



ZIIBALOGZII: A PANACEA TO NIGERIA'S CIVIL LIBERTIES AND CHALLENGES OF DEMOCRACY

BY

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Abstract

The philosophy of civil liberties and democracy in Nigeria represents a dynamic interplay between universal moral principles and the country's cultural realities. Grounded in ideals such as human dignity, freedom of speech, the right to a fair trial, freedom of assembly, and the right to privacy—core components of any democratic society—the Nigerian experience reveals the challenges of fully implementing these rights in a diverse and often divided nation. As a result, violations of these rights remain persistent, impeding the country's democratic progress and societal development. This paper employs a descriptive method to explore the Ziibalogzii philosophy as a potential solution to the enduring challenges facing civil liberties and democratic governance in Nigeria. Ziibalogzii, literally translated as "the state of being in an interconnected web," emphasises interconnectedness, communal harmony, and ethical leadership. The study argues that Ziibalogzii provides a framework to address systemic issues such as political corruption, human rights violations and weak democratic institutions. By examining the principles of Ziibalogzii in relation to Nigeria's socio-political landscape, this research underscores its relevance as a guiding philosophy for fostering inclusive governance, reconciliation, and respect for human dignity. Adopting a Ziibalogzii-based approach could encourage Nigerian authorities to prioritise dialogue over repression, ensuring that dissenting voices are heard and respected. In turn, empathy and mutual understanding could help cultivate a culture where human rights are upheld and inviolable.

Key Words: Civil Liberties, Democracy, Human Rights, Ziibalogzii

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Introduction

Civil liberties are the cornerstone of any democratic society, ensuring that individuals can live with dignity, freedom, and equality. These liberties, which include freedom of speech, the right to a fair trial, freedom of assembly, and the right to privacy, form the foundation for democratic governance and social justice (Kanu & Ndubuisi, 2020, p. 45). They empower citizens to participate in the political process, hold authorities accountable and safeguard personal autonomy. Civil liberties are guarantees and freedoms that governments commit not to abridge, either by [constitution](#), [legislation](#), or [judicial interpretation](#), without [due process](#). Though the scope of the term differs between countries, civil liberties may include the [freedom of conscience](#), [freedom of press](#), [freedom of religion](#), [freedom of expression](#), [freedom of assembly](#), the right to security and [liberty](#), [freedom of speech](#), the [right to privacy](#), the right to [equal treatment under the law](#) and due process, the [right to a fair trial](#), and the [right to life](#). Other civil liberties include the [right to own property](#), the [right to defend oneself](#), and the right to [bodily integrity](#).

Rooted in Mill's utilitarianism, the marketplace of ideas argument defends civil liberties like free speech as essential for truth-seeking (Peschke, 2004, p. 15). The unrestricted exchange of ideas allows societies to challenge errors and refine their understanding, fostering intellectual and moral progress. Civil liberties are integral to democracy, enabling participation, dissent, and accountability. Philosophers such as Jürgen Habermas emphasise the role of communicative action in protecting these rights, arguing that open dialogue and public reasoning are vital for democratic legitimacy (Popkin and Stroll, 2009, p. 105). Aristotle's concept of *eudaimonia* (human flourishing) provides a foundational argument for civil liberties. Freedom of thought, expression, and association are seen as prerequisites for realising one's potential and contributing to the common good (Popkin and Stroll, 2009, p. 106). Postcolonial philosophers, such as Frantz Fanon, critique the imposition of Western civil liberties on non-Western societies (Deezia and Kilani, 2023, p. 265), arguing that these frameworks often ignore indigenous values and histories. They advocate indigenous understandings of freedom that reflect communal and cultural priorities.

The notion that humans have natural, inalienable rights is the foundation of liberal

democracies. Human rights wore an international mantle after the 2nd World War and has now been documented in international, regional and national legislation. The appellation 'civil liberties' refers to civil and political rights which are embraced in international documents such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) and in Part IV of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution (as amended). The essence of protecting civil rights is that it places a duty on the state not to impede with the individual's civil rights such as to life, liberty, and fair hearing amongst others. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966 endorses the social contract theory and gives an exclusive eminence to individual liberties and rights. These individual rights have the function of 'fundamental rights', The ICCPR and other international civil rights enforce on the state the onus to prove that any fundamental rights obstruction is legal, unavoidable and proportionate.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, is rich in cultural diversity, with over 250 ethnic groups and multiple religious traditions, stands at a crossroads in its democratic journey. Despite being a democracy since 1999, the country continues to face significant challenges related to the protection of civil liberties and the deepening of democratic values (Deezia, 2018, p. 168). These very freedoms come under regular attack by governments that want to stifle criticism. This erosion has significant implications for democratic governance, the rule of law, and social stability. Nigeria's history of military dictatorships (1966–1999) left a lasting impact on civil liberties. In other words, the history of civil liberty in Nigeria reflects a complex journey from pre-colonial governance systems through colonial oppression, military rule, and the challenges of modern democracy. While significant progress has been made, especially since 1999, the ongoing struggle for civil liberties remains central to Nigeria's democratic consolidation. Ensuring that these rights are protected requires continuous vigilance from both the state and its citizens. However, persistent social challenges—such as corruption, poverty, weak institutions, ethnic and religious tensions, and insecurity—continue to shape the country's civil landscape.

This study proposes *Ziibalogzii* as a holistic and culturally resonant framework for addressing Nigeria's challenges in civil liberties and democracy, offering a pathway towards ethical governance, social justice, and national unity. *Ziibalogzii* is an African

philosophy rooted in the belief that human dignity is realised through relationships and communal solidarity (Deezia, 2023a, p. 106). Originating from the Ogoni people of Southern Nigeria, *Ziibalogzii* emphasises that personhood cannot be fully achieved in isolation; instead, individual well-being is deeply interconnected with the well-being of others. The philosophy posits that the intrinsic interconnectedness of all existents forms the basis of individual identity, suggesting that no one exists in isolation but rather in relation to all other things. To "be" is to exist within a mutual and complementary relationship with all that exists, whereas the negation of this relational existence leads to isolation, which is akin to nothingness (Deezia, 2024, p. 170). This perspective underscores the idea that nothing has meaning in isolation from everything else. By examining the principles of *Ziibalogzii* in relation to Nigeria's socio-political landscape, this research highlights its relevance as a guiding philosophy for fostering inclusive governance, reconciliation, and respect for human dignity. Adopting a *Ziibalogzii*-based approach could encourage Nigerian authorities to prioritise dialogue over repression, ensuring that dissenting voices are heard and respected. Empathy and mutual understanding, central to *Ziibalogzii*, could help cultivate a culture in which human rights are inviolable and democracy thrives.

Conceptual Clarification

The terms *civil liberties*, *civil rights*, and *human rights* are often used interchangeably, but they refer to distinct concepts within political theory and legal practice. Each plays a unique role in protecting individual freedoms and maintaining a just society. Understanding these differences is crucial for fostering informed citizenship and safeguarding democratic values. Civil liberties are the basic rights and freedoms derived from positive law (Okoronye & Okeyim, 2013, p. 47). They are defined by the legal relationship between individuals and the state, reflecting the freedom to act in ways that promote the common good while remaining free from state interference. Civil liberties include freedoms such as speech, religion, privacy, and assembly, as well as rights like due process, voting, fair trials, marriage, and family life. The foundation of civil liberties is determined by each state through contracts such as constitutions or similar legal frameworks (Deflem & McDonough, 2015, p. 78). These liberties aim to balance the power dynamics between individuals and the state, protecting citizens from state overreach, such as extrajudicial executions or arbitrary detention.

Human rights represent the universal standard of rights inherent to all individuals, irrespective of nationality, ethnicity, gender, or any other status, as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Mashood, 2011, p. 95). Unlike civil liberties, human rights are not granted by states but are considered inherent to human nature itself. These rights include the right to life, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, and the right to work, shelter, and family life. The universality of human rights underscores their equal and indiscriminate application to all people. As such, they transcend legal systems and are grounded in the principle that all human beings deserve dignity and respect, simply by virtue of being human.

Civil rights, in contrast, are specific legal protections designed to ensure equal social opportunities and protections under the law. These rights are granted to individuals by their respective states and are rooted in constitutional or statutory provisions (Sullivan, 2015, p. 25). Examples include the right to vote, access to education, and equal treatment under the law, such as protections against gender or racial discrimination. Civil rights are political and social rights vary by country, as they depend on national laws. For example, the right to vote and the eligibility criteria for voting (e.g., age or citizenship status) are determined by individual states. Civil rights aim to promote equal participation in society and prevent discriminatory practices.

In distinguishing civil liberties, civil rights, and human rights, the key distinction between human rights and civil rights lies in their origins and scope. Human rights are inherent to all individuals as a function of their humanity, while civil rights are tied to citizenship and are granted by a state. Similarly, civil liberties differ from civil rights in terms of the type of protection and the entities involved. Civil liberties focus on protecting individuals from government overreach, whereas civil rights aim to ensure equal treatment and participation within society. For example, the right to pursue higher education may not be a guaranteed civil liberty, but civil rights ensure that individuals—such as female graduates—cannot be denied access based on gender. Similarly, marriage is a recognised human right, but the specifics of marriage laws (e.g., age of marriage, legality of same-sex or cousin marriages) differ across states (Stone, 2014, p. 211).

The Challenges of Civil Liberties and Democracy in Nigeria

Nigeria's journey towards consolidating civil liberties and democratic governance is ongoing, marked by significant challenges. Below are some critical areas of concern:

1. Colonial and Postcolonial Foundations

During British colonial rule (1861–1960), Nigerians had limited civil liberties (Uranta, 2023, p. 126). The colonial administration suppressed dissent, limited press freedom, and restricted political participation. The fight for independence was marked by demands for civil rights, which culminated in Nigeria's 1960 independence and the adoption of a federal constitution that promised democratic governance and basic freedoms.

Nigeria's initial years post-independence saw efforts to build a democratic foundation. The 1963 Constitution guaranteed basic civil liberties such as freedom of speech, assembly and association. However, political instability, corruption and ethnic tensions, culminating in the Biafran Civil War (1967-1970), tested these freedoms, leading to human right abuses and social fragmentation. Successive military regimes severely restricted civil liberties, with censorship, political repression and extrajudicial killings becoming commonplace. The regime of General Sani Abacha (1993-1998) was particularly notorious for human rights violations, including the execution of activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, which drew international condemnation. The transition to civilian rule in 1999 marked a pivotal moment. The Fourth Republic, under President Olusegun Obasanjo, restored a framework for civil liberties, with a new Constitution emphasising human rights. Institutions such as the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) were strengthened to monitor and protect these rights. Nigeria's return to democratic rule marked a renewed commitment to civil liberties, enshrined in the 1999 Constitution. However, the implementation remains inconsistent.

2. Authoritarianism and Human Rights Violations

One of the primary challenges to civil liberties in Nigeria is the persistent authoritarian tendencies of successive governments. Despite the country's transition to civilian rule in 1999, the centralisation of power, political repression, and state violence have continued to undermine civil liberties. Government actions such as arrests, detention without trial, and

crackdowns on protests undermine the right to freedom of speech, assembly, and association.

The Nigerian government has often used the pretext of national security to curtail civil liberties (Amaechi, 2018, p. 155). Laws such as the *Anti-Terrorism Act* and the *Cybercrimes Act* have been used to limit freedom of expression, particularly targeting journalists, activists, and political opponents. In recent years, there have been increasing reports of arbitrary detention, surveillance, and harassment of critics of the government, which further erodes trust in democratic institutions. In particular, the tendency for political elites to consolidate power and suppress dissent is a recurrent issue in Nigeria's democratic history. These issues suggest that, like previous administrations, the Tinubu government may face challenges in upholding democratic norms and protecting civil liberties.

3. Media Suppression and Freedom of Expression

The freedom of the press is crucial for a functioning democracy, as it ensures that the government is held accountable and that citizens are informed about public affairs. The Nigerian Constitution (1999, as amended) enshrines the right to freedom of expression under Section 39. This includes the right to hold opinions, receive, and impart information without interference. However, in Nigeria, media suppression is a significant problem. Media freedom faces challenges such as harassment of journalists and regulation by state bodies like the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC). Journalists often face harassment, threats and violence when reporting on issues that challenge the status quo.

As noted elsewhere, freedom of the press is tantamount to the freedom of the citizen. In other words, there is a symbolic relationship between autonomy of the press to inform, educate and entertain and the citizen's right to be informed, educated and entertained. The citizens cannot be said to be freed in a situation whereby the press is caged, suppressed and prevented from performing its role as the watchdog of the society (Deezia, 2018, p. 166). Therefore, the freedom of the press and the right of the citizens are the same side of the same coin. Virtually, all the constitutional arrangements all over the world regardless of historical or ideological framework affirm the principle of press freedom. Both religion and free

expression were offered protection by the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) drafted in 1947. It outlines the ways in which both free expression and religious freedom should be protected in Articles 18 and 19.

Nigeria is not left out of the attempts to give press freedom a constitutional backing, it is, therefore, not surprising that the 1963 republican constitution formally gave birth to press freedom in Nigeria. The section 25 sub-section (1) contained provisions on press freedom. In the 1979 constitution, the chapter 12, section 2, on obligation of the mass media, stated that: The press, radio, television and other agencies with fundamental objectives contained in this chapter are to uphold the responsibility and accountability of government to the people. In addition, the freedom of information Bill FOI – The law of the federal republic of Nigeria concerning media practice which snowballed into full blown act on 28 May, 2011 under President Goodluck Jonathan gives journalist the leverage to go about their legitimate business of reportage without fear of intimidation.

In spite of all these decrees and constitution backing for press freedom, many media houses were shut down on account of new or editorial comments they carried and which government considered offensive. On May 4, 1990, that Nigerian Army officially warned that it will deal with journalist who published new stories that would cause embarrassment to families, relations and friends of members of the Nigerian Armed Forces loyal to the federal military government (Amaechi, 2018, p. 155). At least five media houses were shut down in 1990 alone, the punch and new breed were shut-down on April 11 and June 9, Vanguard and the champion were shutdown respectively.

In the middle of 1992, the Babangida regime created a crisis that would have not only a profound implication for survival of Nigeria as an entity but also for the press. It started with African concord magazine which was shutdown, with other publications in April 1992. From then on, thousands of copies of many editions were seized at the printing press, their offices were ransacked members of their families were arrested, vendors and distributors manhandled on the street. They were only sent underground and thus began what is today known in Nigeria as “Gorilla Journalism” (Deezia, 2018, p. 167). Such oppression and censorship continue even till today in Nigeria.

On June 12, 1993, free and fair presidential elections were held in Nigeria. Dissatisfied that Abiola, the Social Democratic Candidate won, the Federal Military Government annulled the results on June 23. Decrees were put in place which made the government's actions legal, and also guaranteed that certain candidates could not stand for election again. Many opposition activists who protested the annulment of the elections were arrested and detained, many without charges ever being brought. The government also banned "The News" magazine and declared four of its editors wanted by the police. Further, the authorities seized 50,000 copies of the weekly magazine "Tempo." Some of those detained brought a complaint to the African Commission on People's and Human Rights, alleging violations of articles 6 (the right to liberty and to the security of his person) and 13 (the right to participate freely in the government of his country) of the African Charter on Human Rights (Deezia, 2018, p. 168). The government maintained that its actions were justified.

In April 2015, Muhammadu Buhari orders barring the crew of the African independent television (AIT). AIT and the public owned Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) were accused of airing "hate" documentaries during the buildup campaigns. Hence, AIT was asked to stay aside due to what Buhari camp described as "security and family concerns" (Amnesty International, 2015, p. 106). Driving from the background of different African governments for reasons of keeping their ugly act of corruption in the dark, subjected the press to less than nothing and this account for the praise-singing nature of most African press. Without doubt, this shows evidently the marks of a muzzled press as what comes out of it cannot hurt and consequently cannot in any manner be catalytic to change and apparently development. Hence, freedom of the press, which is an essential attribute of democracy, given rise to a credible media. The press is perceived as credible when they expose corruption in the society, expose injustice, and unearth the negative effects of government policies and actions on the people. These are cardinal functions completely absent in Nigerian journalistic setting owing to the fear of the "known and unknown." In the light of the above, the question then is, who exposes who, in a situation where journalists compromise in their duty and responsibilities because of "block throat."

The advent of social media, which was initially seen as a space for free expression, has also been heavily regulated. In 2021, the Nigerian government suspended Twitter, one of the

country's most popular social media platforms, following the removal of a tweet by President Muhammadu Buhari that was deemed to violate Twitter's rules. The suspension lasted for several months, during which time Nigerians were unable to access the platform, severely curtailing freedom of expression. The Nigerian authorities justified the ban by citing national security concerns, arguing that Twitter was being used to incite violence, especially during the #EndSARS protests (*Johnson-Bashua*, 2021, p. 110). However, critics saw this as an attempt by the government to suppress dissent and limit the space for free speech, particularly in a digital age where social media has become a powerful tool for mobilisation and activism. The move was widely condemned by civil rights groups and the international community, as it directly violated the constitutional right to free expression. This incident is part of a broader pattern of media suppression in Nigeria, where journalists who report on corruption, human rights abuses, and government mismanagement are frequently harassed, intimidated and sometimes imprisoned.

The code of ethics for Nigerian journalists addresses editorial independence, accuracy and fairness, privacy, privilege/non-disclosure, decency, discrimination, reward and gratification, violence, children and minors, access to information, public interest, and social responsibility. Ethical issues include corruption, news subjectivity, editorial manipulation, invasion of privacy, news commercialisation, religious inclination, indecency/violence, censorship, inclination towards tribalism/ethnicity, social responsibility social media flood gate, handling of terrorism, portraying of violence, declining editorial standard, poverty, plagiarism and copy right, infringement and charlatans. However, despite the numerous code of conduct media freedom is still elusive. In the words of Dyikuk, journalism and media practice in Nigeria is marred by the brown envelope syndrome (Dyikuh, 2015, p. 9). News has become a commodity, which can be bought by those who have the money so their voices can be heard. News has automatically become a commercial product to the detriment of important development in the country as they are pushed away by, in some cases, trivial news items concerning urban events as the activities of personalities (Asemah 2011, p. 50). Some social critiques asserted that editorial and news manipulation is a common feature in Nigerian journalism. Journalists mortgage their conscience and manipulate editorial matters or news to satisfy either the government, their boss, their beliefs or vested interest. This has led to plague by religious

terrorism, activities of militia men and tribal ethnic warlords.

4. Ethnic, Religious, and Regional Inequality

Nigeria is a deeply diverse country with over 250 ethnic groups and a significant Muslim-Christian divide, creating a fertile ground for conflicts. These ethnic and religious tensions frequently manifest in violence and discrimination, which compromise the civil liberties of affected groups (Obodoegbulam, 2014, p. 56). In the northern part of the country, for example, religious tensions have led to clashes between Muslim and Christian communities, as well as the imposition of Sharia law in certain regions. These divisions hinder the full realisation of civil liberties, as individuals from marginalised ethnic or religious groups often face discrimination in accessing education, employment, and even the justice system. In Nigeria, geography and religious phenomena and events appear to have symbiosis. One crucial area of this interface is the mapping of occurrences of conflict. Whatever influences geography and environment have on religious psychology and their propensity to violence, are still being investigated. It has been observed that an issue, whether religious or political, that has sparked off violence among Muslims in the North has not had similar violent reactions among the Southern Muslims. It is this observation that lends credence to the advocacy to go beyond the conventional focus on perpetrators, victims and bystanders of religious conflict in Nigeria (Igboin, 2010, p. 15).

In other words, the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast has led to widespread displacement and the destruction of property, disproportionately affecting Christian communities in the region. The Nigerian government's inability to effectively combat these sectarian and extremist groups has left vulnerable communities without protection, violating their right to security, freedom of movement, and life. The farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria's Middle Belt and north-central regions are a prime example of how ethnic and religious violence undermines civil liberties. These clashes, often between Muslim-Fulani herders and Christian farmers, have led to mass displacement, loss of life and the destruction of livelihoods. The government's failure to adequately address these issues has allowed these groups to continue to perpetrate violence without fear of retribution, further eroding civil rights in the affected areas. While the military's role in combating insurgencies

such as Boko Haram in the northeast and banditry in the northwest is necessary, their conduct has raised serious concerns regarding civil liberties and the rule of law. Additionally, in the southeastern region, the Nigerian government has deployed military forces to deal with the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), a separatist group advocating the independence of the Biafra region. The military's operations in this region have been associated with widespread human rights violations, including the killing of unarmed civilians, arbitrary arrests, and the destruction of property. The government's failure to hold security forces accountable for these abuses further undermines the protection of civil liberties.

5. Protest and Police Brutality

One of the most significant recent events highlighting the erosion of civil liberties in Nigeria was the #EndSARS protests in 2020. The protests were sparked by the longstanding abuses committed by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a unit of the Nigerian police that had been accused of widespread human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, torture, extortion, and unlawful arrests (*Johnson-Bashua*, 2021, p. 107). The protests, largely organised on social media, grew into a nationwide movement calling for the disbandment of SARS and an end to police brutality. While the demonstrations initially took place peacefully, the Nigerian government responded with force, and on October 20, 2020, security forces opened fire on unarmed protesters at the Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos, killing and injuring several individuals. The incident, widely referred to as the Lekki Massacre, sent shockwaves across Nigeria and the international community, highlighting severe state repression and the violation of the fundamental right to protest.

The Nigerian government's handling of the #EndSARS protests demonstrated the fragile state of civil liberties in the country. The use of force against peaceful protesters and the crackdown on dissent raised significant concerns about the government's respect for human rights and its commitment to democratic principles. This incident, along with the subsequent suppression of media coverage and targeted harassment of activists, showcases the extent to which civil liberties can be violated under the guise of maintaining law and

order.

On August 1, 2024, Nigeria witnessed the eruption of nationwide protests under the banner "End Bad Governance" or "Hunger Protest." This significant civil action drew millions of Nigerians from various walks of life into the streets, united in their demand for a radical transformation of the nation's governance. The protest, marked by its widespread participation, unfortunately also witnessed considerable violence and casualties, raising critical questions about the state of Nigeria's democracy, governance, and the role of the state in addressing public grievances.

The "End Bad Governance" protests were not a spontaneous occurrence but rather the culmination of years of accumulated frustrations and unaddressed grievances. For decades, Nigerians have contended with systemic corruption, poor infrastructure, unemployment, and a lack of basic services. The situation has been exacerbated by frequent scandals involving public officials, who often remain unpunished, further eroding public trust in the government. Economic hardships, amplified by a global downturn and mismanagement, have pushed many Nigerians into poverty. Inflation has skyrocketed, the naira has plummeted in value, and essential goods have become increasingly unaffordable. Additionally, the security situation has deteriorated, with rampant banditry, kidnappings and insurgencies making daily life perilous for many citizens. These factors created a fertile ground for widespread discontent, setting the stage for the protests.

The End Bad Governance protests stemmed from Nigeria's growing economic hardship and hunger, which BBC reporter, Simi Jolaoso, described as the "worst economic crisis in a generation", due to record inflation, especially on food prices. Some experts have linked the crisis to the execution of economic reforms, particularly the removal of fuel subsidies and the devaluation of the Naira following the removal of its peg to the US dollar, under president [Bola Tinubu](#) designed to liberalise the Nigerian economy and attract foreign investment (*Ugwu, 2024, p. 5*). Various members of the government, including Tinubu himself, have attempted to dissuade protests, with some measures to financially support young people being announced (*Ugwu, 2024, p. 9*). Protests began on 29th July, 2024 as demonstrators were seen on the streets displaying placards with messages like "Enough is

Enough," "Stop Anti-Masses Policies," "We Are Not Slaves in Our Country," "Hardship Is Unbearable," and "Fuel Subsidy Must Be Back" (Folashade, 2024, p 8 Raphael, 2024, p. 6). In response, scores were killed by the [army](#) and [police](#) in a bid to disperse the protesters across Nigeria. Four were shot dead in [Borno State](#) and four in [Niger State](#) (Sahara Reporters, 2024, p. 15; Ogaga, 2024, p. 11). Three protesters were also reportedly killed in [Kaduna State](#) and two in [Jigawa State](#), bringing the total number of deaths to at least 14 (Abah, 2024, p. 3). In [Kano State](#), four protesters were critically injured and taken to hospital, many were arrested and detained by police while reporting on the protests at [Eagle Square](#) in Abuja. A report from the [United Action Front of Civil Society](#) stated that 21 protesters were killed and over 1,100 arrested by police on the first day of the protests. Additionally, 175 people were injured (Sahara reporters, 2024, p. 16). The "End Bad Governance" protests are a stark reminder of the deep-seated issues facing Nigeria. They reflect a society yearning for change and willing to risk everything for a better future. The path ahead is fraught with challenges, but it also presents an opportunity for transformative change. By addressing the root causes of the protests and fostering an environment of inclusivity and accountability, Nigeria can begin to heal and build a more just and equitable society.

6. Gender Inequality and Discrimination

Gender inequality remains a significant issue in Nigeria, with women facing persistent barriers to fully enjoying their civil liberties. Challenges such as gender-based violence, child marriage, and female genital mutilation (FGM) continue to affect millions of Nigerian women (Wotogbe, Deezia, & Tambou, 2021, p. 90). Although legislation such as the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (VAPP) exists, enforcement remains weak, undermining efforts to protect women from these abuses. Furthermore, systemic discrimination against women, the LGBTQ+ community, and people with disabilities remains prevalent. The criminalisation of same-sex relationships raises significant concerns about the protection of individual freedoms and civil liberties in the country.

Women in Nigeria face additional hurdles despite constitutional guarantees of equality. While they have legal rights to education, employment, and political participation, cultural and traditional practices often restrict their full involvement in society. Practices like FGM,

child marriage, and limited access to healthcare continue to undermine women's rights and liberties. In the political sphere, women are significantly underrepresented, limiting their ability to influence policies that directly affect their lives. Although Nigerian women have made strides in securing some political positions, they remain vastly underrepresented in leadership roles. The lack of gender-sensitive policies and robust laws to protect women's rights exacerbates these challenges, leaving many women unable to fully exercise their civil liberties.

7. Weak Political Institutions, Corruption and Weak Rule of Law

Nigeria's democratic institutions, including the legislature, executive, and judiciary, are often weak and prone to manipulation. The separation of powers, a fundamental principle of democracy, is not always respected, and political interference in judicial processes is common. This weakens the checks and balances that are essential for maintaining a functioning democracy. Additionally, political parties are often divided along ethnic and religious lines, which can hinder national unity and the development of a shared democratic vision. Although Nigeria holds regular elections, political participation remains low, particularly among the youth. Apathy toward the political process, stemming from widespread disillusionment with the government, means that large segments of the population do not exercise their right to vote or engage in civic activities (Wapwera, 2023, p. 199). This lack of participation weakens the legitimacy of the democratic system and perpetuates a cycle of poor governance.

Corruption is one of the most significant obstacles to the protection of civil liberties in Nigeria. Corruption within both the public and private sectors has weakened the rule of law and undermined accountability. Government officials and law enforcement agencies often use their positions to exploit citizens, leading to the denial of basic rights. The judiciary, tasked with upholding civil liberties, is often compromised by corruption, delays in legal proceedings, and lack of independence. This undermines access to justice for ordinary Nigerians, particularly those from marginalised communities who are most vulnerable to human rights violations. As such, corruption remains a significant impediment to civil liberties and social justice. Transparency International consistently ranks Nigeria low on its

Corruption Perceptions Index (Wapwera, 2023, p 101) Despite anti-corruption campaigns, many public institutions struggle with accountability, impacting citizens' trust and access to equitable services.

The Ontology of Ziibalogzii Philosophy

Ziibalogzii is an African philosophy rooted in the idea that human dignity is realised through relationships and communal solidarity (Deezia, 2023a, p. 102). Etymologically, the term *Ziibalogzii* derives from the Ogoni words *Zii* (one), *Ba* (hand), and *Log* (washes), symbolising the idea that “one hand washes the other.” Literally translated as “the condition of being human,” Ziibalogzii embodies the concept of an interconnected web of existence, where reality is perceived as a universe of forces interlinked and in constant interplay (Deezia, 2023b, p. 90; Deezia & Abdulrazaq, 2023, p. 265). This theory emerges from the ancient Ogoni tradition of collaborative and reciprocal thought, emphasising mutual reliance, interconnection and the value of reciprocity.

As a philosophical construct, Ziibalogzii—interpreted as “humanness”—is employed within African philosophy to address issues of morality, politics and society. Deezia (2023b, p. 91) provides a detailed exploration of this concept, framing it within the context of what it means to be and become human. At its core, Ziibalogzii emphasises the necessity of controlling the human inclination toward exclusivity, recognising neither race nor colour but instead focusing on the shared humanity created by God. This inclusivity does not reject external values but seeks to integrate them into a cohesive framework of understanding. Ziibalogzii is inherently relational, often expressed through proverbs and idioms such as:

1. *Doo-i-tor* (“live and let live”)
2. *Bue nee kum-zoo* (“individuals make up the community”)
3. *Bae gbo kpena loo, ba kpo kpue* (“hunting wild animals requires collective efforts of the dogs and the hunter”).

Other expressions like “one sees the other, and the other sees the one” or “I am what I am because of others” reflect a profoundly constructivist ontology. These ideas align with John Mbiti's (1931–2019) assertion that an individual realises their being only in relation to

others: through fulfilling duties and feeling responsible both to themselves and their community. According to Mbiti (1969, p. 150), individual experiences—whether suffering or joy—are communal. When a person suffers, the community suffers with them; when they rejoice, the community shares in that joy. The social formula encapsulates this philosophy: “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.”

In the Ogoni worldview, existence is not viewed as a collection of isolated entities but as a complex, interconnected web. This network of relationships functions like a chain, where each connection strengthens or weakens the whole, directly impacting collective well-being. Ziibalogzii represents a profound shift in understanding human existence: that to exist is to be in a relationship. Isolation is seen as "delinking" from the community, leading to the erosion of social cohesion, loss of cultural identity, disconnection from ancestral heritage, and the breakdown of social support systems. These outcomes contradict the fundamental principles of interconnectedness and interdependence intrinsic to Ziibalogzii.

In this philosophy, every existence is purposeful. Within any system or framework, all elements—no matter how seemingly insignificant—contribute to the system's definition and vitality. To maintain the system's optimal life, all components must be considered in their sufficiency. Thus, a typical human action is understood as one directed toward the collective joy and well-being of all involved. Ziibalogzii describes the interconnected web of causality that governs all phenomena. This holistic perspective posits that every event, action, and being is inextricably linked, challenging the notion of independent existence. By embracing this worldview, Ziibalogzii fosters empathy and responsibility, promotes harmony and balance, and encourages holistic understanding. It also critiques Western traditional notions of separation and individualism, instead revealing a rich tapestry of relationships and interdependencies. Through its principles, Ziibalogzii challenges Western dominance by offering an alternative framework that prioritises interconnectedness and collective well-being over individualism.

Applying Ziibalogzii to Nigeria's Challenges

Nigeria faces recurring issues such as suppression of dissent, restrictions on free speech, and human rights violations. At the heart of Ziibalogzii lies a profound respect for human

dignity and equality. In a society as diverse as Nigeria, civil liberties such as freedom of speech, the right to a fair trial, and the right to association must be protected for all individuals, regardless of their ethnic, religious, or social background. Ziibalogzii emphasises that no one's rights should be suppressed for the benefit of another. This aligns with the principle of equality, ensuring that all Nigerians, regardless of their differences, are entitled to enjoy the same civil liberties. By recognising that human beings are interconnected, Ziibalogzii advocates the protection of the fundamental rights of the marginalised minorities, and those who are often excluded from political processes. This moral foundation calls for the recognition of the human rights of all individuals, ensuring that civil liberties extend to all Nigerians equally, irrespective of their background. In other words, Ziibalogzii's respect for human dignity aligns with protecting civil liberties. By adopting a Ziibalogzii-based approach, Nigerian authorities could prioritise dialogue over repression, ensuring that dissenting voices are heard and respected. Empathy and mutual understanding could foster a culture where human rights are inviolable.

Ziibalogzii teaches that personal freedom and collective well-being are mutually dependent. In the Nigerian context, this means that civil liberties cannot be viewed in isolation but must be balanced with social responsibility. For example, the right to freedom of expression is fundamental, but it comes with the responsibility not to incite violence, hate speech or division. In Nigeria, where ethnic and religious tensions frequently spark violence, Ziibalogzii provides a basis for a more responsible exercise of civil liberties that fosters unity rather than division. Ziibalogzii encourages open dialogue but emphasises respect and empathy. Freedom of speech is not just a right to speak but a responsibility to contribute constructively to the community. Central to Ziibalogzii is the ability to put oneself in another's shoes. In dialogue, this translates into active listening and understanding. Rather than dismissing differing viewpoints, Ziibalogzii encourages finding common ground through empathy. Misunderstandings and conflicts are inevitable. Ziibalogzii emphasises reconciliation, ensuring that disagreements do not lead to lasting divisions. By fostering an environment where people can admit mistakes and seek forgiveness, dialogues remain open and honest.

Equality means that all individuals, regardless of their race, gender, religion, or socioeconomic status, should be treated with the same respect and have access to the same opportunities. Discrimination is not just a legal issue but a violation of the community's moral fabric. Human dignity is the right of every individual to be valued and respected. It encompasses freedom, autonomy, and the capacity to live a fulfilling life. Ziibalogzii teaches that every person possesses inherent value. This aligns with the notion of equal treatment, as each individual is recognised as a vital part of the community. At the core of Ziibalogzii is the principle that respecting others is a reflection of self-respect. A society practising Ziibalogzii sees dignity not as an individual entitlement but as a communal responsibility. Ziibalogzii encourages societies to care for their most vulnerable members. This principle promotes policies and actions that protect the marginalised, thereby upholding their dignity and enabling their full participation in society. Ziibalogzii places emphasis on forgiveness and empathy. Ziibalogzii emphasises that the prosperity of one contributes to the prosperity of all. When social structures enable equal opportunities, everyone benefits. Conversely, systemic inequalities are viewed as fractures in the fabric of society that need healing. In addressing historical and systemic inequalities, Ziibalogzii favours restorative justice. By promoting dialogue and understanding, it seeks to heal divisions rather than exacerbate them, ensuring that marginalised voices are heard and validated.

The Nigerian government and civil society must adopt this philosophy to ensure that the exercise of individual rights does not infringe upon the rights of others, promoting a more harmonious and inclusive society. Ziibalogzii's emphasis on inclusivity and participation can strengthen Nigeria's democratic system. In a democracy, it is crucial that all citizens, especially marginalised groups, are included in the political process. Ziibalogzii promotes the idea of consensus and collective decision-making, making it a powerful tool for fostering democratic engagement. In Nigeria, democracy has often been undermined by elite dominance, corruption, and exclusion of certain groups from the political process. Ziibalogzii offers a more inclusive model, where leadership is viewed as a service to the people and not a means for self-enrichment. This can encourage political leaders to prioritise the welfare of all citizens, rather than the interests of a select few. Furthermore, Ziibalogzii encourages dialogue, consultation, and consensus-building, which could be

crucial in resolving Nigeria's ethnic and religious conflicts. A democratic system rooted in Ziibalogzii would encourage a more participatory approach, where all voices are heard and collective decisions are made for the common good.

Ziibalogzii is fundamentally concerned with social justice and equity. This can be especially relevant in Nigeria, where deep inequalities exist along ethnic, religious, and socio-economic lines. The philosophy advocates for a fair distribution of resources, opportunities, and power, which directly addresses issues of inequality in the country. In terms of civil liberties, Ziibalogzii's focus on communal well-being would push for policies that ensure equal access to education, healthcare, and social services for all citizens. It would encourage the Nigerian government to implement policies that address systemic inequalities, such as gender inequality, economic deprivation and access to justice. Ziibalogzii highlights that individuals have a responsibility towards their community. This aligns with democratic principles, which rely on active citizenship, where individuals participate in governance, hold leaders accountable, and contribute to societal development. When citizens act in the spirit of Ziibalogzii, they prioritise the welfare of all over personal gain, enhancing civic engagement and reducing corruption. Leaders guided by Ziibalogzii are expected to act with integrity and prioritise the common good. By fostering a culture of accountability rooted in communal values, democracies can mitigate corruption and enhance public trust.

Moreover, Democracy thrives on inclusion, transparency, and accountability—principles deeply embedded in Ziibalogzii. Nigerian political leaders can draw from Ziibalogzii to engage in more inclusive governance, ensuring that diverse ethnic, religious, and social groups feel represented. Consensus-building, a cornerstone of Ziibalogzii, can replace divisive politics with participatory decision-making, enhancing trust in democratic institutions. Corruption remains a significant impediment to Nigeria's progress. A Ziibalogzii-driven ethical framework promotes communal well-being over individual gain. By fostering a culture of accountability and emphasising the collective impact of corruption, this philosophy can inspire a moral resurgence in leadership and public service. Nigeria's diversity is both a strength and a source of tension. Ziibalogzii encourages

embracing differences and viewing them as essential to collective identity. Implementing Ziibalogzii-inspired educational and social programmes could reduce ethnic and religious divides, promoting national unity under the banner of shared humanity.

In Western legal systems, justice often focuses on punishment and retribution. In contrast, Ziibalogzii emphasises restorative justice, which seeks to repair harm by addressing the needs of both victims and offenders. This approach aims to restore relationships rather than simply impose penalties. Offenders acknowledge their actions and take responsibility, but within a framework that seeks to reintegrate them into the community. Victims play an active role in the justice process, sharing their experiences and contributing to the resolution. Justice is a collective effort, involving families, elders, and community members to foster understanding and healing. Ziibalogzii's emphasis on restorative justice—focusing on rehabilitation and reconciliation rather than retribution—could transform Nigeria's approach to justice. This would enhance the public's faith in the judiciary as a protector of rights and a facilitator of healing.

Conclusion

The thrust of this paper is the attention it has drawn to the problem of civil liberties and democracy in Nigeria, highlighting the key challenges that undermine democratic consolidation and the protection of human rights. The philosophy of civil liberties in Nigeria is a dynamic interplay between universal moral principles and local cultural realities. While grounded in the ideals of human dignity, freedom, and equality, the Nigerian experience highlights the challenges of implementing these liberties in a diverse and often divided society. Instances of police brutality, media suppression, electoral fraud, human rights abuses by the military, ethnic and religious violence and gender inequality are just some of the ways in which civil liberties have been violated in the country. These challenges threaten not only the protection of individual rights but also the democratic fabric of Nigeria. Ziibalogzii provides more than just a philosophical ideal; it offers a practical roadmap for addressing Nigeria's civil liberties and democratic challenges. The study proposed that that Ziibalogzii philosophy offers a holistic, ethical framework that can address many of the problems facing Nigeria today, particularly in relation to civil liberties

and democracy. Its emphasis on interconnectedness, mutual respect, and collective responsibility provides a foundation for more inclusive governance, social justice, and the protection of human rights. By adopting Ziibalogzii, Nigeria can create a society where civil liberties are respected, democracy is strengthened, and the welfare of all citizens is prioritised. In other words, Ziibalogzii provides a rich and nuanced perspective on civil liberty, highlighting the interconnectedness of individual rights and communal responsibilities. By framing civil liberties within a context of mutual respect, dignity, and collective well-being, Ziibalogzii offers a holistic approach that can enrich contemporary discussions on human rights. It challenges us to view freedom not as individual autonomy alone, but as a shared endeavour that uplifts the entire community, fostering a more just and compassionate society. Adopting Ziibalogzii's principles can help Nigeria build a society where civil liberties are not only protected but also understood as essential for collective flourishing. By embracing this African philosophical framework, Nigeria can chart a path toward justice, equality, and peace. While the integration of Ziibalogzii into democratic practices offers significant promise, it requires a cultural shift that emphasises collective well-being over individualism. Societies must balance traditional values with modern governance systems, ensuring that the principles of Ziibalogzii do not undermine individual rights or lead to groupthink.

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