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Citizen-Centric Perspectives on Election Administration and Democratic Process in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

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Abstract

Elections are inevitable for democratic nourishment and their processes are a pathway to ideal legitimate political leadership. The core intent of the paper is to appraise two decades (1999-2019) of the democratic process in Nigeria's elections administration vis-a-vis citizen-centric viewpoint with reference to Lagos State. This research relies on primary and secondary sources of data collection. It adopted participatory democratic theory, precisely Dahl Polyarchy as a theoretical foundation. The findings of the study revealed that the 2003, 2007, and 2011 general elections were marred with various irregularities, but the non-interference disposition in 2015 by incumbent governments and leadership of INEC projected the mandate with fairness through better technological innovations. It was also revealed that the 2019 general elections possessed a typical element of the 2011 general elections with the conspicuous low turnout as its climax. The paper recommended among others, that there is a need for more continuity of the technological initiative in election administration, electoral management system (EMS) research, Continuous updating of voters' registers, and adjustments of operational and administration of logistics to make INEC more trustworthy referees in future elections.

Keywords: *Citizen-Centric, Election Administration, Citizen Participation, Voters Apathy, and Citizens' Civic Engagement.*

Introduction

An election is the most complex obligation in which any democratic country steadily involved (Hall, 2018). Since the inauguration of the fourth republic in Nigeria, the nation has consistently held six general elections, with the outcome of each in questionable relics of electoral derelictions; killings, maiming, intimidation, harassment, ballot snatching, thuggery, arson, and rigging, resulting in manipulation and wanton destruction of properties (Fatile & Sanni, 2018). These are contrary to the ethos of democracy and good governance; it divulges a deficiency of the right democratic culture in the nation's democratic rule over the years. The nation merits commendation for its democratic sustenance, particularly the conduct of periodic elections uninterruptedly for twenty years; it is pertinent to note that each of the successive elections was embedded with peculiar challenges; rigging, intimidation, violence, ballot box stuffing, and other electoral malpractices pattern (Centre for Democracy and Development, CDD, 2019).

An election represents the citizens' decision-making process regarding political power, managed by electoral bodies, in accordance with laws that ensure fair practices (Fagunwa, 2015). Electioneering is a cornerstone of democracy and reflects social equality on an international scale (Massicotte, Blais, & Yoshinaka, 2004; Hall, 2018). However, the structure of elections can significantly impact political development over time (Birch & Wallace, 2003). Ewald (2009) emphasizes that historical and contextual factors play crucial roles in election administration, which involves rulemaking, application, and implementation (Mozaffar & Schedler, 2002). In Nigeria, voter-registration numbers often exceed the actual votes cast, signaling political apathy among citizens. Despite an increase in registered voters over the years, this has not translated into substantial voter turnout (CDD, 2019). For example, in 2019, out of 84 million registered voters, only a fraction participated, with significant discrepancies observed in previous elections as well. The 2019 general election saw the lowest voter turnout in Nigeria's (then) twenty years of democratic practice. Political apathy, characterized by low voter turnout and disengagement from civic duties, poses a serious threat to democracy and national development. When citizens are disengaged, politicians may deprioritize citizen-oriented policies, weakening the democratic process (Powell, 1982; Arowolo & Aluko, 2010; Fagunwa, 2015; Wattenburg, 2002).

Lagos, Nigeria's most populous state, exemplifies this trend. Despite having the highest number of registered voters in 2019, voter turnout was low, with many citizens losing faith in the integrity of the electoral process (Budg IT, 2019). The true measure of civic engagement is not in voter registration numbers, but in the actual participation on election day. Despite political awareness campaigns, voter apathy remains a significant challenge in Nigeria, undermining the effectiveness of democracy. Since independence, voter apathy has been a persistent issue in Nigeria, yet little research has explored this phenomenon in depth. There is a notable decline in citizen participation, particularly during elections (Sule, 2019). While voter apathy is a widely researched topic, findings are often conflicting, necessitating further investigation. Fagunwa (2015) notes the lack of detailed discourse on voter apathy, despite its pervasive presence in Nigeria's political sphere. Oyediran and Arowolo (1981) highlighted voting behavior shaped by regional affiliations, while Nwankwo (2018) pointed out that elections in Nigeria

are often seen as a means to acquire power and resources, leading to desperate and sometimes harmful civic engagement.

Research by Resnick and Casale (2011) indicates that older African citizens are more engaged in voting compared to younger populations. Factors like socioeconomic status also influence voter turnout in Western democracies, as noted by Kuenzi and Lambright (2007, 2011) and others. In Nigeria, issues like excessive security presence, lack of trust in the government, and doubts about the political process hinder active civic engagement (Nwankwo & Okafor, 2017). This study aims to fill gaps in existing literature by examining voter registration, the impact of democratic dividends, and the role of smart card readers in Lagos State.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine citizen perspectives on election administration and the democratic process in Nigeria, particularly in the Lagos State electorate. Other specific objectives are to:

- i. examine whether there is a significant relationship between voters' registration and citizen participation in Lagos State, Nigeria.
- ii. determine whether voter apathy is related to a democratic dividend in Lagos State, Nigeria.
- iii. investigate if there is a correlation between the smart card reader and citizens' civic engagement in Nigeria's electoral process.

Research Questions

- i.
 - ii. Examine the relationship between voters' registration and citizens' participation in Lagos State, Nigeria.
 - iii. Investigate the association between voters' apathy and democratic dividend in Lagos State, Nigeria.
 - iv. Examine the correlation between the smart card reader and citizens' civic engagement in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Research Hypotheses

- i.
 - ii. The hypotheses are stated in a null form:
 - iii. There is no relationship between voter registration and citizen participation.

- iv. There is no association between voters' apathy and democratic dividend.
- v. There is no correlation between smart card readers and citizens' civic engagement.

Conceptual Foundation

Election and Election Administration

Elections in Nigeria are often mired in controversy and disputes, with electoral bodies frequently undergoing dissolution and reconstitution (Okoye, Ezugwuorie, & Onah, 2020). Bariledum, Abang, and Nwigbo (2016) emphasize that elections are a fundamental feature of democracy, serving as the mechanism for the legitimate transfer of power (Kalu & Gberevbie, 2015). Sule and Tal (2018) describe elections as a deliberate process for choosing leaders through periodic regulation, allowing citizens to assess and vote based on performance (Fishkin, 2009). Elections and democracy are inseparable, with election management crucial for ensuring free and fair processes (Shafiu, Umar & Manaf, 2015). However, the autonomy and capacity of Nigeria's Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) are often questioned due to frequent changes by successive administrations (Agbaje & Adejumbi, 2006, cited in Moveh, 2009). Historical issues like violence, malpractice, and ballot rigging by desperate politicians continue to challenge effective election management (Ekundayo, 2015).

Election administration worldwide is deeply intertwined with the overall structure of governance. For electoral management bodies to function effectively, the judiciary must be independent and incorruptible, with strong checks and balances among the executive, legislature, and judiciary. These branches must work together to uphold public trust, ensuring that laws are applied justly and equitably (Oromareghake, 2013). A sustainable democratic culture is essential for successful elections, but in Nigeria, misconception of true democracy has led to a winner-takes-all mentality, fostering political gangsterism that undermines election management. Historically, election management in Nigeria has been fraught with challenges. The first federal election in 1954, conducted under separate regional laws, set a precedent for complications in election administration (Shafiu et al., 2015). This has contributed to systemic issues in Nigeria's political arena, where corrupt officials rarely

face consequences, eroding public trust in state agencies (Ugandan, 2010).

Election Administration in Nigeria

Nigeria's electoral management has its roots in the colonial era. The Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN) was established in 1959 following political agitation, though the elective principle had been introduced in 1922. The ECN conducted the general elections that brought the late Tafawa Balewa to power, under a parliamentary system. After 13 years of military rule, the Federal Electoral Commission (FEC), chaired by Chief Michael Ani, organized the 1979 elections. During President Shagari's administration, the FEC was renamed the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO), which conducted the controversial 1983 elections. In 1987, the National Electoral Commission (NEC), led by Prof. Eme Awa, was established. Following the June 12 election crisis in 1994, General Sani Abacha's military government renamed the NEC to the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON).

In 1998, INEC was established by Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar, with Justice Ephraim Akpata and Sir Abel Guobadia serving as chairmen in 2000 and 2003, respectively. The 2003 elections were marred by violence, irregularities, and international condemnation. Prof. Maurice Iwu, who became INEC chairman in 2005, oversaw the 2007 elections, which were widely criticized as the worst in Nigeria's history. Following these challenges, an Electoral Reform Committee (ERC) was established to address electoral system issues.

Prof. Attairu Jega, who succeeded Iwu in 2010, initiated significant reforms, including technological advancements and staff training. The 2011 elections, while showing improvements, still had notable gaps. With 73 million registered voters, the 2011 elections saw PDP win 59.6% of the vote, CPC 32.3%, and ACN 5.5%. The 2015 elections, conducted under Jega, marked a significant turning point, with APC winning 53.96% and PDP 44.96% of the vote. Jega's tenure ended in 2015, succeeded by Prof. Mahmud Yakubu in October 2015.

Citizen-Centric Philosophy

The Citizen-Centric Philosophy highlights the crucial role of citizen involvement in governance, positioning citizens not just as enablers, but

as the very foundation of government administration (Gupta, 2019). Elections are pivotal in holding elected representatives accountable, granting legitimacy to governments, and shaping policy based on collective preferences (Powell, 2000, 2014; Norris et al., 2018). Good governance is marked by accountability, equity, responsiveness, and transparency in resource management (Downer, 2000). To embody a citizen-centric approach, governments must prioritize service delivery that meets citizens' needs, fostering responsiveness through democratic dialogue (ECOTEC, 2017). This approach is reflected in the Good Governance Index (GGI), which emphasizes focusing on service delivery to improve citizens' quality of life (GGI, 2017). The World Bank (2015) supports this, showing that feedback channels in public administration enhance efficiency. Citizen-centric governance aims to increase trust in government, enhance satisfaction, and provide quality services, by showing understanding of citizen's demands and addressing service gaps (Carson, 2011; OECD, 2013).

Democracy and Democratic Process

In a democracy, elections serve twin purposes; voters' freedom to choose choice candidates and a chance to campaign for the votes of adult suffrage by candidates (Obianyo & Emesibe, 2015, Mbah, Nwangwu & Ugwu, 2019). Van Dijk (2012) examined the democratic process from digital democratic perspectives and political communication and identified the following forms of democratic practices:

- **Government-centric:** Traditional, legal democracy with separation of powers
- **Citizen-centric:** Focuses on social participation and digital interaction.
- **Plebiscitary:** Advocates for direct decision-making by citizens.
- **Pluralist:** Combines various forms of representation and civil organization.
- **Participatory:** Promotes active citizen engagement through education and discourse.
- **Libertarian:** Emphasizes independent political involvement, often through internet platforms.

Nigeria's democratic process incorporates elements of these views, which tends towards increased digital involvement in elections. This paper adopts the citizen-centric view, advocating for greater consideration of citizens' perspectives to enhance engagement.

Citizens and Civic Engagement

Golubeva (2018) argues that citizenship traditionally involves political rights and obligations within a sovereign state. However, civic education and global agreements have expanded citizenship beyond these boundaries. Intercultural citizenship now emphasizes inclusivity, blending cultures, values, and a sense of belonging (Byram, 2012; González & Harris, 2013). The concept of active citizenship has emerged, shaped by civics, education, and social sciences, encouraging social, political, and civic engagement (Albanesi et al., 2019; Barrett & Zani, 2015). Hoskins et al. (2008) define active citizenship as participation in society with mutual respect, non-violence, and a foundation in human rights and democracy.

Research on citizens' engagement in politics has traditionally focused on electoral participation (Deth, 2001; Brady, 1999; Ekma & Amnå, 2012). In developed democratic nations, the level of citizen participation is often debated or attempted, but rarely fully realized. Declining voter turnout and a lack of trust in political actors and institutions have reduced civic engagement, undermining the legitimacy of democratic officeholders (Norris, 2011; Van Biezen et al., 2012; Blais & Rubenson, 2013; Della Porta, 2013).

Voters Apathy

Electorates' turn out to vote for leadership in a country is crucial to the comprehension of citizens' political participation. Yakubu (2012) perceived voters' apathy to be electorates feeling less concerned about voting and electioneering involvement. Cloud (2010) argues that voter apathy is not a participation of eligible citizens. Voter apathy is tantamount to low electorate turnout. Agaigbe (2016) identifies the cause, and mentions five elements of voters' apathy; lack of interest deliberated disenchantment, lackadaisical attitude of voters, ignorance, and absence of proper civic education caused by a political system.

Smart Card Reader

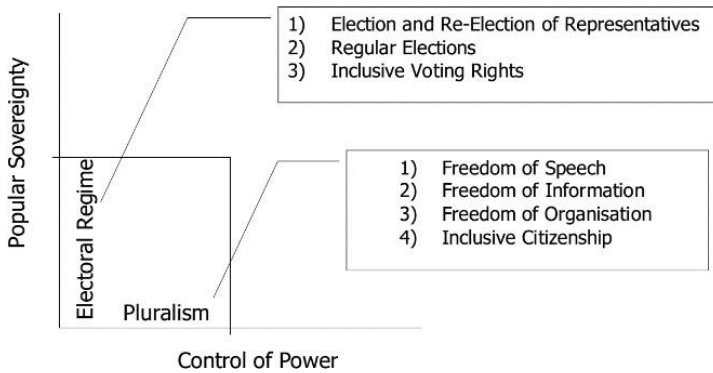
All societies and institutions evolve over time to address functional issues, often through advancements in technology. In Nigeria, this led to the introduction of the Smart Card Reader (SCR) by the electoral management body. The SCR was introduced to enhance transparency and integrity in elections, particularly addressing challenges in the voting system (Ahmad et al., 2015). The device serves two primary purposes: minimizing electoral rigging and safeguarding the credibility of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Designed as an Android device, the SCR verifies and authenticates voters' details by reading biometric data from Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) on Election Day (INEC, 2015). The 2015 general election marked the beginning of this technological innovation, which was further consolidated in 2019. Previous elections were plagued by issues like impersonation, multiple voting, and result falsification, leading to litigation and violence (Ibrahim & Makama, 2015). The SCR represents a significant step forward in addressing these challenges.

Theoretical Review

This paper applies the Polyarchy model by Dahl and Lindblom (1970), where democracy addresses societal issues through popular institutions. INEC, as Nigeria's electoral body, must fulfill its mandate by ensuring collective aspirations are realized through the ballot, following Dahl's criteria (Zittel, 2008);

- i. equal votes as the means of expressing preferences in final decision-making;
- ii.
 - iii. equal chances to express preferences;
 - iv. equal opportunities to become informed and arrive at a preference;
 - v. citizens to decide what matters are or are not to be decided; and
 - vi. all adult members to be included.

Figure 1: Robert Dahl's model of Polyarchy



Source: Zittel (2008)

Dahl's model asserts that free and fair elections require popular sovereignty. It suggests that democracy thrives when public will is expressed in elections, and democratic governance is continuously evaluated by impartial authorities. Zittel (2008) adds that democratic quality is strengthened by balanced institutional structures, where public sovereignty and electoral regimes are measured by realistic criteria such as:

- i. the election and reelection of public officials;
- ii. the existence of regular elections; and
- iii. the existence of inclusive voting rights.

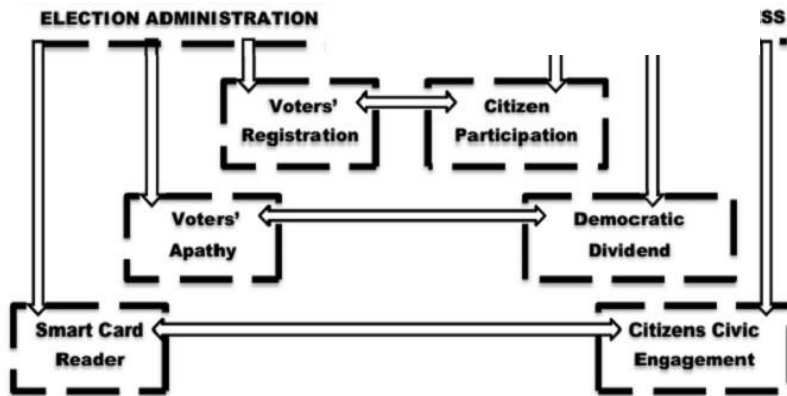
The Nigeria experience over the years has made INEC ensure the measures are used to curtail a lot of anomalies that the institution is faced with over the year through the instillation of initiatives that change the face of elections in Nigeria.

Empirical Review

Urbina and Abe (2017) found that while Filipino citizens welcomed e-government, the lack of ICT infrastructure and internet access hindered adoption. Afolabi (2017) studied Nigerian election administration using interviews and focus groups, revealing that the state's structure impedes free and fair elections. Edet (2016) analyzed election administration from

2007-2015 in Nigeria, uncovering persistent issues. The researchers suggested punishing both perpetrators and victims of electoral fraud to strengthen democratic trust.

Operationalization of Variables



Source: Developed by Author.

Fig.... Conceptual Model developed by the researcher (2022)

The above model depicts the empirical data required designed at assessing citizen-centric perspectives. The conceptual framework indicates the relationship between the election administration and the democratic process.

Method

This study used a survey research design using a quantitative approach. The population area for this study consists of an electorate made up of adult suffrage registered voters in Lagos State, Nigeria. The EMB recorded over 6.5 million registered voters in the State for the 2019 election. Lagos State recorded the highest registered voters in the country. A stratified and random sampling technique was used to select 10 selected Local Government Areas (LGAs), 10 Local Council Development Areas (LCDAs), and registered voters across the five administrative divisions (Ikeja, Badagry, Ikorodu, Lagos, and Epe) in

Lagos State.

Population and Sample Size

This work utilized Cochran's (1963) formula to calculate the sample size for the study given a desired level of precision, a confidence level, and the estimated proportion of the attribute present in the population. Cochran's formula is considered especially appropriate in situations with large populations (6,500,000 electorates).

The resulting sample size is demonstrated in equation 1, using the Cochran (1963) formula for sample size determination;

Sample size,
$$n = n_o \left(1 + \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2 N} \right) \dots\dots\dots 1a$$

Where
$$n = \frac{n_o (Z^2 pq / e^2)}{1 - \frac{n_o (Z^2 pq / e^2)}{N}} \dots\dots\dots 1b$$

Where

n = The sample size,

Z^2 = The abscissa of the normal curve that cuts off an area α at the tails ($1 - \alpha$ equals the desired confidence level, e.g., 95%). The value for Z is found in statistical tables which contain the area under the normal curve = 1.96.

e = The desired level of precision = 0.05
 p = The estimated proportion of an attribute that is present in the population = 0.5 $q = 1 - p = 1 - 0.5 = 0.5$
 thus,

$$= n_o \left(\frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2} \right) = \left(\frac{1.96^2 (0.5)(0.5)}{0.05^2} \right) = 384.16$$

$$= \frac{n_o (Z^2 pq / e^2)}{1 - \frac{n_o (Z^2 pq / e^2)}{N}} = \frac{384.16}{1 - \frac{384.16 - 1}{6,500,000}} = 385.$$

Stratified and random sampling techniques were used to select 385 registered voters across the five divisions in Lagos State. These sampling techniques were used because they bring to bear more appropriate information about the target electorate. The sampled respondents are 30 years and above and have voted in the last twenty years.

Primary data were obtained from 385 respondents through the administration of copies of the administered questionnaire. The

questionnaire was premeditated to ensure adequate content requirements and simple to elicit objective citizens' disposition cum familiarity with electoral experience in the last 20 years.

Validity and Reliability of Research Instrument

Content validity was used to validate the research instrument, while the reliability of the designed instrument was ascertained by the internal consistency method. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of reliability was calculated for the eight (8) major constructs used for the study.

The Results in the Table

4.1 shows that the research instrument is reliable and internally consistent since Cronbach's Alpha results for all the constructs are greater than 0.7.

Variables	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha results
Voters Apathy	4	0.709
Voters Registration	4	0.724
Democratic Dividend	4	0.901
Smart Card Reader	4	0.882
Citizen Participation	4	0.807
Citizens Civic Engagement	4	0.801

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

The benchmark for reliability Cronbach's Alpha score is 0.70 as recommended by Nunnally (1978). Thus, the overall reliability of the scale is guaranteed.

Test of Hypotheses

In this section, an attempt is made to test each of the stated hypotheses, using appropriate statistics. Correlation analysis and regression analysis were used to test the stated hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance (95% confidence level).

Hypothesis one

There is no relationship between voter registration and citizen participation.

Independent Variable = Voters Registration
 Dependent Variable = Citizen Participation.

Correlation analysis was used to test this hypothesis.

Correlations			
		Voters Registration	Citizen Participation
Voters Registration	Pearson Correlation	1	.641**
	Sig. (2-Tailed)		.000
	N	348	348
Citizen Participation	Pearson Correlation	.641**	1
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	.000	
	N	348	348

** . Correlation Is Significant At The 0.05 Level (2-Tailed).

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis result above suggests that there is a positive relationship between voter registration and citizen participation ($r = 0.641$). This relationship is statistically significant because the p-value for the result (0.000) is less than the level of significance (0.05) used for the study.

Decision

The null hypothesis was rejected, while the alternative hypothesis was accepted. This implies that there is a significant positive relationship between voter registration and citizen participation.

Hypothesis two

There is no association between voters’ apathy and democratic dividend.
 Independent Variable = Voters’ Apathy
 Dependent Variable =

Democratic Dividend.

Correlation analysis was used to test this hypothesis.

Correlations			
		Voters' Apathy	Democratic Dividend
Voters' Apathy	Pearson Correlation	1	.805**
	Sig. (2-Tailed)		.000
	N	348	348
Democratic Dividend	Pearson Correlation	.805**	1
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	.000	
	N	348	348
**. Correlation Is Significant At The 0.05 Level (2-Tailed).			

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis result above suggests that there is a positive relationship between voters' apathy and democratic dividend ($r = 0.805$). This relationship is statistically significant because the p-value for the result (0.000) is less than the level of significance (0.05) used for the study.

Decision

The null hypothesis was rejected, while the alternative hypothesis was accepted. This implies that there is a significant positive relationship between voters' apathy and democratic dividend.

Hypothesis three

There is no correlation between a smart card reader and citizens' civic engagement.

Independent Variable = Smart Card Reader
 Dependent Variable = Civic Engagement.

Correlation analysis was used to test this hypothesis.

Correlations			
		Smart Card Reader	Citizens' Civic Engagement
Smart Card Reader	Pearson Correlation	1	.664**
	Sig. (2-Tailed)		.000
	N	348	348
Citizens' Civic Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.664**	1
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	.000	
	N	348	348

** . Correlation Is Significant At The 0.05 Level (2-Tailed).

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis result above suggests that there is a positive relationship between a smart card reader and citizens' civic engagement ($r = 0.664$). This the relationship is statistically significant because the p-value for the result (0.000) is less than the level of significance (0.05) used for the study.

Decision

The null hypothesis was rejected, while the alternative hypothesis was accepted. This implies that there is a significant positive relationship between the smart card reader and citizens' civic engagement.

Conclusion

This research explores elections as a reflection of democratic values, emphasizing the need for strong institutions, increased voter participation, and impartial electoral bodies. Citizen engagement depends on political will and transparency. However, active participation requires assurance from public officials that state resources will not be misused to intimidate the opposition. A legitimate democratic government is marked by high, uncoerced voter turnout, respect for the opposition, and reduced violence and fraud. Without these factors and solid citizen commitment, elected officials may struggle to gain popular support and recognition.

Recommendations

Elections are essential in democracies, enabling citizens to choose their representatives and shape the nation's future. Electoral bodies must adapt, embracing technology, streamlining registration, and ensuring smooth logistics to maintain integrity. Civic engagement is crucial for a thriving democracy, requiring public education on voting rights and the importance of participation. Reducing political apathy and increasing voter turnout can lead to a more representative government. Governments should be responsive to citizens' needs, fostering trust in democratic institutions and encouraging active civic participation, which strengthens the overall democratic system.

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