to apply to all"⁶⁷ Proper civic education and favorably egalitarian conditions are necessary for the deliberations of the citizens to have the rectitude they require to make the general will triumph over particular interests. Self-legislation as part of the sovereign makes possible a new kind of freedom, a civil and moral freedom that transcends the natural freedom we have as individuals. Rousseau's general will inspired his followers with what they saw as a promise of revolutionary moral and political transformation.

The General Will Rousseau tied the concept of general will directly to sovereignty. True sovereignty did not imply simply having power over the rest of society, but was always directed at the public good. The general will, therefore, infallibly pursued the benefit of the people. It is always general. It could establish rules, set up social classes, or even a monarchical government, but it could never specify the particular individuals who

⁶⁷ J.J Rousseau *contract* vol. II, p.4

were subject to the rules, particular members of the social classes, or the particular rulers in the government

The general will was directed at the good of the society as a whole, and was not to be confused with the collection of the wills of individuals, who would put their own needs, or the needs of their particular factions, above those of the general public. Rousseau emphasized that the general will (*volonté générale*) was not merely the cancelled-out sum of all the individual wills of those who participate in the social contract, the will of all (*volonté de tous*). There is often a great deal of difference between the will of all and the general will.⁶⁸ The latter looks only to the common interest; the former considers private interest and is only a sum of private wills. But take away from these same wills the pluses and minuses that cancel each other out, and the remaining sum of the differences is the general will

Critique of Rousseau's General Will Theory

The concept of the general will, first introduced in the *Discourse on Political Economy*,⁶⁹ is further developed in the *Social Contract* although it remains ambiguous

⁶⁸ Rousseau, J.J *social contract Theory*, vol. iv, 146)

⁶⁹ Celeste (2020). " *Social Contract Theory*". *Internet Encyclopedia of philosophy*.

and difficult to interpret. The most pressing difficulty that arises is in the tension that seems to exist between liberalism and communitarianism.

On one hand, Rousseau argues that following the general will allows for individual diversity and freedom.⁷⁰ But at the same time, the general will also encourages the wellbeing of the whole, and therefore can conflict with the particular interests of individuals. This tension has led some to claim that Rousseau's political thought is hopelessly inconsistent, although others have attempted to resolve the tension in order to find some type of middle ground between the two positions. Despite these difficulties, however, there are some aspects of the general will that Rousseau clearly articulates. O'Hagan, Riley and Reisert argued that, first; the general will is directly tied to Sovereignty: but not Sovereignty merely in the sense of whomever holds power. Simply having power,⁷¹ for Rousseau, is not sufficient for that power to be morally legitimate. True Sovereignty is directed always at the public good, and the general will, therefore, speaks always infallibly to the benefit of the people. Second, the object of the general will is always abstract, or for lack of a better term, general. It can set up rules, social classes, or even a monarchical government, but it can never specify the particular individuals who are subject to the rules, members of the classes, or the rulers in the government.

⁷⁰ Gundogan, E. (2008). *J.J Rousseau's and the theory of the General will: An Introduction* (London: Cyprus International University), p. 78.

⁷¹ Hagan, O.T, *Rousseau's Routledge*.

This is in keeping with the idea that the general will speaks to the good of the society as a whole. It is not to be confused with the collection of individual wills which would put their own needs, or the needs of particular factions, above those of the general public. This leads to a related point⁷². Riley Patrick posited in his work that, J.J Rousseau argues that there is an important distinction to be made between the general will and the collection of individual wills: “There is often a great deal of difference between the will of all and the general will. The latter looks only to the common interest; the former considers private interest and is only a sum of private wills. But take away from these same wills the pluses and minuses that cancel each other out, and the remaining sum of the differences is the general will. This point can be understood in an almost Rawlsian sense, namely that if the citizens were ignorant of the groups to which they would belong, they would inevitably make decisions that would be to the advantage of the society as a whole, and thus be in accordance with the general will

CHAPTER THREE

⁷² Riley P. (1989), " *The General will before Rousseau*", *political Theory*, 6:4: special issue: J.J Rousseau's: 485-516.

RELEVANCE OF J.J ROUSSEAU’S SOCIAL CONTRACT TO NIGERIA

SOCIO-POLITICAL CULTURE

3.1 OVERVIEW OF NIGERIAN SOCIO-POLITICAL CULTURE

Political culture describes how culture impacts politics. Every political system is embedded in a particular political culture. Political culture is what the people, the voters, the electorates believe and do based on their understanding of the political system in which they have found themselves. Nigerian politics take place within a framework of a federal and presidential republic and a representative democracy, in which the president holds executive power. Legislative power is held by the federal government and the two chambers of the legislature: the House of Representatives and the Senate.⁷³ Nigeria's socio-political landscape is a complex interplay of diverse ethnic groups, a formal democratic structure, and a history marked by both progress and challenges. While Nigeria is a federal republic with a presidential system, the country grapples with issues like political instability, corruption, and insecurity, particularly in certain regions. Cultural factors, including strong ethnic identities and traditional political systems, also significantly influence the political sphere.

⁷³ Anikwe, F. I. (2014), *Culture and National Development: Challenges and Prospect. Royalty*, pp 1, 24-26.

Key Aspects of Nigeria's Socio-Political Culture:

Federal Republic with Presidential System: Nigeria operates under a presidential system with three branches of government: the executive (led by the President), the legislature (National Assembly with Senate and House of Representatives), and the judiciary (headed by the Supreme Court).⁷⁴

Multi-Ethnic Society:

3. Nigeria's diverse ethnic composition, including the Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba, shapes its political dynamics and social interactions.

Political Culture:

Nigeria's political culture is characterized by a complex mix of formal democratic institutions and informal practices, including patronage, clientelism, and money politics.

Challenges to Democracy:

Despite the formal democratic structure, Nigeria faces challenges such as electoral violence, corruption, and weak democratic institutions, which hinder its democratic progress.

⁷⁴ Arowolo, D. (2011), Fiscal Federalism in Nigeria: Theory and Dimensions. *Afro Asia Journal of Social Sciences*, 2(2-2) 1-21.

Traditional Political Systems:

Some scholars argue for the importance of understanding Nigeria's traditional political systems and incorporating their lessons into contemporary governance.

Need for Value Re-orientation:

There's a call for a value re-orientation to promote a more civic and patriotic political culture, prioritizing national interests over personal and ethnic gains.

In essence, Nigeria's socio-political landscape is a dynamic and multifaceted one, where formal institutions and democratic processes coexist with deep-rooted cultural norms, historical legacies, and contemporary challenges

3:2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (COLONIALISM, MILITARY RULE, DEMOCRACY)

Colonialism:

Nigeria's history is marked by the transition from British colonial rule to periods of military dictatorship and, ultimately, a return to democratic governance. The country gained independence in 1960, but shortly after, experienced its first military coup in 1966.

This ushered in a long era of military rule, punctuated by brief periods of civilian

government. Nigeria finally returned to democratic rule in 1999 and has remained a democracy since.⁷⁵

Colonial Era:

Nigeria was colonized by Great Britain, with British influence beginning in the mid-19th century. The European exploratory and explorative expeditions to Africa in the nineteenth century was an historical watershed. It redirected and redefined the socio-political history of the continent. As it affected the continent, so also it did to its component units.⁷⁶

The 1884/85 Berlin conference presented a forum for the carving of the continent into spheres of influence, beyond the hitherto uncoordinated scramble . The Berlin conference fulfilled a double task; it endorsed the creation, of a great interior state, commercially open to all nations, but politically shielded from their competition. It also set up the bases for economic legislation which was immediately applicable to the central zone of the continent bur which virtually demanded more extensive application.

Ben Nwabueze has stated that under international law, there are four ways by which a country may acquire a jurisdiction outside of its own territory namely by occupation,

⁷⁵ Attoh, F. and Soyombo. O. (2020), The Politics of Ethnic Balancing in Nigeria, *African Journal of Political Science*, Vol 14(4), pp 001-005.

⁷⁶ Carland, J.M. (1985), *The Colonial Office and Nigeria*, (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers), p. 37.

conquest, cession, and prescription. It is reasonable for our purpose to acknowledge that the European occupation or usurpation of African territory, was not predicated on the finesse of international law, Rather, it was influenced by mutuality of desire for exploitation by the European powers. Yet there was a pretension to legality.⁷⁷

In the case of Nigeria, the first British penetration of the Niger Delta was by sir George Goldie in 1885 under the Royal Niger company. Suspicion in Britain as to the real intention of sir George, led to the withdrawal of the charter in 1897 and Lord Lugard was sent to protect British interests against French encroachment. Lugard efficiently and effectively carried out the assignment such that Ursula Hicks notes that He (Lugard) was effectively the first Governor and founder of the British influence in Nigeria. Lugard success in relation to his mandate was undisguisedly visible as Nwabueze (1982) credits him with acute political wisdom and foresight. Lugard introduced the indirect rule system which virtually preserved the existing traditional political system and therefore guaranteed him acceptance by the traditional elite.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Nwabueze, B. (2010), *Constitutional Democracy in Africa*, (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited), p. 101.

⁷⁸ I. Charles. (2014) *Amalgamation of Nigeria: was it a mistake?.* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd) pp. 91-93.

On January 1, 1914 the protectorate of Northern Nigeria and the colony and protectorates of southern Nigeria were amalgamated which was apparently the first attempt at creating the modern Nigeria. From then onwards, the evolution of Nigeria was encapsulated in various constitutional reviews; the 1922 Clifford constitution, The 1946 Richards constitution, The 1951 MacPherson constitution and the 1954 Lyttleton constitution. The constitutional reviews were to serve two related purposes. One, was to maintain British hold on Nigeria. Two, was an acknowledgement of a reality, especially after the end of the second world war, of an eventual decolonization of Nigeria. This invariably happened with the attainment of independence in 1960.

Nigeria was granted independence on October 1, 1960 but the journey to achieving the right to self-government started seven years before when Anthony Enahoro moved the motion for self-governance in the British-led parliament in 1953.⁷⁹ Foremost Nigerians like Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Tafawa Balewa who like Enahoro were some of the nationalists who fought for the country's independence”

They were trying their best to convince their colonial Britain of the need for independence but prove and the capability of self-governance. They had to use their knowledge to prove this by presentation at the parliament and with solid logic. On the other hand, British need to consider the gain and loss from the Nigeria since British is

⁷⁹ Fani- Kayode, F. (2010) *The Truth about the Motion of Independence*, (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd), p. 56.

under a turbulent era: Nazism in Europe was over, but Communism and the Soviet Union was increasingly powerful (America also). The available resources were limited, so it's necessary for British to balance the risk of losing their power in the world.

Military Rule:

Military rule is the involvement of the armed forces as a direct and active participant in policy making and governance in a state. It is the unconstitutional take-over of the machinery of administration of a state by members of the Armed Forces based on martial laws - Decrees and Edicts. The Military usually comes to power through a military coup d'état i.e., when members of the armed forces overthrow the machinery of government in the state through a bloody or bloodless military change of government. All military governments are authoritarian and they make no pretensions of being democratic..

Nigeria passed through seven military regimes between 1966 and 1999. The first military era, which comprised three regimes, lasted for 13 years (1966-1979). The second military era which was made up of four successive regimes lasted for 16 years (December 31, 1983-May 29, 1999)⁸⁰ (Bassey, 2005). By implication, the military had ruled Nigeria for 29 out of the 64 years life span of the Nigerian nation, a period that this paper examines while the civilians have ruled for 35 years.

⁸⁰ Bassey, J.R (2005). *Epitaph to Military Rule: Political and Administrative History of the Nigeria Local Government*, (Uyo: Minder International Publishers), p. 32.

Under the successive military regimes, the Nigerian psyche was moulded into a frame of militancy and respect for the use of force. Indeed, force replaced the rule of law. The course of “jungle law” was promoted by the state through brutal force, torture, murder etc.

9. The emergence of the military led to militarised political culture and the erosion of civic culture. Thus, the rule of operation became that of order, combat, rather than dialogue, disregard for court orders and violation of human rights.⁸¹

One of the institutions of the Nigerian society which was highly vilified by the military was the press, which has been the greatest instrument within a state for disseminating ideas. Like in every society, the press has basic responsibilities towards the people. One of such is to hold the government of the day accountable. In that respect, wide latitude of freedom is required by the press to function effectively. This is usually permitted to a large extent under civilian administrations, but experience has shown that under military rule, freedom of the press does not thrive. Indeed, for every military regime that emerged in Nigeria, series of conflict with the press became inevitable. As a way of curbing the press excesses, the successive military regimes often employed arbitrary anti-press decrees, whimsical harassment, arrest and detention of journalist, proscription of media houses etc..⁸²

⁸¹ O.E. Eyo, (2016). *Military and Nation- Building in Nigeria, 1966-1999*. Pp.19-29

⁸² I. Mabadeje (2004). *The Nigeria Press under the Military. A Compendium of Cases of Press Freedom Violations in Nigeria (1966-199)* (Uyo: Robertminder International Ltd), p. 134

The Military

The armed forces are made up traditionally of the army, navy and air force and these together constitute what is generally referred to as the military. The military is a bureaucratic organisation that utilises and manages violence. There is high emphasis on hierarchy, centralisation, discipline and obedience to higher commands. The military institution otherwise is the instrument of national security that is charged with the responsibility of defending the country from external aggression. It is used to put down internal uprising depending on the intensity of the aggression. Constitutionally, the military has no business in politics

Military intervention in Nigerian politics began with the first coup in 1966, just six years after independence, according to Nigerian embassy in Dublin.⁸³ This coup, and subsequent ones, led to a long period of military governments, with the military directly ruling the country for extended periods. The military governments faced numerous challenges, including 8.coups, civil war (Biafran War), and political instability. The military rule is often cited as a period of human rights abuses, corruption, and economic mismanagement. Nigeria transitioned back to democratic rule in 1999, with the establishment of the Fourth Republic. This transition was a result of a combination of

⁸³ Muhammad, M. (2014). *Nigerian Military in Politics; 1966-2011*, (Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press Ltd), pp. 10-17.

factors, including international pressure, public demand for democratic governance, and the desire for stability within the country. The current democratic period has seen the country navigate challenges such as insecurity, economic issues, and electoral irregularities.

The transition to democracy has been marked by both progress and setbacks, with the need for continued strengthening of democratic institutions and practices. The Nigerian military can be said to be a victim of its own internal contradictions. Yet, it likes to give an outward image of internal and group cohesion and solidarity. The military as a result of uncontrollable power rivalry within it, took the nation through a civil war from 1967-1970.

Democracy:

The term “democracy” has become hackneyed through constant usage. It has become a domestic word. Many people use the word without knowing its implications. Some have come to think of it as something to which people give lip or mind service, without using their minds to re-examine the term. It can be said that since Herodotus coined the word “demokratia”, it has acquired diverse meanings, referring, as it has, to every different historical settings as well as to very different ideals. With the passing of time, both its denotative and connotative usage has changed. Presently, there is disagreement on the meaning, form and substance of the term ‘democracy’. Mbaegbu

laments that, “different people make use of the word democracy in their daily conversations, but ask them to define what they mean by democracy, they find it rather very difficult and elusive”.⁸⁴

It is, however, difficult to state precisely what democracy means. In other words, a comprehensive definition of democracy is a conceptual and theoretical impossibility. Little wonder Ugumanim observed “when a word acquires a universally sacred character as has today the word democracy, I begin to wonder, whether, by all its attempts to mean, it still means anything at all”.⁸⁵

However, despite the definitional problematique which engulfs the term, there is a modicum of consensus that the term is a derivative of the two Greek words ‘demos’ meaning people and “kratia” meaning to rule. When combined “demokratia” means rule by the people. Democracy as practiced in ancient Greece was called direct or pure democracy. It was a democracy characterized by decision making directly by the people. Representation was not necessary because of its small size and population. Nigeria officially became a democracy on its independence from Britain in October 1960. But the history of Nigerian demands for greater representation go back to the 1920s. A new

⁸⁴ Mbaegbu, C.C. (2007), “Nigerian Democracy and the Nationality Question” in ed. Ike Odimegwu, *Nigerian Democracy and Global Democracy*, (Awka: Fab Educational Books), p. 55.

⁸⁵ Mbaegbu, B. and Abua, M.A. (2006), “Democracy and the Dialectics of Mass Poverty: The Nigerian Experience” in ed. F.A. Uduigwomen, *SOPHIA*, Vol.8, No.2, pp.137.

constitution was created in 1922 under British colonial rule, largely due to Nigerian calls for reform. The country's first general election – to a colonial legislative council – was held the following year. The colonial administration hoped to contain demands for full independence but the elections failed to suppress Nigerians' desire for control of their own affairs.

Civil resistance continued throughout the 1920s led mainly by women and student movements. The Aba Women's Uprising of November 1929 saw protests by thousands of Nigerian women against the unjust rule of 'Warrant Chief' tribal officials appointed by the colonial government. Young nationalists in the Lagos area founded the Nigerian Youth Movement in 1934. After World War Two, it became clear Nigeria would become independent. In the 1950s another new constitution created a structure for Nigeria's federal government and paved the way for an end to British rule. The 1959 general election saw a victory for the Northern People's Congress, which formed a coalition government with the south-eastern dominated National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons. This created the first ever Nigerian led self-government, which would steer the nation into independence in 1960. Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa served as Nigeria's first – and only – prime minister and Nnamdi Azikiwe became governor-general. For the first three years of independence, Nigeria was a constitutional monarchy with Britain's Queen Elizabeth remaining as head of state.

The hallmarks of democracy are political liberty, political equality, consensus of all concerned, rule of law, checks and balances, freedom of the press, peaceful assembly, etc. However, this conventional wisdom about democracy has in recent time been questioned and challenged in Nigerian and African situation, due to the imperfections observable in the practice of democracy. Thus, we shall now turn to see how truthful this claim is. Regrettably, all of these conventional wisdom presupposed of democracy could be challenged if the performances during any of the republic in Nigeria are reviewed and subjected to critical scrutiny. Godfrey Onah summed up the result of his review in these words: "...the so called democracy is at best, pluralistic dictatorship in which selfish and unscrupulous tyrants ride on the shoulders of the people in order to defend only their selfish interest and those of their political cronies and clubs".⁸⁶ G. I Oginyi, in a swift reaction, affirms that "the democratization process in Nigeria since Independence has remained nascent in every republic, its practices and processes have remained strange and fresh and in most cases ended up in confusion and chaos, the 1993 June, 12 is a testimony of her democratic decay".⁸⁷ However, the discourse on the political decay in Nigeria is something that one can talk about with instances, but when one is limited on the amount of words and pages like this piece, one is left with no option than to say what can be said

⁸⁶ Onah, G. I. "Africa and the Illusion of Democracy", pp.283.

⁸⁷ Oginyi, G.I. "Rousseau's General Will and Democracy in Nigeria: A Hermeneutic Study", Unpublished Master's Thesis, Department of Philosophy, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, 2016, pp. 4.

and make references. Having seen the level of hostility shown to democratic principles in Nigeria, we shall quickly see how Rousseau's doctrine of the General Will can help ameliorate the democratic challenges in Nigeria.

3.3 GOVERNANCE, CITIZENSHIP, RULE OF LAW, ETHICS, AND RELIGIOUS INFLUENCES ON POLITICS IN NIGERIA

Governance and Citizenship

In Nigeria, governance is a critical aspect of the country's development, with citizenship playing a vital role in shaping the nation's identity.⁸⁸ However, the country faces challenges in ensuring effective governance, with issues such as executive overreach, weak legislative and judicial institutions, and corruption undermining the democratic process.

Citizen governance increases the democratic content of government and provides opportunities for citizens to take interest in public affairs. The three elements of the governance model are citizen engagement, performance measurement and government policy and implementation.

⁸⁸ Osaghae, E. (2011). "Corruption, Governance and Accountability in Nigeria". *African Journal of Political science*, 13(4), 58-74.

Citizen governance does indeed enhance democracy and public involvement, with citizen engagement, performance measurement, and government policy and implementation serving as key components of a governance model that fosters participation, transparency, and accountability. By empowering citizens and holding governments accountable, this approach strengthens democratic principles and improves public service delivery by ensuring policies are responsive to community needs.

Rule of Law

The “rule of law” refers to a principle of governance in which all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the State itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated, and which are consistent with international human rights norms and standards. It requires, as well, measures to ensure adherence to the principles of supremacy of law, equality before the law, accountability to the law, fairness in the application of the law, separation of powers, participation in decision-making, legal certainty, avoidance of arbitrariness and procedural and legal transparency.⁸⁹

.The rule of law in Nigeria is essential for promoting good governance, upholding human rights, and fostering development in the country.

⁸⁹ Agbaje, F. (1995). " The Rule of law the Third Republic". In Fundamental Legal Issues in Nigeria. p 45.

Weaknesses in the rule of law have significant implications, including

- Undermining Public Trust: Weak institutions erode public confidence, fostering corruption and impeding economic growth.
- Social Inequality: A weak rule of law exacerbates social inequality, perpetuates impunity, and hinders access to justice for marginalized groups.
- Governance Challenges: Strengthening the rule of law is crucial for promoting political stability, economic prosperity, and social cohesion.

Ethnic

What is Ethnicity?

Traditionally, ethnicity is primarily defined in terms of shared genetic, racial, and sometimes linguistic traits, usually visibly apparent and hence detectable by outsiders⁹⁰. An ethnic group has been conceived broadly as a people “who identify themselves or are identified by others in cultural terms, such as language, religion, tribe, nationality, and possibly race.⁹¹.” According to Joseph Rudolph, Ethnic groups are typically described as having three distinguishing characteristics: they are ‘largely biologically self-perpetuating’; ‘they share clusters of beliefs and values’; and they ‘have internal

⁹⁰ Rudolph, J. (2006), *Politics and Ethnicity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Publishers), p. 2.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

differentiations which could affect the community's political capacity to deal with outside pressures.' The first two elements are normally visibly apparent to anyone researching and writing in the area of ethno-politics; often the third only becomes apparent in the context of a case study.

Questions about ethics in politics spring up almost everywhere. Demands for a just politics or a stop to unjust politics can be found in virtually every country. The question of ethics in politics and how ethical politics could make a difference is germane more than ever in our nation, Nigeria. Some assert that ethical politics is rare if not almost an impossibility. Yet, fusion of ethics and politics is essential as nearly every successful profession today has its moral codes. Indeed, there ought to be a necessary unity of ethics and politics.

The word "politics" is derived from the Greek "polis" meaning city state. Covertly is the idea of governance in the word "polis". Various scholars have given politics different definitions, which largely reflect the social, philosophical, and political background of these scholars. As a result, no universally acceptable explanation can be ascribed to the word politics. For example, Hornby sees politics as the science and art of

government. It is the science dealing with terms, organization and administration of state or part of one and the regulation of its relation with other states.⁹²

Notwithstanding the conflicting notions of politics, there seem to be a common strand that binds these divergent views - the centrality of the state and power to the political process. Thus, politics is concentrated as revolving around the state, its agencies, activities and overall impact on the society; and an analysis of government and its responsibilities.⁹³ According to this view, most people are not involved in politics. Not all institutions engaged in “running the country” are regarded as “non-political”.⁹⁴

Bearing in mind the numerous ethnic groups within Nigeria’s geographical area, Nigeria is often described as one of Africa’s most ethnically diverse countries. According to the 1952 and 1953 census, there are more than two hundred distinct ethnic groups in Nigeria, most of whom have particular customs, traditions, and languages. The larger and politically dominant groups include the Yoruba, the Igbo, the Hausa, and the Fulani.⁹⁵

⁹² Hornby, A. (2000), *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press), p. 89.

⁹³ Appadorai, A. (2003), *The Substance of Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press), p. 45.

⁹⁴ Heywood, A. (1997), *Politics* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd.), pp. 1-13.

⁹⁵ Udo, R. (1980), “Environments and Peoples of Nigeria,” in Obaro Ikime, ed., *Groundwork of Nigerian History* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books Plc), p. 14.

Other prominent but less numerous groups include the Edo, Ibibio, Tiv, Nupe, Kanuri, to mention but a few. Each ethnic group occupies a distinct and continuous territory. The 1914 amalgamation brought together the heterogeneous races of Nigeria for the first time. During the colonial period, when the various groups inhabiting Nigeria came under one government, trade, and cultural contacts among the different ethnic groups increased substantially. Unfortunately, the other ethnic groups were not adequately integrated into the new administrative system. This gave rise to the race for ethnic identity and superiority as a dominant feature of Nigerian history.

Religious Influences on Politics in Nigeria

Religion has always played an important part in Nigerian politics, although many disagreements were suppressed during decades of centralized military rule. Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, religion has become increasingly important in both public debate and political mobilization. Nigeria has successfully managed to contain religious violence in central (Federal) politics, through accommodative arrangements that provide for the equitable representation of the country's largest groups, Christians and Muslims. However, such strategies have either not been instituted or have been unsuccessful at lower tiers of governance and in many Nigerian States.⁹⁶ Many religious groups make

⁹⁶ Adetunji, A. (2017). "Faith-Based organizations and Development in Nigeria: The Role of Religion in Governance." *International Journal of Development and Sustainability*, pp 580-594.

significant contributions to human development, through the provision of education, health and social welfare, mainly for their numerous members all over the country. Beyond the similarity of their social contributions, many religious groups share ideals and virtues, and many religious leaders also share a critique of the Nigerian state and its political class. However, many leaders of different religious groups appear to be unaware of their shared views and interests..

Religion significantly influences Nigerian politics, with both positive and negative impacts

- Sharia Law: Implemented in some northern states, Sharia law has sparked debates on human rights, religious tolerance, and the separation of state and religion.⁹⁷

-Religious Leaders: Religious leaders often play a crucial role in shaping public opinion, promoting peace, and influencing political decisions.

- Challenges: The instrumentalization and weaponization of religion can undermine democracy and peace, highlighting the need for effective management of diversity and promotion of inclusive governance.

Challenges and Opportunities

⁹⁷ Mackenzie. C. (2020). " The Role of Religion in Shaping Ethical Conducts Among Leaders: A case study of Nigeria". *Journal of Business Ethics*, 162(2). pp 253-263.

Nigeria's complex socio-political landscape presents both challenges and opportunities for governance, citizenship, rule of law, ethics, and religious influences on politics. Addressing these challenges requires

- Strengthening Institutions: Building strong, independent institutions to promote accountability and transparency.
- Promoting Inclusive Governance: Fostering inclusive governance that respects diversity and promotes social cohesion.
- Upholding the Rule of Law: Strengthening the rule of law to protect human rights and promote justice.

3:4 APPLICATION OF J.J ROUSSEAU'S PRINCIPLE'S IN THE NIGERIA CONTEXT

Rousseau's principles, especially the social contract and General Will, can guide Nigeria toward more inclusive and participatory governance by emphasizing active civic engagement, promoting the common good over narrow interests, and fostering a sense of unity and social justice. For a democratic society to thrive in Nigeria, the people must actively participate in forming and upholding the "We the people" contract, which necessitates addressing issues of nationhood, ensuring the rule of law, and creating a political culture focused on shared welfare rather than self-interest.

Rousseau's Idea: Society arises from a voluntary agreement where individuals give up some freedoms for the collective good and the protection of civil society.

Nigerian Context: Nigeria's constitution already declares sovereignty from the people, but applying Rousseau's concept would demand a more active and continuous consent from citizens, not just periodic voting. This implies a deeper public engagement in governance beyond just voting.

Rousseau demonstrated that “Will”, not force, is the basis of the state, and that government depends on the consent of the governed. Appadorai explained that: “Rousseau’s idea that sovereign community was logically the only lawmaker has the direct effect of stimulating direct legislation by the people through the referendum and initiative.”⁹⁸. We are, however, not arguing that Nigeria should move on with the French style, but will definitely have a lot to gain if she strives to allow the will of the state to prevail in all her democratic dealings. Rousseau’s doctrine of the General Will, as contained in the social contract, will no doubt help to reduce (if not wipe out) the extreme individualism and the political godfatherism which are the twin factors that have eaten deep into Nigeria’s democratic process. Godfrey Onah is in agreement with this idea when he wrote that, “the so-called Nigeria democracy, is at best pluralistic dictatorships

⁹⁸ Appadorai, A. *Op Cit.*, p. 28.

in which selfish and unscrupulous tyrants ride on the shoulders of the people in order to defend only their personal interests and those of their political cronies and clubs”⁹⁹.

It is the conviction of Rousseau that the problem of social contract is not simply to find a form of association which will protect the individuals and goods of each member, “but also to find an association in which each member will still obey himself and remain as free as before.”¹⁰⁰. Rousseau stated the essence of the social contract cum the General Will, thus: “each of us put in common his person and his whole power under the supreme direction of the General Will and in turn we receive every member as an indivisible part of the whole.”¹⁰¹. The General Will he referred to is the will of the sovereign, where the sovereign stands for the total number of citizens of a given society. Such being the case, the General will of the sovereign is the single will, which reflects the sum of the wills of all the individual citizens. J. I. Omoregbe captures this when he noted that “sovereignty is nothing but the exercise of the General will.”¹⁰².

⁹⁹ Onah, G.I. (2004), “Africa and the Illusion of Democracy” in *Democracy and Responsible Governance in Africa*, ed. J. O. Oguejiofor (Enugu: Delta Publishers), 283.

¹⁰⁰ Rousseau, J.J. (1998), *The Social Contract* Trans. H.J Tozer, (New Jersey: Words Worth Editions), p. 14

¹⁰¹ Rousseau, J. J. *Op Cit.*, p. 14.

¹⁰² Omoregbe, J.I. (1991) *A Simplified History of Western Philosophy*, (Lagos: Joja Educational Research and Pub), 55.

Interestingly, the thoughts espoused by Rousseau, especially the use he made of the General Will have some affinity within the twin principles of democracy as clearly enshrined in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, section 14(1) which declares that “the Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be a state based on the principles of democracy and social justice.”¹⁰³ Similarly, section 14 (29) declares also that “sovereignty belongs to the people of Nigeria from whom government through this constitution derived all its powers and authority.”¹⁰⁴. And section 14 (26) has it that “the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government.”¹⁰⁵. Thus, taking into cognizance the fact that Rousseau is convinced that the General Will is infallible, directed towards the common good, and guarantees individual’s freedom, equality of all, and that democracy is also interested in securing the individual freedom and equality, and popular sovereignty, it is clear indication that Rousseau’s General Will will be relevant in enhancing democratic culture in Nigeria.

Fascinatingly, when we reflect on the fact that these principles are enshrined in the constitution and yet crippled, it becomes imperative to wholly articulate the importance/ relevance of Rousseau’s doctrine of the General will to democracy in Nigeria.

¹⁰³ The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, Lagos: Federal Government Press,

¹⁰⁴ The Constitution, 1999.

¹⁰⁵ The Constitution, 1999.

The rationale for this work, therefore, is to bring to the fore the relevance of the doctrine of the General Will to the practice of democracy in Nigeria.

3:5. GENERAL WILL VS ETHNIC INTERESTS

General Will

The General Will is central to Rousseau's program of political construction. "it conveys everything he most wanted to say. The most famous definition of General Will comes in the social contract: "from these same particular wills, one takes away the pluses and minuses which cancel each other out, what is left as the sum of the differences is the General will.¹⁰⁶". The General Will secures the goals of the state, the common good, and the lack of dangerous extreme individualism. Rousseau grounded legitimate society in the General will such that both are founded upon a strict principle of egalitarianism. Rousseau's aim in placing the people under the authority of the General Will is not to defeat or replace justice, but to make justice to be binding on persons so that no one may violate its principles with immunity or economic power. In his masterpiece, *The Social Contract*, Rousseau laid the foundations for the emergence of civil society and the basis for popular sovereignty in government. He affirms that democracy is the form of government by which the sovereign power resides in the people as a whole. It is the conviction of Rousseau then that men should participate actively in their government. He

¹⁰⁶ Rousseau, J.J. *Op Cit.*, p. 10.

stressed that participatory democracy is essential for the realization of the common good for which the state was originally formed. This common good is ensured in the liberty and equality of the right of the people to control their destiny in a state where they belong. It behoves any democratic government to ensure and guarantee the freedom of the individuals as one of the main objectives of a social and political system.

Freedom is an inalienable right of the individual, thus, Rousseau deduced that “man is born free”. Therefore, in the state of Rousseau, the people must exercise this freedom.¹⁰⁷ Consequently, as the state works hard to preserve the freedom and liberty of its people, Rousseau opines that the people have to be trained to be patriotic, loyal and devoted to the state. They should be made to follow the General Will by removing all personal considerations in their deliberations and considering those things that promote the common good. “What this different interest has in common is what forms the social bond, and if there were not some points on which all interests agree no society could exist.”¹⁰⁸ Accordingly, Rousseau agrees that the general voice is always right and always tends to the public advantage.

Therefore, all the people, for him, must work to ensure that their individual wills conform to the general will, arguing that: it is in obeying the general will that the

¹⁰⁷ Rousseau, J.J. *Op Cit.*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁸ Rousseau, J.J. *Op Cit.*, p. 10.

individual gains his freedom, whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be constrained to do so by the whole body; which means nothing else than that he shall be forced to be free.¹⁰⁹

In “Rousseau and the General Will”, David Lay Williams opines that Rousseau’s principles of political right can be best described as a reformulation of Hobbes’ conception of the social contract. He stressed that what contributes to the conflicting interpretations of Rousseau can be attributed to different understanding of the relative priority and relationship of two central concepts in his writings, one of which, he argues, is the general will, which he said is the “conventional substitute for natural law or transcendent ideas”¹¹⁰. Accordingly, David argues that the General Will as formulated by Rousseau has a good intention, hence it is “grounded on nothing more than the consent and functions as the first principle of all legitimate political societies”.¹¹¹ He, however, stressed that it would be foolish to dismiss the importance of the general will to Rousseau’s political philosophy and political societies, since it is the bed-rock on which Rousseau built his social contract. Thus, he views the “General Will as the true impetus

¹⁰⁹ . Rousseau, J.J. *Op Cit.*, p. 18.

¹¹⁰ Rousseau, J.J. *Op Cit.*, p. 12.

¹¹¹ David, L.W. (2000), “Rousseau and the General Will” in *Journal of History of Ideas* Vol.66, No.3, ed. Donald R. Kelly, (Baltimore: Hopkins University Press, 2000), p. 384.

of his Social Contract”¹¹². This contract, concludes David, is designed explicitly to counter Hobbesian absolutism and his brutish Leviathan with a morally grounded social contract and egalitarian state. In “Singing Democracy: Music and Politics in Rousseau’s Thought”, Julia Simon argues that democratic theory of the eighteenth century, particularly Rousseau’s, is suffused with the idealism and lack of pragmatism that make it both inversely compelling and frustrating, and argues thus: “yet this theory continues to inspire democratic practice and political debates even more than 200 years after its writing”¹¹³. On how the General Will is to be determined, Julia argues that the “musical analogy provides some interesting possibilities for understanding the Ethnic Interests

Ethnic Interests

Definition:

The specific goals, needs, and desires of a distinct ethnic group within a society. It's focused on the benefit of a specific group rather than the entire populace. It also Can lead to competition for resources, power, or territory among different ethnic groups.

Implications:

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 384.

¹¹³ David, L.W. *Op Cit.*, p. 384.

Polarization: Can divide society, increasing in-group/out-group feelings and potentially leading to ethnic conflict.

Ethnocentric Policies: Political parties may cater to ethnic groups, promoting agendas that favor one group over others.

Conflict: Can escalate to ethnic conflicts, civil wars, and other forms of violence when groups compete for dominance or resources¹¹⁴. Ethnic interests are basically the priorities, concerns, or goals of specific ethnic groups, often tied to preserving their identity, culture, or advocating for their rights. These interests can take shape in various ways, like forming ethnic interest groups or communities that push for political, social, or cultural change.

For example, ethnic interest groups are advocacy organizations that represent the interests of a particular ethnic group. They work on issues like influencing foreign policy to support their homeland or advocating for minority rights in the host country. A group like this might rally around issues like cultural preservation, economic equity, or even political autonomy. However, their influence can spark debates—some people argue they enrich multiculturalism, while others worry about "parochial capture," where ethnic interests could overshadow broader national priorities

¹¹⁴ Rudolph, J. *Op Cit.*, p. 39.

In Nigeria, ethnic interests¹¹⁵ often intersect with 'ethnic conflicts' due to the country's diversity. Groups like the Odua People's Congress (OPC) or Egbesu Boys highlight how ethnicity can shape political and cultural movements, sometimes leading to clashes over resources, representation, or autonomy. Managing these interests effectively is key to reducing tensions and promoting unity in such a pluralistic society.

Globally, these interests can also contribute to cultural communities, where people band together to preserve traditions, languages, and customs. These communities become spaces to celebrate identity and pass down heritage while fostering belonging and unity. They also help bridge divides and promote tolerance by connecting people across backgrounds. Ethnic interests can be empowering for communities but also tricky to balance with broader national or global goals. What's your take?

3 6: CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING SOCIAL CONTRACT IDEAS IN NIGERIA

The collapse of the social contract between the government and the people stifles individual freedoms and opportunities for growth because it chips away at trust. When governments fail to uphold their responsibilities, such as providing security, basic services, and fair opportunities, citizens lose the freedom to pursue personal aspirations.

¹¹⁵ N. Okwudiba (1978), *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing co, Ltd), p. 5.

The Nigerian legislature should create a specialised anti-corruption court free from political influence. The proposed anti-corruption court would handle corruption cases, with specialised judges and prosecutors from agencies like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission. The anti-corruption court would implement streamlined procedures, prioritising fast-track trials to reduce case backlogs and delays. The court would operate independently, with judges appointed based on merit and strict safeguards against interference. The court would be able to impose severe penalties, including prison sentences and asset forfeiture, to deter corruption under the law.

Implementing social contract ideas in Nigeria is challenged by persistent corruption, widespread insecurity, a pervasive culture of ethnicity influencing governance, poor service delivery and infrastructural decay, and a pervasive lack of accountability from government officials. These issues undermine the state-citizen relationship envisioned by the social contract, hindering its realization and contributing to social injustice and mistrust.

Here are five challenges to implementing social contract ideas in Nigeria:

1. Persistent Corruption and Poor Governance:

Widespread corruption and a fundamental breakdown in the quality of governance lead to poor service delivery and a failure to provide essential necessities, such as food, clean

water, and healthcare. This directly contradicts the state's obligation to protect and provide for its citizens under the social contract.

2. Widespread Insecurity:

The prevalence of banditry, insurgency, and kidnapping across various regions creates a climate of fear and demonstrates the state's failure to secure the lives and property of its citizens, a core component of the social contract.

3. Culture of Ethnicity and Power Imbalance:

Nigeria's diverse ethnic and regional makeup often leads to the politicization of ethnicity and an uneven distribution of power and resources, fostering mutual mistrust and tension rather than a unified commitment to the public good.¹¹⁶

Danjibo is of the view that ethnicity is too fluid a concept to be encased in a single definition. To buttress this point, he cited the case of the Yorubas of southwestern Nigeria who see themselves at the macro level as an ethnic stock when contending with the Igbos of the south-east, and Hausa/Fulani of the north. However, at the micro-level, the same Yorubas see themselves as belonging to different ethnocultural identities such as Egba, Ijebu, Ife, Ijesha and others. Perhaps the three academic leanings of ethnicity attest to the

¹¹⁶ Osaghae, E.E. (1991). "A Re-examination of the Concept of Ethnicity in Africa as an Ideology of Inter-Elite Competition," in *African Study Monograph*, 12 (1, June 43-60).

perspective that ethnicity as a concept is neither 'here nor there'; but always in a state of flux. These three theories are primordialism, constructivism, and instrumentalism

4. Lack of Accountability:

A significant deficit in government accountability, coupled with a lack of commitment to the rule of law, means that politicians and public officials are often not held responsible for their actions or inactions. This erodes trust and makes citizens question the legitimacy of the government's authority.

5. Inadequate Public Service Delivery and Infrastructure:

A consistent pattern of poor maintenance, infrastructural decay, and inadequate policies militates against the effective execution of public services. This failure to deliver on basic needs and public goods further weakens the social contract and fuels discontent.

CHAPTER FOUR

EVALUATION, SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

4.1 EVALUATION

Jean-Jacques Rousseau remains one of the most important political philosophers of the Enlightenment, whose *Social Contract* continues to shape modern political theory. Rousseau's central thesis is that legitimate political authority does not derive from coercion or divine right but from an agreement freely entered into by individuals who constitute themselves into a political community¹¹⁷. The essence of this contract is the creation of a "general will" that represents the collective interest of the citizens. This idea raises important questions about the foundation of political legitimacy, the nature of freedom, and the obligations of rulers and citizens.

¹¹⁷ Rousseau, J. J. (2002), *The Social Contract* (G. D. H. Cole, Trans.). (New York: Dover Publications), p. 23.

In evaluating Rousseau's thought, this project examines its relevance to the Nigerian socio-political culture, considering both its contributions and limitations.

Rousseau's theory is founded on the belief that "man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains"¹¹⁸. The chains symbolize oppressive political structures that deny individuals their natural liberty. Rousseau argues that political legitimacy is possible only when individuals collectively surrender their natural rights to form a body politic governed by the general will. This general will is not merely the sum of private interests but the expression of what is best for the whole community¹¹⁹. Rousseau therefore defends a form of radical democracy in which sovereignty resides with the people and cannot be alienated. Nigeria's political history provides fertile ground for testing Rousseau's ideas. The colonial state imposed by Britain was not the product of any social contract but of conquest and exploitation¹²⁰. Post-independence Nigeria has witnessed authoritarian rule, military coups, electoral malpractice, and corruption, all of which have widened the gap between rulers and the ruled. Rousseau's insistence that true political authority must rest on popular sovereignty highlights the illegitimacy of governance in Nigeria whenever it fails to reflect the will of the people. This evaluation suggests that Rousseau's critique provides a philosophical framework for understanding Nigeria's persistent crisis of legitimacy.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹¹⁹ Bertram, C. (2012). *Rousseau and The Social Contract*, (London: Routledge), p. 66.

¹²⁰ Ake, C. (1996), *Democracy and Development in Africa*. (Washington D.C. Brookings Institution Press), p. 71.

A significant limitation in applying Rousseau's theory to Nigeria lies in the challenge of defining the "general will." Rousseau presupposed a relatively unified polity, but Nigeria is characterized by deep ethnic, religious, and regional divisions. In practice, political decisions in Nigeria are often determined by sectional interests and patronage networks rather than a genuine commitment to the common good. Nevertheless, Rousseau's idea remains relevant as a normative ideal, calling Nigerian political actors to transcend divisive loyalties in pursuit of national unity and collective welfare.¹²¹

Rousseau's critique of inequality as corrosive to freedom resonates with Nigeria's socio-economic realities. Despite its vast resources, Nigeria suffers from extreme poverty, unemployment, and inequality, with wealth concentrated in the hands of a few elites.¹²² Rousseau would argue that such inequality erodes the foundation of civic freedom and undermines the possibility of a genuine social contract¹²³. Thus, Rousseau's theory provides a philosophical justification for addressing economic injustice as a prerequisite for meaningful political freedom in Nigeria.

4.2 SUMMARY

¹²¹ Ojo. E. O. (2008), *Nigeria's Democracy and the Crisis of Political Instability: The Way Forward*". *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, Vol 2, No. 1, pp. 1-9.

¹²² Rousseau, J. J. *Op. Cit.*, p. 95.

¹²³ David, L.W. (2000), "*Rousseau and the General Will*" in *Journal of History of Ideas* Vol.66, No.3, ed. Donald R. Kelly, (Baltimore: Hopkins University Press), 384.

The first chapter sets the foundation of the study by introducing the concept of social contract theory as a philosophical framework that explains the origin and legitimacy of political authority. It highlights the central problem of governance, political legitimacy, and the relationship between citizens and the state. The chapter also situates Rousseau within the broader tradition of social contract theorists like Hobbes and Locke, while emphasizing his unique contributions. Additionally, the scope, objectives, and methodology of the research are presented, showing how Rousseau's ideas are relevant for understanding political and social structures, especially within the Nigerian context. The chapter justifies why Rousseau's philosophy provides a meaningful lens to interrogate Nigeria's socio-political culture.

The second chapter explores Rousseau's social contract theory in detail. It explains how Rousseau believed that human beings, originally free and equal in the state of nature, gradually became corrupted by inequality and domination as societies developed. To resolve these problems, Rousseau proposed the idea of a "social contract" where individuals collectively agree to form a political community guided by the *general will*. Unlike Hobbes' emphasis on absolute authority and Locke's emphasis on natural rights, Rousseau stressed collective sovereignty, freedom, and equality. His idea of the general will ensures that laws reflect the common interest, thereby legitimizing political authority. This chapter carefully unpacks Rousseau's arguments and positions him as a central thinker in modern political philosophy.

The third chapter applies Rousseau's theory to Nigeria's contemporary socio-political realities. It examines the challenges of governance, corruption, weak institutions, and the disconnect between leaders and citizens, comparing them with Rousseau's demand for

governance based on the general will. The chapter argues that if Nigerian politics were guided by Rousseau's principles of collective sovereignty, equality, and accountability, many of the nation's democratic struggles could be addressed. Furthermore, it considers how Rousseau's ideas of freedom, justice, and the rule of law resonate with Nigeria's need for inclusive governance and active citizen participation. The chapter ultimately shows the enduring relevance of Rousseau's theory in building a more just and democratic Nigerian society.

The final chapter critically evaluates Rousseau's theory, acknowledging its strengths and limitations. While Rousseau offers valuable insights on popular sovereignty, freedom, and collective responsibility, critics note that his idea of the general will can sometimes be vague or manipulated by leaders. The chapter also assesses how far his philosophy can be practically applied in Nigeria, given the complexities of ethnic diversity, political instability, and entrenched corruption. In conclusion, the research affirms that Rousseau's social contract remains an important philosophical guide for promoting social justice, political accountability, and citizen-centered governance in Nigeria. It suggests that for Nigeria to achieve genuine democracy and stability, principles of mutual agreement, civic responsibility, and collective decision-making, as emphasized by Rousseau, should be prioritized.

4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

One key recommendation is the need to strengthen participatory democracy in Nigeria. Rousseau emphasized that true political authority derives from the people's collective agreement expressed through the general will. For Nigeria, this means creating stronger mechanisms for citizen involvement beyond elections, such as civic education, community forums, and

transparent consultations on policy matters. Enhancing citizen participation would help close the gap between government and the governed, fostering legitimacy and accountability in governance.

Another recommendation is the promotion of national unity over sectional interests. Nigeria's political culture is often fragmented along ethnic and religious lines, undermining the possibility of a true general will. Rousseau's insistence on prioritizing the common good suggests the need for policies that discourage ethnic patronage and promote inclusive governance. Strengthening national identity through fair representation, equitable distribution of resources, and inclusive policymaking would encourage citizens to see themselves as part of a collective political community. Addressing socio-economic inequality should also be a central priority. Rousseau warned that inequality corrupts freedom and weakens social bonds. Nigeria's widespread poverty and elite domination hinder democratic consolidation and alienate the majority of citizens. Policies focused on wealth redistribution, job creation, quality education, and accessible healthcare would help reduce inequality and strengthen the foundations of a genuine social contract where all citizens feel represented and protected.

Finally, Nigeria must focus on institutional reforms to prevent the abuse of power. Rousseau's theory highlights the dangers of rulers who act in their private interest rather than the general will. Nigeria's history of corruption and authoritarianism reveals the urgency of building stronger democratic institutions that ensure checks and balances, uphold the rule of law, and protect civil liberties. Institutional accountability, coupled with active civil society oversight, would safeguard against the manipulation of power and bring governance closer to Rousseau's vision of legitimacy.

4.4 CONCLUSION

Rousseau's *Social Contract* provides a powerful philosophical framework for interrogating the foundations of political authority and legitimacy in any society, including Nigeria. His insistence that sovereignty resides with the people and that political order is only legitimate when it reflects the collective will offers a profound critique of Nigeria's socio-political realities. From colonial imposition to post-independence governance, Nigerian political culture has often been shaped by coercion, corruption, and elite dominance rather than genuine consent of the governed. This has left a gap between rulers and the ruled, undermining both democracy and development. Rousseau's ideas, though conceived in a different historical and cultural context, resonate strongly with Nigeria's ongoing struggles for accountability, participation, and justice.

The application of Rousseau's theory in Nigeria is not without its challenges. His notion of the "general will" presupposes a relatively cohesive and unified polity, whereas Nigeria is marked by deep ethnic, religious, and regional divides. The fragmentation of political loyalty along sectional lines has often prevented the emergence of a collective national interest. Yet, while Nigeria may not easily embody Rousseau's ideal of a homogenous political community, his emphasis on subordinating private and sectional interests to the common good remains highly relevant. It provides an aspirational vision for Nigerian leaders and citizens alike, reminding them that democracy cannot thrive where ethnic patronage and corruption override national priorities.

Rousseau's critique of inequality is particularly significant in light of Nigeria's socio-economic realities. He maintained that inequality is the root of many political problems, as it

fosters domination, dependency, and alienation. In Nigeria, extreme wealth concentration among elites and widespread poverty among the masses have weakened the social fabric, breeding resentment and undermining trust in political institutions. By stressing the link between equality and freedom, Rousseau's philosophy highlights the need for Nigeria to pursue policies that reduce poverty, promote social justice, and ensure fair distribution of resources. Without addressing inequality, the Nigerian state cannot claim to be based on any genuine social contract.

Rousseau's political theory also has its limits when transposed to Nigeria's context. His preference for direct democracy is impractical in a large, diverse, and populous country like Nigeria. Representative democracy remains the most feasible model, though it must be reformed to reflect greater accountability and responsiveness. Moreover, Rousseau's abstract notion of the general will may be open to manipulation, particularly in a country where political elites often exploit ideology for personal or sectional gain. Despite these limitations, the value of Rousseau's theory lies not in its direct applicability but in its critical function. It provides Nigerians with philosophical tools to assess the failures of their political culture and to imagine alternative possibilities for a more just and inclusive society.

Rousseau's *Social Contract* underscores the fact that political authority should be grounded in the will of the people, aimed at the common good, and tempered by equality and freedom. Nigeria's socio-political culture, though plagued by challenges of corruption, inequality, and fragmentation, can still draw inspiration from Rousseau's vision. The task is not to replicate Rousseau's model wholesale but to adapt its principles to Nigeria's unique realities. By cultivating participatory democracy, promoting social justice, strengthening institutions, and

nurturing a sense of collective responsibility, Nigeria can move closer to fulfilling the ideals of a true social contract. In this way, Rousseau's philosophy remains a timeless and relevant guide for Nigeria's democratic development and its aspiration to build a society that reflects the sovereignty and dignity of its people.

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