

JOHN STUART MILL'S UTILITARIANISM IN NATION-BUILDING: A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA SINCE 1999

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ABSTRACT: Humans, by nature, desire happiness. They intrinsically desire nothing that is not happiness or its part or a means of happiness. Thus, happiness is more or less the overriding principle of human action and life. However, the character and quality of a society largely determine its organisation and the form of happiness the citizens seek to enjoy. Regrettably, despite all efforts toward nation-building and development by scholars and successive governments in Nigeria, genuine unity, sustainable development, and indeed happiness are still a mirage in the lives of most citizens. Hence, the current study has attempted a critical evaluation of nation-building process within the frame of democratic governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. On the basis of the nation's political landscape, this paper proposes JS Mill's utilitarianism as an essential tool for achieving long-lasting solutions to various challenges associated with democracy, nation-building, development and genuine happiness of the citizenry. Methodologically, it adopted a documentary method of data collection in which relevant information was extracted from textbooks, journal articles, conference papers, etc. Analysis was performed within the ambit of Mill's utilitarian principles via qualitative content analysis method. The study highlights the gap between theoretical ideals and practical governance and how utilitarian principles can inform policy decisions aimed at improving the overall well-being of the population. Thus, it contends that genuine application of Mill's utilitarianism, offers Nigeria the opportunity to recreate a society that centres on the value, genuine happiness and prosperity of its people as a nation.

Keywords: Democratic Governance; Genuine Happiness; Holistic Education; JS Mill's Utility; Nation-Building

INTRODUCTION

Indeed, the sustainable development of any given society and the happiness of people therein depend on the level of unity and peaceful coexistence that exist among the people (Zachariah & Olisah, 2020). Unsurprisingly, political philosophers and leaders from time immemorial have deeply reflected on the government and its structures and operations. Over the years, many models and forms of government have emerged. One of which is democracy – a system of government associated with a wider array of individual liberties and legal rights, such as the right to assemble, freedom of expression, freedom of worship, property rights, adherence to legal principles, and a government accountable to the people's wishes, typically enforced through legislation, the extensive political procedures of establishing a state, and the

establishment of liberal policies and judicial systems, which must be harmonised to establish a meaningful democracy (OCDP, 2009; Ozohu-Suleiman, 2016; Alo & Zachariah, 2024).

Even as democracy is widely seen as appealing on a global scale, its ability to thrive in diverse cultures remains a challenge. In today's democratic era, the concept of democracy is universally attractive, yet its actual practice varies greatly depending on the unique perspectives of different societies. The way constitutional structures address these societal differences is influenced not only by the importance of specific divisions within society but also by the presence of a "liberal ethos" that safeguards minority rights from being overshadowed by the majority. In other words, many countries around the world have adopted democracy, but many countries in the Global South with diverse cultures and beliefs face various challenges related to governance, nation-building and development (Fukuyama, 2004; Omotola, 2010; Ezeaku et al., 2023). In Nigeria, poverty, ignorance, and diseases are obvious obstacles that hinder the moral development of citizens. These challenges, along with economic exclusion, oppression, tyranny, poor governance, corruption, and a lack of social justice, contribute to a sense of moral and political despair within the framework of democratic governance.

Therefore, the moral dilemma in this domain suggests the need for a focused debate on moral and social theory, as it pertains to nation-building and democratic governance. These issues, which continue to plague most emerging democracies, provide us with an opportunity to explore the merits of utilitarianism in nation-building process of Nigeria within the context of democratic governance. Particularly, it seeks to highlight the importance of maximising collective happiness and ensuring fair distribution of resources in addressing issues like corruption, inequality, and civic engagement. By analysing governance through a utilitarian lens, the study aims to identify actionable strategies that can improve public welfare and contribute to nation-building, promote qualitative happiness of the citizenry, enhance national unity and sustainable development in the country. This will serve as the basis for this research.

Structurally, the remaining parts of the paper is discussed in the following main headings: (a) Methodology, JS Mill's (1806-1873): towards understanding Mill's basic principles of utility; (b) Historisation context and challenges of nation-building in Nigeria; (c) The democratic government in Nigeria since 1999: challenges and opportunities; (d) Democracy and Governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic; (e) Application of JS Mill's utilitarianism to Nigeria's nation-building process; (f) Summary of findings and policy implications.

Methodology

This study relies on a secondary source of data. Hence, it adopted a historical research design and employed a documentary method of data collection, in which relevant information was sieved from printed and internet materials such as textbooks, journal articles, and conference proceedings, newspapers. The analysis was anchored on JS Mill's utilitarian principles and used qualitative content analysis strategy.

Method of data collection: Selection criteria for documents utilised in the study

From the foregoing, the following basic criteria, as explained by different scholars were carefully considered in selecting documents for this study (Bowen, 2009; Patton, 2015; Cresswell & Poth, 2017; Krippendorff, 2018; Flick, 2018):

Relevance: We ensure that the documents selected for this research are directly related and meaningfully provide insights into the subject-matter being studied.

Authorship: Only reliable documents with credible authors were used, since reliable sources enhance the validity of findings of a study.

Context: Similarly, we assessed the social, cultural, and historical context surrounding the documents, as it can affect their content and interpretation.

Diversity: A variety of documents were included in order to capture multiple perspectives and experiences related to the research topic and problem. This significantly promotes a comprehensive understanding of the study.

Richness of content: Only documents that provide detailed, substantive information were selected for the research. This is because qualitative analysis thrives on depth rather than breadth.

Availability and time frame: The documents were selected based on their availability and accessibility within the timeframe for the study.

In view of the above, diverse documents were assessed and related relevant data extracted from reliable sources based on the richness of the content, their context, availability and timeframe. Interestingly, it is imperative to note that through relational content analysis, we explore how different actions were perceived by most Nigerians within the periscopic lens of Mill's utility. This aids to reveal public sentiment regarding specific actions, helping to determine how democratic governance in the Fourth Republic contributes to national unity, development and the overall happiness of the citizenry.

Method of data analysis: Qualitative content analysis

Generally, content analysis is a research technique utilised to identify patterns in recorded communication/materials. To carryout content analysis, data is systematically gathered from a variety of texts, including written, oral, and visual sources such as journals, books, newspapers, speeches, web content, photographs and films. Basically, this method divided into: (i) Quantitative content analysis, and (ii) Qualitative content analysis. The former focuses on counting and measuring, while the latter focuses on interpretation and understanding of a particular phenomenon or social reality from various documentaries. In both approaches, words, themes, and concepts within the texts are categorised or "coded" before analysing the findings (Luo, 2023). Specifically, this study adopted qualitative content analysis. As noted by some scholars, it is an approach that involves empirical, methodological analysis of texts within their context, following content analytic rules and step-by-step models without quantification. It also involves qualitative data reduction and sense-making efforts to identify core consistencies and meanings within a volume of

qualitative materials (Mayring, 2001; Patton, 2002). According to Zhang and Wildemuth (2009, p. 1):

Qualitative content analysis goes beyond merely counting words or extracting objective content from texts to examine meanings, themes and patterns that may be manifest or latent in a particular text. It allows researchers to understand social reality in a subjective but scientific manner.

Furthermore, qualitative content analysis's selection criteria are unlike quantitative content analysis which requires that the data are selected using random sampling or other probabilistic techniques. Rather, qualitative content analysis typically involves purposively selecting texts that can provide insight into the research question or problem being investigated. In other words, it focuses on identifying unique themes that showcase the various meanings of the phenomenon, instead of emphasising the statistical significance of specific texts or concepts (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). In relations to the present study, this strategy is significant in that it provides qualitative insights that are essential for understanding their wider implications on societal happiness and well-being of most citizens.

The content analysis method serves as a valuable tool for applying JS Mill's utilitarianism in nation-building process by providing a systematic way to evaluate the consequences of content on public perception, policy, social outcomes, democratic institutions, decision-making process, etc. It provides the avenue to assess and advocate for improvement/changes that promote the greater good, aligning findings with the core tenets of utilitarian principles. Therefore, we systematically evaluate the utility of different public policies, government's actions, etc. based on their themes, social impacts and contextual narratives from various sources as earlier noted.

JS Mill's (1806-1873): Towards Understanding Mill's Basic Principles of Utility

Basically, utilitarianism is a social and political thought that holds that every human being seeks happiness. As noted by Mukherjee and Ramaswamy (2007, p. 266), this suggests that "pleasure alone was good and that the only right action was that which produced the greatest happiness of the greatest number." However, Epicures, the Greek thinker noted that "individuals sometimes pursue pleasure wisely, and at other times unwisely", which Bentham and others agreed with this submission. To address this, the Benthamite perspective advocates and seeks to apply the principle in "policies of the state, welfare measures and for administrative, penal and legislative reforms in society." As a normative ethical theory that assesses the moral worth of actions, utilitarianism has been described as a form of consequentialism, which implies that the morality of an action depends on the general outcome. Denoting that, "the ends justify the means" provided that they lead to overall happiness.

However, John Stuart Mill's thesis of the theory as contained in intellectual works titled *Utilitarianism* (1863) and *On Liberty* (1859) – a refined version of earlier views of utility by Jeremy Bentham and James Mill, who see happiness in terms of [quantitative] pleasure and pain. To Mill, happiness and the dignity of human beings, rather than the Benthamite principle of pleasure, are the essence and principal end of life. Happiness, according to him, denotes "perfection of human nature, cultivation of moral virtues, lofty aspirations, total

control over one's appetites/desires as well as recognition of individual and collective interests" (Mukherjee & Ramaswamy, 2007, p. 324).

Furthermore, even though Mill maintains the basic principle of utility, he nevertheless differentiates between higher and lower pleasures. In his view, greater human pleasure implies an increase not only in the quantity but also in the quality of goods enjoyed, which to him is over and above the quantitative notion of utility – the lower pleasure or happiness attributed to the Benthamite idea of the theory. He believes that human beings, the happiness they desire or aspire to, are capable of being directed by intellectual and moral pleasure, which transcends the physical pleasure they share with lower animals (Mukherjee & Ramaswamy, 2007). It was based on the above that Mill is being quoted of, as he views that:

It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied. It is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. If the fool or the pig is of a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question. The other party, in comparison, knows both sides (Mill, 1976, p. 9).

In Mill's utility, happiness *per se* is not just a particular state of mind or feeling but also the quality of life in the organised and active expression of one's powers and capacities. It is a function identified with "good", human endeavour, virtue or excellence (Mukherjee & Ramaswamy, 2007, 108). For Mill, "...social welfare is a matter of concern to all men of good will, and [so] freedom, integrity, self-respect, and personal distinction..." not only contribute to human happiness but are also intrinsically good in themselves (Sabine and Thorson, 1973, p. 641). According to him, "the chief end of life is the happiness and dignity of *man*" but not Benthamite's idea of happiness, which is commensurable with quantitative pleasure irrespective of its *quality*. Although Mill maintains the basic principle of "greatest happiness of the greatest number", he viewed happiness as perfection of human nature, cultivation of moral virtues and lofty aspirations, total control over one's appetites and desires and recognition of individual and collective interests. It also refers to the ability of a person to discover his/her innate powers and develops them while exercising their human abilities of autonomous thought and action, i.e., liberty, the "prerequisite for leading a good, worthy and dignified life" (Mukherjee & Ramaswamy, 2007, p. 321-347; Njoku, 2019, p. 357-377). Thus, Mill's definition of human happiness transcends not only the mere increase in quantity but also the quality of goods enjoyed since the *Homo sapiens* are capable of demonstrating "intellectual and moral pleasures" and that prove them superior to other species of mammals.

Mill places high premiums not only on human beings or the quantity of their happiness but also on the quality of individual members who collectively form society. As noted by Mukherjee and Ramaswamy (2007, p. 324-325), Mill regarded individual self-development and diversity (unconventional opinion) as the ultimate ends, important components of human happiness and the principal ingredients of individual and social progress. This does not, in any way, limit the fact that the individual or people could sacrificially do what seems good for the society other than for themselves. It is imperative to note that the sentiment of the majority in a majoritarian democracy would suppress and prevail over that of minority, especially in cases of "offences against public decency"; beyond this, however, his principle of utility – i.e., "ultimate appeal on all ethical questions" – holds that "minorities must be granted the freedom of thought and expression, and the right to live as they pleased" (Mukherjee & Ramaswamy, 2007, p. 325).

In line with the above, therefore, Mill viewed the state as an instrument for the transformation and improvement of the capacity of every individual. This corroborates Aristotle's perception of the state as the only means through which *citizens actualise* their potential since it is only a ghost that exists in a vacuum. In other words, Mill believes that the state plays a fundamental role in shaping the ends or happiness of every individual member of its jurisdiction through education. He insists that all creative faculties and the great goods of life could be developed only through freedom and experiments in living (Mukherjee & Ramaswamy, 2007; Njoku, 2019). According to Mukherjee and Ramaswamy (2007, p. 328), Mill believed in the individual's capacity for education, which he meant not only intellectual training or cultivation of critical enquiry but also the training of individual character. Moreover, the individual character in Mill's view is a consequence of "civilisation, instruction, education and culture" (Mill, 1976, p. 115).

In general, therefore, freedom, and indeed happiness according to Mill's utility, goes beyond the absence of restraints. It also includes the ability of *every* individual member of society to cultivate some desirable, genuine qualities that could further provide them with the ability to exercise good choices that affect not only their immediate needs and environment but also the prosperous life of their future generation; otherwise, the human being does not differ from apes. In summary, the significant aspects of Mill's and indeed major departure from Benthamite utilitarianism are outlined in the following concepts (Mill, 1859, 1863; Nwoko, 2006; Mukherjee & Ramaswamy, 2007; Njoku, 2019):

Impartiality: Mill holds impartiality in high esteem, in that every individual's happiness counts equally in every form of utilitarian decision-making. This principle aims to dissuade every form of bias and selfishness.

Qualitative and quantitative happiness: Inasmuch as Mill, in a way, accepts hedonism, which posits that pleasure and the avoidance of pain are the only intrinsic goods, he redefined Benthamite's hedonistic approach, which perceives all pleasures as equal in value by identifying higher and lower perspectives of pleasure. In his conception, the former include intellectual and moral pleasures, whereas the latter are more bodily (physical) and thus qualitatively lower than the former.

Rule utilitarianism: This concept (*rule utilitarianism*) is associated with JS Mill's utility, which holds that "actions should be guided by rules that, if [diligently] followed by everyone, would lead to the greatest happiness." On the other hand, Benthamite's utility is described as *act utilitarianism*, which directly evaluates individuals' actions on their consequences squarely in terms of pleasure and pain. Therefore, Mill's perspective shifts from appraising individual actions to evaluating the utility of rules that govern human behaviour.

Moral progress: In relation to the above, Mill believes that societies could improve over time by modifying their understanding of happiness and justice, since utilitarianism goes beyond being a tool for evaluating individual actions to a broader moral framework for guiding social and political reforms. In addition, this is moral progress for him.

Individual rights: As advanced in his *On Liberty*, JS Mill stressed that protecting individual freedoms is very paramount for promoting happiness. To him, the autonomy and liberty of every individual in society play a significant role in human flourishing and should thus be respected irrespective of whether limiting them could result in greater overall utility.

Importantly, utilitarianism in general is not without weakness. It has been criticised, among others, for emphasising too much on predicting uncertain consequences, and many lead to justifying morally questionable actions on the basis of overall outcomes. This paper argues that JS Mill's utilitarian theory has a high propensity to enthrone national cohesion and, indeed, the genuine happiness of a greater number of citizens.

However, the usefulness of utilitarianism as a tool of analysis cannot be overemphasised. In fact, many scholars have attempted the application of the theory in different studies. In their study for instance, Ganiyu and Adewunmi (2015) opined that the principles of utilitarianism can guide policymakers in creating frameworks that prioritise public welfare over partisan interests. They argue that successful governance involves implementing policies that benefit the greatest number of citizens. In Nigeria, despite the democratic framework in place, governance has encountered significant obstacles. Scholars such as Ojo (2013) argue that the pursuit of the greatest good is often undermined by widespread corruption and a lack of accountability in political institutions. Similarly, Imoize (2014) shares this view, highlighting how the failure to consolidate democratic values has caused disillusionment among the population which hinders the potential for collective well-being. Moreover, extant literature showed that governance in Nigeria is marked by ethnic divisions and regional disparities (Nnoli, 2008; Ayoob, 2013; Ezeaku et al., 2023), making the application of utilitarian principles somewhat difficult (Ojo, 2013). Ayoob (2013) explains how these divisions impede fair policy-making, leading to a governance system that often benefits specific groups at the expense of overall societal welfare. Assessing the behaviour of leaders in Nigeria from Mill's utilitarian philosophical lens, Ezugwu (2022, p. 23) reported that incessant selfish attitudes of Nigerian leaders which are manifested in various ways such as: embezzlement of public funds, vote buying, ballot box snatching, militarization of electoral processes, etc. The scholar further opined that Nigerian leaders involve themselves in these acts for their own selfish interests at the expense of the welfare of the general public. In another study, Eze (2018) noted that the "lack of meaningful engagement in the political process limits the ability of citizens to influence governance outcomes; thereby diminishing the collective well-being that utilitarianism seeks to achieve." These selfish attitudes of political leaders in Nigeria and their apparent manifestations have posed serious threat to peace and security in Nigeria.

These critiques by various scholars resonate with JS Mill's concern for justice and fairness, suggesting that good governance must address inequalities, disunity, welfare of the masses, etc. to truly manifest utilitarian principles. In what follows is a historicised context of Nigeria's nation-building process and related challenges.

Historisation Context and Challenges of Nation-building in Nigeria

First, nation-building simply refers to the process of structuring or forming a national identity using state power with the aim of unifying the citizenry, maintaining a harmonious political system, fostering economic development, promoting social cohesion through the establishment of strong political institutions and infrastructure, formulating and implementing policies that support inclusivity and so forth (Ake, 1996; Fukuyama, 2004). Specifically, Cloud Ake highlights that it encompasses a wide range of activities, which include creating effective governance structures, promoting national unity, developing infrastructure, ensuring the equitable distribution of resources, and creating inclusive policies that address the diverse needs of the population, particularly in multiethnic and religious settings. Similarly, he

further stated that education, economic empowerment, and social welfare programmes are crucial components of nation-building because they contribute to human capacity development and encourage a sense of belonging among the people.

Historically, the nation-building process in Nigeria since independence on October 1, 1960, has been shaped by a complex web of factors such as colonial legacy, cultural and religious differences, ethnic diversity, political institutions and governance. These factors are highlighted below.

Colonial legacy and Independence in Nigeria: Despite the fact that British colonial authority in Nigeria made some positive contributions to the nation's economy and political history, scholars have argued that colonial masters laid the foundation for many bedeviling challenges related to the nation-building process in the country (Falola & Heaton, 2008; Zachariah & Ngwu, 2023). According to this argument, the British colonial government employed a policy of indirect rule to govern the people through their respective traditional rulers and where there is none, or the existing local authority does not protect/promote imperialist interests, the colonial power created and implanted their stooges as leaders. The indirect rule system allows so-called traditional leaders to retain power while reinforcing existing social hierarchies. This system, according to Falola and Heaton (2008), created deep-seated divisions among various ethnic groups in the country, as the colonial administration treated regions differently on the basis of their economic and political interests.

Furthermore, Nigeria, at independence from her colonialist, is a system marked by entrenched regional and ethno-religious consciousness, as well as sociopolitical and economic disparities. Various scholars, such as Ekeh (1975), Osaghae (1998), Suberu (2001), Nnoli (2008), Achebe (2012), Agbiboa (2013), Zachariah and Ngwu (2024), highlighted some of these issues in their respective works. It was observed that post-independent Nigeria was characterised by political instabilities in which the simmering web of regional and ethnic tensions escalated and culminated in the Biafran-Nigerian Civil War, which lasted for more than two years (July 6, 1967–January 15, 1970), with its attendant bizarre story of the extermination of millions of people and destruction of property worth billions of naira (NGN). The Civil War, as noted in Achebe (2012), resulted from secessionist attempts to establish the Republic of Biafra by the people of the Southeastern region. The area today covers all five states (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo) of the Southeast geopolitical zone and some parts of the states that constitute the South-South geopolitical zone. Even though the federal military government eventually regained control over the area, the scars of the war have continued to run through the lane and length of the nation-building process in the country. In fact, since 1999, Nigeria has returned to democracy after the year of military interregnum, yet the country has been struggling to address the lingering negative impacts of colonialism and the Civil War via various policies, including decentralisation and economic reforms, which are aimed at fostering national cohesion.

Ethnic diversity and national cohesion: One of the common features of the Nigerian state is ethnic diversity—a contributing factor to the nation's unity and development challenges. The country is home to more than 250 ethnic groups, with Yorubas (west), Hausa-Fulani (north) and the Igbo people (east) dominating the economic and political landscapes of the country since independence. As Osaghae (1998) noted, there are other minority ethnic nationalities, such as Ijaw, Urhobo, Tiv, Nyankpa/Yeskwa, Eggon, Koro, Jukun, Gbagi, Jaba, and Idoma, across the federation. In fact, every state and local government area in Nigeria, including the

Federal Capital Territory (FCT)–Abuja, domiciled many ethnic groups within their respective domains. In each of these areas, one or two ethnic groups tend to dominate the economy and politics, whereas the rest unceasingly struggle for recognition and influence. To this effect, it has been observed that while this diversity is a source of cultural richness to the nation, it has, to a large extent, contributed to the challenges of national unity and cohesion. These challenges include but are not limited to unhealthy political competition, resource conflict, settler-indigeneship catastrophe, etc. (Suberu, 2001; Lewis, 2011; Nwanegbo et al., 2014). Similarly, ethnic and regional competitions often undermine efforts toward nation-building. For example, political power struggles in post-independent Nigeria witnessed the formation of political parties with ethnoregional colouration that have continued to hunt for national unity (Nnoli, 2008; Lewis, 2011; Achebe, 2012). Thus, efforts such as the Federal Character (FC) principle, National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), unity school programmes, Federal Revenue Mobilisation and Allocation Commission, etc., have been made by various administrations to promote national unity and cohesion. However, ethnic consciousness and its politicisation in different parts of the country remain challenging forces in Nigeria's nation-building process (Suberu, 2001; Nnoli, 2008; Lewis, 2011; Tom & Ataide, 2021).

Religio-politics and national unity: In contemporary Nigeria, it is seemingly difficult (if not impossible) to separate religion from politics and vice versa due to their high level of interplay. Aside from its composition of diverse ethnic and sociocultural groups, the country is demographically divided into various religious groups and competing denominations with antagonistic tendencies. As highlighted in Falola (1998), since independence, Christianity and Islam are the two dominant religions, with most citizens in the southern part (combine) being predominantly Christian faithful, while most of them in the north are Muslims. Religion colouration to virtually every political or national issue, rather than being a symbol of peace and unity, has created a complex web that intersects with ethnicity and regional identity and further intensifies political and social tension, hostility and violence in the polity (Falola, 1998; Agbibo, 2013; Zachariah and Olisah, 2020; Campbell, 2021; Alo and Zachariah, 2024). This has, on many occasions, rendered many citizens gullible to various religious opportunists and over ambitious politicians, who often exploit religious affinity to build and gain political offices at the detriment of peaceful coexistence and national unity. Regrettably, this has often led to unnecessary politicisation of religious matters and/or religionisation of political issues that, ordinarily, should not be meddled. For example, Agbibo (2013) noted that the adoption of Sharia law in several northern states in the early 2000s heightened religious tensions that sparked violence in various parts of the country. Another example is the Boko Haram and ISWAP (Islamic State, West African Province) extremism, which became pronounced in 2009.

In line with the above, some researchers believe that some religious leaders have become so powerful that they not only influence or shape political decisions or policies but also play significant roles in shaping electoral processes and outcomes, the appointment of individuals as heads/members of a particular cabinet, parastatals, boards, etc., just to mention but a few (Campbell, 2021; Alo & Zachariah, 2024). The implication is that the selection of political leaders is no longer based on merit and credibility or political issues and policies considered according to their quality and impacts but rather is tied to regional and ethno-religious sentiments. Although governments at different levels have made efforts to promote interfaith dialogue and harmonious relationships, the interplay between religion and politics has continued to truncate the nation-building process in Nigeria.

Political institutions and governance in nation-building: Political institutions and governance structures are fundamental to the nation-building process of any nation. In the context of Nigeria, political institutions have evolved alongside governance challenges, which constitute a formidable obstacle to nation-building and national development since independence. In light of the above, Suberu (2001) noted that Nigeria has witnessed multiple transitions between military dictators and civilian leaders, with the military intervening in politics on account of perceived corruption and inefficiencies on the part of civilian governments. However, although these military dictators frequently promised economic prosperity, political stability and unity, they successfully worsened governance structure challenges as well as deepened the division and bad economic situation of the country.

Furthermore, the military government of Gen. Abdulsami Abubakr (Rtd.) dusted the 1979 Constitution with some touches of that of 1983 and presented it as the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, popularly known as the 1999 Constitution. This Constitution established (maintained), among other things, a federal system in which a democratically elected president is vested with strong executive powers. The Constitution also establishes a complex judicial system with the Supreme Court as the apex court of the land. Similarly, it establishes a two-chamber National Assembly consisting of a 360 Federal House of Representatives and 109 Senators from the 36 States of the Federation and FCT-Abuja (Suberu, 2001). Similarly, the federal system has continued to struggle to balance the different competing demands of various ethnic groups and regions.

However, the Constitution has been criticised in many respects, including being a “military package” as well as an over-boated exclusive legislative list and a concentration of power in the hands of the central government, which often lead to unnecessary tensions with state and local governments over resource control and what have you. The quest for resource control and perceived political marginalisation, coupled with bad governance, led to the rise of various militant groups and insurgencies, such as MASSOB, MEND, OPC, IPOB, Boko Haram and other criminal groups in the country (Watts, 2004; Agbiboa, 2013). Additionally, government attempts to address these challenges often lead to excesses, human rights violations and extrajudicial killings of citizens (Onyemaobi, Zachariah, Ngwu & Ugbagu, 2023). All these instances indicate that Nigeria has struggled to create stable and effective political institutions capable of managing its diverse population and complex web of socioeconomic and political challenges. Other efforts, such as the establishment of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), and reforms on the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), have aimed at strengthening political institutions, improving electoral processes, enhancing transparency and promoting accountability in democratic governance (Oluwole, 2013; Campbell, 2021). Nevertheless, progress has been very slow, if not very elusive, because the economy continues to bite harder on the masses, while insecurity and unemployment, underemployment, the inflation rate, absolute poverty, etc., are increasing greatly by the day. Worse still, the real income and sources of livelihood of average citizens remained stagnant or dwindled, making the nation-building process more complex and difficult to attain. The next section briefly highlights various challenges and opportunities for democratic governance in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic.

The Democratic Government in Nigeria since 1999: Challenges and Opportunities

Nigeria turned a new leaf of history on May 29, 1999, when a new civilian administration led by the former military head of state, Olusegun Obasanjo, was the president of the country. This resulted from the death of Gen. Sani Abacha in June 1998 and the conduct of democratic general elections on February 27, 1999, organised by Abacha's successor, Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar (Rtd.). This ended the many years of military rule in the country (Ihonvbere, 1999; Suberu, 2001). One of the most remarkable features of the Fourth Republic is that in the history of the country, it is the longest civilian administration without military intervention in politics (i.e., from 1999 to date [2024]). In other words, the country has experienced 25 years of uninterrupted democracy within which successive democratically elected leaders have emerged with peaceful transfers of power, including from one political party to another, particularly at the federal and state levels of governance. However, a greater number of citizens, and indeed the country, have been grappling with daunting challenges, which include but are not limited to systemic corruption, bad governance, high levels of insecurity, persistent ethno-religious tensions, regional identity, absolute poverty and swift dwindling down of living standards. These, in no small measures, impede the nation-building process and development of the country.

Notably, within this era, the following political events and transitions were recorded, particularly at the national level of governance, within which are our challenges and opportunities (Omotola, 2010; Olakunle et al., 2019; Adeyemi, 2023):

- 1) ***President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration:*** This administration, which governed the country between May 29, 1999, and May 29, 2007, was not without expectations, achievements and weaknesses. In its attempt to alleviate the living standards of the masses and redeem the economy and image of the country at international fora, the government of Obasanjo focused on various socioeconomic reforms, such as the establishment of anticorrupt agencies, namely, the EFCC and the ICPC. It also embarked on debt relief efforts, as well as poverty alleviation and other social security programmes (Oluwole, 2013; Compbell, 2021). In fact, Obasanjo was known for his *Shuttle diplomacy*. Nevertheless, the administration was criticised in many respects, such as the attempts to extend the constitutional "goal post" of a 4-year tenure with a maximum of two terms in office to another six years, human rights violations, corruption, poor electoral process, etc.
- 2) ***Umar Musa Yar'Adua/Goodluck Ebele Jonathan's administration:*** President Yar'Adua was declared the winner and sworn in from an election that was marred by a high level of irregularities such that the elected president acknowledged this. Ironically, although he (Yar'Adua) did not live long to complete his first term in office, he has been described by many Nigerians as the best leader Nigeria has ever had, at least in the 4th Republic. For example, he was the only president who did not increase the fuel pump price but rather reduced it from ₦75 to ₦65 (a 15.39% decrease) and ensured that it remained like that throughout his stewardship (AutoGirl, 2024). He also initiated many important policies that were subsumed into his "7-point Agenda", which focused on (i) power and energy, (ii) food security, (iii) wealth creation, (iv) the transport sector, (v) land reforms, (vi) education, and (vii) security (Gadzama, 2013). Although his health failed in 2010, late President Yar'Adua will always be remembered for his Niger Delta amnesty programme and electoral reforms aimed at uniting the country and restoring public trust in the government, which his Vice, Goodluck Jonathan, tried to sustain.

At the demise of his principal, His Excellency, President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan was sworn in on May 5, 2010, as the 14th president of the country to complete their 2007 presidential joined ticket, which ended on May 29, 2011. Meanwhile, he vied for the presidency in the 2011 general elections and won by a wide margin under the same political party—the People’s Democratic Party (PDP). As noted by Agbiboa (2013), President Jonathan’s administration made considerable gains through various reforms, including the power sector and the management of oil wealth, organising national conferences with the aim of addressing national questions, etc. However, this administration also suffered widespread criticisms because it was corrupt and ineffective in managing security concerns of the country, which was exacerbated by the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast. Nonetheless, Jonathan will ever be remembered for his unreserved ambition towards one and unified Nigeria, especially by not only calling and congratulating his opposition party flag bearer, President Muhammadu Buhari of All Progressive Change (APC), even before he was declared the winner of the 2015 elections by the INEC but also against all odds of uncertainties and contradictory speculations, ensuring that there was a smooth transition of power on May 29, 2015.

- 3) ***President Muhammadu Buhari’s administration:*** The election, declaration and swearing of Buhari as the Democratic President of Nigeria in 2015 involved great euphoria, admiration, hope and, of course, high expectations by many Nigerians. Gen. Buhari (Rtd.) who once ruled the country between December 31, 1983, and August 27, 1985, through military junta was handed over the mantle of leadership on May 29, 2015. He promised to squash corruption, eradicate poverty, eliminate insurgency within a few months in office, address insecurity, revitalize the economy, improve the value of naira in the international market, etc. Although President Buhari’s administration instituted different policies, including efforts to diversify the economy from over-dependent on crude oil to agriculture, his government has been criticised as the worst. During his administration, for example, the country experienced two economic recessions (in 2016 and 2020) (Mba, 2021, p. 15-23); high rates of inflation and unemployment alongside push and pull migrations (Olisah et al., 2022); persistent security threats from Boko Haram (prevalent in the northeast), banditry (prevalent in the northwest), nomadic herder-crop farmers clashes (mostly from north-central to south), upsurge vandalisation of oil pipelines (in the Niger Delta area); and secessionist movements by IPOB and OPC (in the southeast and west) accompanied by human rights violations and a lack of constitutionalism (Ahon et al., 2021; Iwuoha & Aniche, 2021; Onyemaobi et al., 2023; Zachariah & Ngwu, 2023). Amid the criticisms against his style of leadership, Buhari was re-elected in 2019 for another 4-year term. The administration was also criticised for bankrupting the nation, nepotism, policy summersault, lack of electoral integrity, including a high exchange rate and persistent fall of naira, etc. However, he was able to manage the country and peacefully transits power to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu in 2023, who won the election under the same APC platform (Campbell, 2021; Akiwale, 2021; Kale, 2021; Adeyemi, 2023).
- 4) ***President Bola A. Tinubu administration:*** The former executive governor of Lagos state (1999-2007), His Excellency, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, was elected president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in the February 25, 2023, general elections. Adeyemi (2023) reported that Tinubu’s government inherited a country grappling with severe economic challenges, widespread insecurity, demands for electoral reforms and restructuring. Shortly after swearing him into power, the president announced the complete removal of a petroleum (fuel) subsidy with an immediate effect. The implementation of this policy

increased the fuel price from ₦197 in May 2023 to a staggering price of approximately ₦870 in August 2024, with ripple effects on other aspects of the economy. This has, in no small measures, badly affected Nigerians, as the prices of commodities and essential goods, including pharmaceuticals and transportation, have increased, with between 100 and 700% hiking. Indeed, a greater number of citizens are living in penury as opposed to their expectations of improved dividends of democracy in a country that is said to be abundantly rich in natural resources.

Generally, the country has been grappling with many challenges, which are summarised as follows:

Security concerns have been a major challenge to Nigeria's democratic governance since 1999, with scholars extensively discussing the various forms of insecurity in the country. Boko Haram's insurgency in the northeast has resulted in numerous casualties and the displacement of millions, while banditry mostly in the northwest, herder-crop farmer conflicts, separatist movements, etc., have further strained the government's ability to maintain order (Agbiboa, 2013; Shuaibu et al., 2015; Ozohu-Suleiman, 2016; Iwuoha & Aniche, 2021; Onyemaobi et al., 2023; Zachariah & Ngwu, 2023; Onuoha et al., 2024). This persistent violence has eroded public trust in the government and hindered economic development, contributing to national-building and governance challenges. Similarly, despite the establishment of anticorruption agencies such as the EFCC, corruption remains a systemic conundrum in Nigeria. Rampant cases of embezzlement, bribery, and misuse of public funds continue to undermine democratic institutions and public confidence in governance. Moreover, the nation's economy heavily relies on oil, making it vulnerable to fluctuations in global oil prices. The economic downturn caused by falling oil prices in the mid-2010s and in 2020 led to a recession, highlighting the need for economic diversification. Consequently, poverty, unemployment, and inequality continue to be significant challenges despite efforts at economic reforms aimed at making the nation and its citizens prosper (Oluwole, 2013; Kale, 2021; Mba, 2021). Worse still, ethnic and religious diversity in Nigeria has been a source of tension, particularly in the context of political competition, resource control and allocation. In addition, electoral violence, ethnic militancy, and religious intolerance have periodically threatened national unity and stability. The integrity of Nigeria's elections has been repeatedly questioned due to several issues ranging from the intimidation of electorates to ballot-box snatching, manipulation of election results, vote-buying, militarisation of electoral process, etc. In view of these issues, reforms such as the use of card readers, BVAS, etc., were introduced to improve transparency and credibility, but these problems persist, casting doubt on the democratic process and related concerns (Suberu, 2007; Nwangwu et al., 2018; Olakunle et al., 2019; Mbah et al., 2020; Campbell, 2021; Oduola, 2023; Abada et al., 2023).

However, it is important to note that despite all these challenges, there are many opportunities that provide hope for the citizenry. These are highlighted as follows:

Democratic resilience: Despite challenges, Nigeria's Fourth Republic has shown resilience, with peaceful transitions of power in 2015 and 2023 marking significant achievements in a region (West Africa) once more plagued by coups and military rule. This resilience suggests that democratic norms are taking root, offering hope for further democratic consolidation in the country (Lewis, 2011).

Youth engagement: Nigeria's youthful population, with over half aged between 20 and 45, presents both challenges and opportunities. The #EndSARS protests in 2020 and the "#EndBadGovernanceinNigeria" protest in August 2024 demonstrate the potential for youth-led political engagement and reform advocacy. They highlight the resilience and democratic spirit of Nigerian people while showing just how much work remains to create a truly responsive and accountable government in the country. Therefore, by embracing and protecting this basic freedom (i.e., the right to peaceful protests), Nigeria can strengthen its democratic institutions and move towards a more just and equitable society. Harnessing this vigour could drive positive change and deepen democracy (Akinwale, 2021; ThisDay Nigeria, 2024).

Economic diversification and institutional reforms: Efforts to diversify Nigeria's economy away from oil dependence offer prospects for long-term stability and growth. The development of sectors such as agriculture, technology, and manufacturing could reduce vulnerability to external shocks and create jobs for the growing population. Ongoing initiatives to strengthen Nigeria's democratic institutions, including the judiciary, electoral bodies, and anticorrupt agencies, hold promise for improving governance (Oluwole, 2013; Kale, 2021).

Therefore, significant reforms cum genuine implementation of realistic policies in line with JS Mill's utilitarian principles will enhance transparency, accountability, responsiveness, and the rule of law, leading to more effective and equitable governance, national unity and sustainable development in the country. This, in Mill's conception can best be achieved in his "Best Representative Government" (i.e. representative democracy) in which he advocates proportional representation of diverse interests of the minority nationalities and truly promotes active participation in governance across all societal strata within the system. In such political system also, Mill believes that quality education of every citizen is necessary because an "informed electorates" is very essential for a well-functioning democracy (Njoku, 2019; Zachariah & Nnaji, 2024). But how can this be possible where the foundation is faulty? This prompts us into interrogating democracy and governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic with a view to relate the ideal democracy and practical governance as highlighted in the following.

Democracy and Governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

First, democracy is an ideological construct; as such, it is the practice of its doctrinal principles that gives democracy a life-wire in any human society. In other words, democracy is not practised in a vacuum, and, from the prism of behaviouralism, its acceptance and practice depend, to a high degree, on the character and qualitative orientation of a greater number of people in such a political community. In simple terms, the Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics (OCDP, 2009, p. 39) gives the Greek meaning of *dēmokratia* (democracy) as "Rule by the people. It further explained that "Since the people are rarely unanimous, democracy as a descriptive term is synonymous with majority rule." The fundamental questions regarding "majority rule" include the following (OCDP, 2009):

- "Who are to count as 'the people' and what is a 'majority' of them?"
- "Why (if at all) should majorities rule minorities?"
- Is it "direct or representative democracy"?

- “Is democracy merely majority rule or are other features necessarily part of the definition?”

Similarly, Shapiro, Dahl and Froomkin (2024, September 7) further opine that “if a popular government of or by the people is to be established” and for such democracy to continually exist in full practice for long, the following basic questions must be considered critically:

a) What is the appropriate unit or association within which a democratic government should be established? – Is it a town, city, country, business corporation, university, international organisation or all of these?

b) Assuming that a city, country or so is considered the appropriate association (*polis*), who, among the *dēmos* (people) therein, should enjoy full citizenship? – Is everybody in or every member of the polis entitled to “participate in governing it”? Or assuming children are excluded for obvious reasons, “should the *dēmos* include all adults” or a subset? If it is “a subset of the adult population, how small can the subset be before the association ceases to be a democracy and becomes something else”, such as gerontocracy, plutocracy, aristocracy, oligarchy, and militocracy (a prevalent phenomenon in countries with a long history of military interregnum)?

c) Similarly, assuming that a proper polis and *dēmos* have been determined, the question is “how are citizens to govern? What political organisations or institutions will they need? Will these institutions differ between different kinds of associations?”

d) Again, “When citizens are divided on an issue, as they often will be, whose views should prevail, and in what circumstances? Should a majority always prevail, or should minorities sometimes be empowered to block or overcome majority rule?”

e) In line with the above, “If a majority is ordinarily to prevail, what is to constitute a proper majority?” Is it of “all citizens” or of the identified (specified) voters? “Should a proper majority comprise not individual citizens but certain groups or associations of citizens, such as hereditary groups or territorial associations?”

f) From the foregoing, it is assumed that the above questions provide a good response to the following questions: “Why should ‘the people’ rule?” or “What reasons could be given to show that democracy is better than aristocracy, monarch...” or other forms of association?

g) Finally, regarding the continued existence and true practice of democracy for a long period in a particular political community, the scholars submit that “No association could maintain a democratic government for very long if a majority of the *dēmos*—or a majority of the government—believe that some other form of government were better.” In other words, for a democratic government to be sustainable, it is paramount that both the majority of the population and the government itself believe in the sanctity and superiority of popular governance over other forms. Otherwise, the longevity of that democratic association would be at risk. Thus, the question is “What conditions, in addition to this, favour the continued existence of democracy?” What conditions are harmful to it? Why have some democracies managed to endure (such as the UK, the U.S., Canada, etc.) even through

periods of severe crisis, whereas many others (such as Africa and other developing countries) have collapsed?

On the whole, what exactly is democracy, and how is it better than other forms of government and why do many countries of the world prefer democracy to other forms of government?

Democracy, as argued by Shapiro et al., denotes a system of governance or “government in which laws, policies, leadership, and major undertakings of the state or other polity are directly or indirectly by the ‘people’—a group historically constituted by only a [relatively] minority of the entire population.” For example, all free adult males, such as those in the ancient Greek city-state (Athens) or all sufficiently propertied males, such as those in 19th century Britain. However, the contemporary worldview of the term from the mid-20th century includes all adult “citizens” of a state. On its advantage over other forms, they argue that states with effective democratic government prevent rule by autocrats but promote general and freely accepted (popular) means of governance, guarantee fundamental individual rights, allow for a relatively high level of political equality and rarely war on each other. Additionally, they, unlike nondemocratic systems, “better foster human development as measured by indicators such as health and education, provide more prosperity for their citizens; and endure a broader range of personal freedoms.” Explaining further, Alo and Zachariah (2024, p. 261) emphasised that liberal democracy “relatively guarantees peace, equal opportunity, economic prosperity, freedom of choice, citizen’s active participation in decision-making process, judicious management of scarce resources, accountability... accommodates and harmonises conflicts of interest, freedom of speech...” including being transparent in its activities. These suppositions align with JS Mill’s utilitarian principles which dissuade “tyranny of the majority” but foster inclusivity in governance, tolerance, national unity and development. With this in mind, therefore, the remaining part of this section is concerned with governance, i.e., how democracy has been practised and its impact on Nigeria since 1999. It focuses primarily on the effectiveness of democratic institutions (National Assembly, Judiciary, and INEC), rule of law and human rights, public participation and civil society, respectively. These are highlighted as follows:

The effectiveness of democratic institutions: Since the transition to civilian rule in 1999, the effectiveness of democratic institutions in Nigeria has been mixed. The National Assembly, judiciary, INEC, EFCC, and others were created to uphold checks and balances, ensure political accountability, and safeguard citizens’ rights. Unfortunately, challenges such as executive dominance, corruption, political meddling, and inadequate governance have hampered the effectiveness of these institutions (Suberu, 2007).

The National Assembly, consisting of the Senate and Federal House of Representatives, was established to, among other purposes act as a check of executive power. Despite efforts to assert its independence, the legislature has been criticised for being subservient in the executive branch, especially during the leadership of Olusegun Obasanjo (1999–2007) as well as that of Buhari (2015–2023) and Tinubu (since May 2023) (Omotola, 2010; Olakunle et al., 2019). Corruption and patronage politics have weakened legislative oversight, leading to a lack of effective scrutiny of the executive. In the same vein, the judiciary is supposedly a neutral arbiter in disputes and safeguards citizens’ rights. However, the Nigerian judiciary has faced challenges such as corruption, delays in justice administration, and political interference. Despite occasional displays of independence, particularly in electoral matters,

systemic issues limit its overall effectiveness (Oko, 2011; Alo & Zachariah, 2024). The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is responsible for overseeing elections and ensuring their credibility. INEC has encountered difficulties in conducting free, fair, and credible elections, especially in the early years of the Fourth Republic. Electoral fraud, violence, and logistical issues have marred many elections. However, progress has been made, notably in the 2011 and 2015 elections, which were seen as improvements (Lewis, 2011; Nwangwu et al., 2017; Abada et al., 2023). The introduction of biometric voter registration and electronic transmission of results in recent elections is viewed as a step toward enhancing electoral integrity.

Rule of law and human rights debacle: The foundation of any functioning democracy lies in upholding the rule of law and protecting human rights. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, these principles have often been compromised due to weak institutions, corruption, and executive overreach. Human rights violations, especially by security forces, remain a significant issue in the country (Onyemaobi et al., 2023). Nigeria's legal system is a complex blend of English common law, customary law, and Sharia law in the northern states. However, the rule of law has been eroded by the politicisation of the judiciary, corruption, and selective enforcement of laws (Oko, 2011; Agbonika, 2014). Political elites have been perceived as above the law, whereas ordinary citizens, particularly those from marginalised communities, have faced arbitrary arrests and extrajudicial killings by security forces. Despite efforts to reform the justice system, the lack of accountability for human rights abuses remains a major obstacle. Human rights violations in Nigeria, particularly by the police and military, have been widespread. The police have been accused of extrajudicial killings, torture, and unlawful detention, whereas the military has been implicated in abuses during counterinsurgency operations against groups such as Boko Haram in Northeast Nigeria (Amnesty International, 2020). The #EndSARS protests in 2020, which demanded an end to police brutality highlighted public frustration with the government's failure to protect citizens' rights in the country (Campbell, 2021; Iwuoha & Aniche, 2021). The government's violent response to the protests further emphasised the human rights challenges facing Nigeria's democracy. Although there have been attempts to enhance the rule of law and human rights through police and judicial reforms, progress has been slow and uneven. The ongoing abuses by security forces and the lack of accountability for perpetrators continue to undermine Nigeria's democratic standing and falls short of Mill's liberal democracy which guarantees the rights of every individual in the system.

Public participation and civil society: The active participation of the public and the role of civil society are essential elements of a thriving democracy. In particular, in Nigeria, public involvement in politics has been impacted by factors such as political violence, voter intimidation, corruption, and poor political orientation (Suberu, 2007). Civil society organisations (CSOs) have been key in promoting democratic governance, despite facing significant obstacles. Voter turnout in Nigeria has been low in recent elections for reasons such as voter apathy, insecurity, and lack of trust in the electoral process (Ibeanu & Ibrahim, 2009). Political violence and intimidation have discouraged many Nigerians from participating in elections. Poverty and economic challenges have also prevented citizens from engaging meaningfully in politics. Nevertheless, Nigerians have shown resilience in participating in elections and political discussions, especially through social media. CSOs have played a crucial role in advocating for human rights, electoral reforms, and government accountability in Nigeria. Groups such as the transition monitoring group (TMG) and the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) have been instrumental in monitoring

elections and pushing for democratic changes (Ibeanu & Ibrahim, 2009). However, civil society faces challenges such as government restrictions, financial limitations, and harassment by security forces. Some CSOs that had been critical of government policies have been viewed with suspicion, leading to attempts to restrict their activities. Indeed, this is a sharp contrast of Mill's theory of utility. Despite these challenges, civil society remains a vital force for democracy in Nigeria. The *#EndSARS* and *#EndBadGovernance* movements showcased the power of grassroots mobilisation and public pressure in holding the government accountable. CSOs continue to push for democratic reforms, even in the face of repression.

Now, the question is how do we appropriate JS Mill's utilitarian principles in Nigeria's nation-building process for a better Nigeria and, indeed, for a qualitative and genuine greatest happiness of the greatest number of citizens? This leads to the next segment of the study.

Application of JS Mill's Utilitarianism in Nigeria's Nation-building Process

The principles of utilitarianism, as expounded by philosophers such as Bentham and Mill, evaluate actions on the basis of their consequences to maximise happiness. In Nigeria, utilitarian principles can guide democratic governance, policy-making, etc. Mill's interpretation of utilitarianism emphasises the qualitative aspects of happiness and the protection of individual rights, which can be particularly relevant in the context of nation-building in Nigeria.

Qualitative dimensions of happiness: Mill's utilitarianism suggests that certain types of happiness hold greater value than others do. This concept can be practically applied in the country's nation-building efforts by formulating and implementing policies that not only address basic needs but also improve overall quality of life. For instance, investing in education and cultural development is viewed as enhancing happiness beyond just material wealth. This approach advocates a focus on intellectual and cultural growth in addition to economic progress, which is essential to the nation-building process and national development. This argument corroborates that of Zachariah and Nnaji (2024, p. 234), who assert that:

When most (if not all) members of society are educationally well equipped in every respect within their ability, appropriately engaged, know and appreciate not only their value but also that of others, being aware of and carrying out their responsibilities accordingly, etc., would have direct or indirect effects on other aspects of human security and sustainable development.

Protection of individual rights: Mill's utilitarianism highlights the significance of upholding individual rights and freedoms to achieve the greatest good. In Nigeria, this perspective emphasises the necessity of democratic institutions that uphold individual liberties and promote justice. It is essential to ensure that policies prioritise human rights and encourage political engagement, in line with Mill's belief that individual rights are essential for overall happiness (Mill, 1863). Relating this to realities in Nigeria, this approach calls for reforms that strengthen political freedom and safeguard minority rights while working towards broader societal objectives.

Inclusive and participatory governance: Mill's utilitarianism advocates for inclusive and participatory governance to achieve the greater good. In Nigeria, this means establishing democratic processes that promote widespread participation and representation. Policies that prioritise transparency, accountability, and public engagement in decision-making align with Mill's belief that inclusive governance is crucial for maximising societal well-being and functioning democracy (Suberu, 2007). Besides, engaging citizens in the political process can bridge the gap between theory and praxis. This will include holistic civic education, public awareness, reorientation of values and rebuilding confidence/trust in the *Nigerian project* among the citizenry.

Therefore, this study argues that the application of Mill's utilitarian theory is capable of enthrone good governance and enhancing the nation-building process, national peace and sustainable development in the country. To practically achieve this, we further factored JS Mill's utilitarian principles into the following three interrelated segments as workable perspectives in addressing their corresponding challenges: (i) utilitarianism and democratic governance, (ii) utilitarian principles and policy making, and (iii) human capacity development and nation-building. They are better highlighted below:

i) Utilitarianism and Democratic Governance

As earlier noted, Mill's principle of utility and democratic governance both aim to enhance individual and societal well-being. For democratic governance, where Nigeria has made unstable strides since 1999, Mill's utilitarian principles can be used to improve governance effectiveness, the nation-building process and equity. These can be achieved through:

Maximising public welfare: Promotion of the well-being of public utility focuses on enacting policies that prioritise the overall welfare of the majority. In Nigeria, this means implementing measures that improve public services, healthcare, education, infrastructure and the agricultural sector in ways that benefit the largest portion of the population. For example, democratic reforms that promote fair elections and transparency in governance demonstrate utilitarian objectives by fostering public trust and participation (Lewis, 2011). Efficient governance systems that enhance service provision and combat corruption are in line with the utilitarian idea of maximising benefits for the greatest number of people.

Balancing majority rule with minority rights: Finding a balance between majority rule and minority rights is a crucial issue in Nigerian democratic governance. Mill's utility suggests that policies should not only cater to the majority but also consider the needs of minority groups. Inclusive governance strategies, such as federal character principles and affirmative action, strive to give diverse ethnic and religious communities a say in political decision-making (Suberu, 2007). This approach aligns with Mill's belief in safeguarding individual rights while enhancing societal well-being.

Enhancing institutional effectiveness: Improving the effectiveness of institutional utilitarian principles can be used to improve democratic institutions in Nigeria. By prioritising reforms that lead to positive outcomes for the greater good, efforts can be focused on increasing the efficiency, transparency or responsiveness of public office holders and accountability of institutions such as the judiciary, legislature, and law enforcement agencies. This strategy ensures that institutions effectively serve the public and help maintain national unity and stability (Oko, 2011).

ii) Utilitarian Principles in Policy Making

Utilitarianism provides a framework for formulating and evaluating policies that aim to improve overall societal welfare. In Nigeria, implementing these principles involves careful consideration of factors such as policy formulation, impact assessment, unbiased resource allocation, addressing inequality and social injustice. In fact, it means realistically weighing the long- and short-term effects of each policy on the masses as note below:

Policy formulation and impact assessment: The theory advocates for formulating and evaluating policies on the basis of their results. In Nigeria, this implies conducting comprehensive impact assessments to understand how proposed policies impact various groups within the population. For example, economic policies should be analysed to determine their ability to alleviate poverty and enhance living standards of the people (Sen, 1999). By following this approach, policies are crafted to generate the most beneficial outcomes for the largest number (if not all) of the citizens. However, reverse is the case in Nigeria, where most policy been implemented are not without sudden nose-diving effects on the masses and economy. Practical examples are the fuel subsidy removal in May 2023; the ₦200, ₦500 and ₦1000 notes redesigning policy between 2022 & 2023; the abrupt closure of international land borders in 2019, etc. These and many other socioeconomic policies did not yield the desired outcome but rather impacted negatively on the overall happiness of most ‘average’ Nigerians (Olisah et al., 2022; Alo & Zachariah, 2024). This may be why Alo and Zachariah (2024, p. 261-271) identify Karl Popper’s *Piecemeal Social Engineering* as the appropriate approach for formulating and implementing policies in African democracies, particularly Nigeria.

Resource allocation: To ensure realistic qualitative dimensions of happiness in Nigeria, resource allocation should be guided by utilitarian principles, which prioritise directing resources to sectors such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure that have the greatest potential for improving public welfare. As observed by Lewis (2011), it is important for resource allocation to be equitable and support sustainable development to address the needs of the population effectively.

Addressing inequality and social injustice: Research has shown that persistent governance challenges such as corruption, human insecurity in all ramifications, ethnic tensions, etc. make it difficult to implement utilitarian principles, as governance frequently favours the needs of a privileged few at the expense of the overall welfare of the population (Aiyede, 2010; Imoize, 2014; Zachariah & Ngwu, 2023). Thus, it is essential to address inequality and social injustice in Nigeria, by prioritising the equitable distribution of benefits to maximise overall happiness. Utilitarianism emphasises the importance of implementing policies that aim to reduce socioeconomic disparities and promote social justice. This includes the implementation of affirmative action programmes and social welfare initiatives that support marginalised communities, as outlined by Sen (1999).

iii) Human Capacity Development and Nation-building

Mill’s philosophy focuses on the importance of intellectual and moral growth in achieving true happiness, a concept that can be applied to the enhancement of human capacity in Nigeria’s democratic system. As Nigeria faces ongoing challenges in governance, prioritising

human development is essential for sustainable progress, social unity, and efficient governance.

Human capacity development as a pillar of democratic governance: Investing in human capacity development is crucial for a thriving democracy. In accordance with Mill's utilitarian principles, the happiness and well-being of society rely on the intellectual and moral growth of individuals (Mukherjee & Ramaswamy, 2007; Njoku, 2019; Zachariah & Nnaji, 2024). In Nigeria, focusing on education, skill-building, and healthcare empowers citizens to actively engage in democratic processes such as voting and political participation. A knowledgeable and skilled population is better equipped to make informed decisions, advocate for their rights, and hold leaders accountable. By emphasising human capacity development, Nigeria can cultivate a more informed and involved citizenry, strengthening democratic institutions. This is because when citizens have access to education and opportunities for personal development, they are more likely to contribute to democratic governance and nation-building efforts (Sen, 1999; Njoku, 2019).

Economic empowerment and nation-building: This is one of the vital aspects of enhancing human capacity development and directly influencing nation-building. Mill's utilitarianism promotes policies that aim to maximise societal well-being by addressing economic disparities and creating opportunities for all individuals in society (Mill, 1863). In Nigeria, there are significant inequalities in wealth, job prospects, and resource access that impede national progress. It is crucial to address these issues through policies that encourage skill development, entrepreneurship, and job creation to promote economic empowerment, leading to genuine happiness and national development. In other words, improving economic empowerment not only enhances individual well-being, but also contributes to the advancement of the nation. A more economically empowered population can bolster the development of democratic institutions and overall economic stability. This approach aligns with utilitarian principles by ensuring that policies are crafted to benefit the majority (if not all) of the population, especially marginalised and disadvantaged groups (World Bank, 2020).

Social cohesion and inclusive nation-building projects: Developing human capacity is crucial for promoting social cohesion, which is a key element in nation-building. Nigeria's diverse ethnic and religious makeup presents both opportunities and challenges in creating a unified nation. Utilitarianism from Mill's perspective underscores the importance of policies that promote social harmony and protect individual rights to ensure that all members of society benefit from national development efforts. Investing in education, healthcare, and social welfare programs can help bridge divides and foster a sense of shared identity and purpose among Nigeria's diverse population. Prioritising inclusive nation-building efforts that focus on human capacity development can lead to a more cohesive society, empowering citizens to contribute to national progress according to their respective ability. This approach not only enhances individual well-being but also strengthens the nation's democratic foundations by ensuring that all citizens have the opportunity to participate in and benefit from development.

Healthcare and well-being as components of nation-building: Healthcare, they say is wealth. Thus, it is a crucial aspect of human development and plays a key role in nation-building. Utilitarian principles also underscore the importance of physical and mental well-being in achieving happiness and societal progress. In Nigeria, it is very important to improve access to healthcare services, address public health issues, and ensure that citizens can lead

healthy lives to build a strong and resilient nation. Healthy individuals are better equipped to contribute to the economy, engage in democratic processes, and support national development efforts. Public health initiatives, such as vaccination programmes, maternal and child healthcare, disease prevention, etc. aligned with utilitarian principles by maximising the well-being of the population and reducing health disparities. By prioritising healthcare as part of human development, Nigeria can create a healthier and more productive society that is better prepared to address the challenges of nation-building and development.

Education and intellectual development for long-term nation-building: Education is a crucial aspect of developing human capacity and plays a key role in nation-building. Mill's belief in the significance of intellectual and moral growth for overall happiness highlights the importance of education in promoting individual and collective well-being. Essentially, investing in holistic (formal and informal) education, both in terms of quality and accessibility, can improve the nation's human capital and contribute to long-term progress. Education provides citizens with the necessary knowledge and skills to participate effectively in democratic governance and economic activities. It also encourages critical thinking, innovation, and social responsibility, all of which are vital for nation-building and development (Zachariah & Nnaji, 2024). By aligning educational policies with utilitarian principles, Nigeria can ensure that its entire citizens are empowered to contribute to the nation's development and that the benefits of education are distributed fairly across various segments of society (Sen, 1999).

Summary of Findings and Policy Implications

This paper critically evaluates democracy vis-à-vis governance in Nigeria since 1999 and finds that despite all efforts toward nation-building and development by successive governments, their benefits are still far from reality for most Nigerians. However, the study offers JS Mill's utilitarian theory as an essential tool for long-lasting solutions to this irksome phenomenon that has persisted for decades in the country. This theoretical approach maximises overall societal well-being by focusing on outcomes that benefit the greatest number of people in society. It enhances democratic governance by prioritising policies that maximise public welfare and participation, such as fair electoral processes and effective public service delivery. It stresses the need to balance majority rule with minority rights or interests. It provides for inclusive governance practices that ensure adequate representation of all diverse ethnic and religious groups. It also suggests that resource allocation should focus on areas with the highest potential for positive outcomes, such as healthcare, education, agriculture and infrastructure. Additionally, addressing long-term sustainability and social justice is essential for achieving utilitarian goals.

Furthermore, Mill's emphasis on the qualitative aspects of happiness highlights the importance of not only meeting basic needs but also enhancing quality of life through various social security policies. Specifically, it includes investing in initiatives such as educational programmes, among others, that aim to enhance both the material and intellectual well-being of every citizen; affirmative action programmes; social welfare initiatives; and targeted support for disadvantaged communities/individuals to reduce inequalities and enhance societal well-being. Additionally, the protection of individual rights and freedoms is integral to achieving overall happiness, which underscores the need for democratic reforms that safeguard liberties and promote political participation. Basically, meaningful and long-lasting nation-building and genuine happiness would entail strengthening democratic institutions

with emphasis on reforms that enhance the transparency, efficiency, and accountability of individuals who manned these institutions. This includes improving the electoral process, judicial independence, legislative assertiveness and effectiveness in building public trust, ensuring that institutions serve the public good.

However, the paper reiterates the importance of public policies such as unity schools, federal character principles that aim at integration of citizens and to create inclusive governance structures and powers that represent diverse groups and promote national unity in the country; nonetheless, they should not dislodge meritocracy. Similarly, long-term economic planning should incorporate strategies for sustainable development, ensuring that immediate gains do not undermine future stability and prosperity or vice versa. Moreover, public policies should be evaluated on the basis of their impact on different segments of the population, ensuring that they contribute to reducing poverty, improving living standards, and addressing socioeconomic inequalities as well as unintended negative consequences for certain individuals or communities.

On the whole, the paper suggests that the adoption and application of JS Mill's utilitarianism in Nigeria's nation-building process provides a robust framework for [re]designing, implementing and evaluating policies that aim at maximising citizenry well-being. This is because Mill's perspective enriches this approach by emphasising the importance of qualitative happiness and the protection of individuals' liberty notwithstanding the *majoritarian effect*. This further means that Nigeria can [re]create a more equitable and prosperous society by focusing on utilitarian inclined democratic governance without excluding holistic quality education, social justice, and the protection of the rights of every member of the nation. In more practical terms therefore, the following actionable recommendations are highlighted for policymakers in Nigeria to transform governance structures in alignment with JS Mill's utilitarian principles:

Oversight for government spending: A separate entity should be created to monitor how public funds are used and ensure that government contracts are awarded efficiently and in the best interest of the majority. Regular audits should be conducted and made available to the public. For instance, a transparency initiative should be implemented to publish government contracts online, including information on the bidding process and awards of every contract.

Supporting marginalised groups through economic policies: With the aid of verifiable national demographic data, develop policies that focus on investing in sectors such as agriculture, education, and healthcare that benefit marginalised groups or communities. This could involve providing tax incentives to businesses operating in underdeveloped areas or investing in community development. For example, implement social investment programmes that offer financial aid and training to low-income communities, especially in rural regions.

Empowering citizens through local councils: Instead of appointing puppets, establish local councils that allow citizens to have a direct say in governance. These councils should have the authority to propose and vote on local initiatives to ensure that governance aligns with the community's needs. For example, launch campaigns to educate citizens on their rights and the importance of participating in democratic processes.

Enhancing education access: Allocate a significant portion of the national budget (up to 20%) to improve public school infrastructure, train teachers, and develop inclusive curricula. For instance, introduce a nationwide scholarship programme to increase access to quality education for disadvantaged children, particularly in underserved areas.

Reforming the healthcare system: Introduce a national health insurance scheme to subsidise healthcare costs for low-income individuals, guaranteeing access to essential services regardless of economic status. Expand primary healthcare services by building standardise clinics in rural areas and increasing funding for preventive care programmes.

Combating corruption: To objectively tackle corruption in the country, it is imperative to strengthen anti-corruption agencies and provide them with the necessary resources and authority to investigate and prosecute corrupt practices effectively; instead of using the agency against governance critics or perceived opposition party members. For instance, implement a whistle-blower protection programme to encourage citizens to report corruption without fear of retaliation. Similarly, other stern punitive measures against culprits should be established and religiously implemented.

Promoting economic diversity: There is need to promote partnerships between government-private sector and educational institutions to encourage innovation and entrepreneurship, ensuring economic growth benefits a wider population. e.g., support small and medium-sized enterprises through grants, training, and access to markets in non-oil sectors.

Building social cohesion: Encourage policies that honour Nigeria's cultural diversity and integrate it into the national identity to ensure all social groups feel represented and valued in the governance process. For instance, implement community-building programmes that promote inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue and collaboration, such as local peace and conflict resolution committees, etc.

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