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The Challenges of Political Parties and Democratic Elections in Nigeria

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Abstract

Political parties play very vital roles in democratic elections; they are referred to as the heart of examining the health of any form of democracy. Political Parties is an alliance of likeminded people who work together to win elections and control of the government. Political Parties compete against one another for political power and for the ability to put their philosophies and policies into effect. Modern representative democracy cannot do without political parties. This paper examines an important aspect of Nigeria's Democratic Governance, which is about Political Parties in general and that there is a direct relationship between the character and conduct of a country's political parties and the degree of democratic consolidation and Governance in that country. The paper argues that Nigerian Democracy has not scored high when compared with countries that are heading towards stable democracy. As a theoretical underpinning, the group theory as propounded by Arthur Bentley was adopted. The secondary sources of data collection were utilised which includes the use of such materials as textbooks, journals, newspapers and magazines. The paper found out that political parties often fail to perform their roles adequately or with sufficient credibility. Some are fundamentally weak and rely heavily on the personal appeal of their leaders. Political Leaders also engage in all manner of election malpractices ranging from violence, thuggery, deployment of ethnic sentiments e.t.c all these create an atmosphere which undermine democratic governance. In conclusion, if parties are not properly connected to the society, they will remain distant from voters' concerns and the best person will not occupy political office, if candidate selection is based on nepotism rather than on merit. The research recommends that for political parties, to be effective, they should practice internal democracy and consistent observance of the principles of transparency, accountability, consultation and consensus building in policies and decision making.

Keywords: *Political Parties, Democracy, Governance, Politics, Power, Sustainable Development, Patron-Client relationship.*

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Background to the Study

Democratic governance with its ideal of elective representation, freedom of choice of leaders, rule of law, freedom of expression, accountability among others, has become the acceptable system of government all over the world. It is a form of government in which the supreme power of a political community rests on popular sovereignty. (Osabiya, 2015).

Robust systems of political parties are essential components of a democratic society. Political parties are at the heart of examining the health of any form of democracy. Their roles and activities are critical in any assessment of democratic practice, with the transition to civil rule in 1999 signalling the commencement of the fourth republic. Political parties had the mandate to produce the right calibre of people to govern (Momoh, 2013). One of the complex and critical institutions of democracy is the political party (ies) (Omotola, 2009).

Political parties are traditionally the most significant intermediary organisation in democratic societies. Students of political parties have commonly been associated with democracy itself (Orji, 2013), for example, maintains that 'to talk, today, about democracy, is to talk about a system of competitive political parties. Political parties, as "makers" of democracy, have been so romanticized that scholars claim that neither democracy nor democratic societies are thinkable without them (Omotola, 2009). In other words, the existence of vibrant political parties is a sine qua non for democratic consolidation in any polity (Dode, 2010). Well–functioning political parties are essential for the success of electoral democracy and overall political development of Nigeria (Adetula and Adeyi, 2013).

Anchoring on the platforms offered by political parties, citizens make demands on the state, support specific policy, positions, and participate in public policy making and implementation. Political parties therefore provide the vital linkage between citizen and the state, governors and the governed, and elites and the masses (Lawson, 1980). The character and tendencies exhibited by political parties has implications for democratic sustenance in the country (Pogoson, 2013:5). The nature, behaviour and performance of political parties and the nature of party relations with other parties, groups, and even the state have consequences for the nature of governance, integration, stability and security. The political party is a critical, formal, institutional, organizational and mobilization player in the political process particularly in relation to power, democracy, governance, government and economy (Ikelegbe, 2013:). The performance of political parties in terms of articulation, aggregation, representation and organization are critical to political accountability, communication, democratic consolidation and political stability (Ikelegbe, et al).

The question is what has made elections in Nigeria to constitute a menace? Some scholars and citizen alike have attributed these problems to the character and nature of Nigerian political parties. This paper argues that the problem with democracy and elections are the effects of the character and functions its political parties and the character of the political elites.

Conceptual Discourse
On Political Parties

Political party/parties have been defined in many different ways by scholars. However, no matter the perspective from which it is defined, all political parties have basic characteristics and functions which they perform. (Rodee, 1983) and Grazia (1960) observed that political parties, have a rather distinct habitat, a peculiar mode of operation, and special characteristics of structure and function. Other scholars have come to see political parties as promoting the vital interest of a nation. Within this category we have Edmund Bunke, who in the last quarter of the eighteenth century famously defines political party as a body of men united, for promoting by their joint endeavours, the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they all agreed.

Others have conceptualized parties as coalition of group and interest aimed at controlling state power for their own interest (Olagunju, 1992 and Leon, 1967). A political party can be define as a group of people or an organized group of people who seek to control the government in order to put their ideology or programme into practice .

Joseph (1979) in his own contribution sees political party as a formal organization whose self conscious primary purpose is to place and maintain in public office persons who will control alone or in coalition the machinery of government.

In this regard, political parties are groups organized for the purpose of achieving and exercising political power through the capture of state power. They are also characterized as a coalition of group interests representing a segment of the social community. However, such a group shall be regarded as a party so long as it participates in electoral competition. In other words, a political party cannot exist in isolation of a political system. They both act as lubricants and ingredients of ideal democratic system. In contemporary times, political parties are seen as the most critical contending political forces seeking for power (Nwajoku, 2001).

In a liberal democracy, a political party is an association of people with similar interest(s) and common purpose. The interest(s) and purpose shown by them revolve around the objective of using the party to acquire power, share in the exercise of power or to take control of government (Yaqub, 1992). Similarly political parties are organized instrumentalities through which the citizens not only attempt to influence, but also control and determine the type and direction of public policies and programmes, including the general allocation of resources (Pakis & Inokoba, 2006). By liberal democratic standards, it shows that political parties are 'voluntary organizations to which people voluntarily belong' and they develop their rules and guidelines based on their philosophies. It is on this basis that Yaqub (1992:55) posits that: Political parties are thus conceptualized not because they have been imposed or decreed into existence by a super-ordinary body of men for the use of lesser men and women, but because they emerge organically from the common history, shared values, interest and aspirations of those who are current as well as prospective members. The essence of party politics, in the conceptualization of Yaqub, is to acquire power and to implement party politics.

Yaqub's idea of party politics was more rigorously interpreted by Okonta (2008) in the submissions that political parties not only aggregate views and interests, they are also the organizational machine for articulating issues and ideas relevant to the development of a nation. Anything short of this is considered by Yaqub, as a partial conceptualization of what a political party is expected to be and a subversion of the normal process of the development of political parties, especially in the liberal democratic mould. Yaqub (1992:15) states thus, 'fighting election is crucial but educating, mobilizing and aggregating the demands of the electorates are equally, if not more, important functions of a political party'.

Komolafe (2010:72) agrees with Yaqub and Okonta that political parties do not exist just for the purpose of elections. He enumerates other functions of a political party to include education, policy formulation, advocacy, research, mobilization and contestation of ideas. According to Komolafe, in most nations, political parties exist to popularize ideas and organize issue-based campaigns, engage government in the debate of policies, promote divergent ideologies and raise issues that merit structured national debate. To provide a counterpoise to the party in power, Komolafe said opposition parties 'form alliances and develop working relationships based on proximity of ideas'. From the foregoing discourse, political parties provide the platform through which party politics is given practical expression. This probably explains why Olaniyi (2001:99) defines party politics as 'activities of political parties in a democratic environment to seek for the control of political offices through stated norms of elections'. It exists when elective principles are present in a democratic state which recognizes and institutionalizes the legitimate choice of the citizens to elect their representatives into political offices (Azeez, 2009). Hence, the primary objective of party politics is directed towards a single goal of accessing and controlling governmental or political power. In the submission of Okoye (1982), party politics includes 'activities of formal structure, institution or organization which compete through electoral process to control the personnel and policies of government, with the aim of allocating the scarce resources in a state through an institutionalized means or procedure'.

There are arguments that the character of party politics in Nigeria is such that the political party in power at the centre stiffles opposition parties. In the long-drawn controversy, Ayila (2006) argued that party politics in Nigeria's democratic practice since 1960 shows that any political party in control of the apparatus of state, principally gained and sustained by control of the economy, plants moles and disruptive elements in opposition parties to create instability and render them ineffective to compete for power. The reaction of Ogunmefun (2007:18) to these arguments is that, it is the responsibility of opposition parties to develop their parties and make them viable to compete for power. He further observes that 'the opposition parties are weak, ineffective and poorly organized to challenge for political power'. Ogunmefun summarizes political parties in Nigeria as: A collection of associations or interest groups. As things stand, there is complete mismatch between the quality of party membership and policy evolution. The quality of people who constitute the large majority of the membership of political parties have little or no education andf many are unfit to articulate policies for effective governance. This characterization of political parties is at variance with what obtains in advance and growing democracies where people join and identify with political parties on the basis of their political beliefs and what policies they stand for in public service.

On Democratic Governance

According to *1989 World Bank Report on Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth,* Governance is defined 'as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development'. Democratic governance, by extension, refers to a democratic mode of exercising powers and performing functions by established institutions to achieve developmental goals (Lafenwa, 2009). More appropriately, democratic governance can be understood in terms of the elements it constitutes. It is in line with the constitutive elements of democratic governance that the National League of Cities (2008) in Lafenwa (2009:4) defines the concept as 'the art of governing a community in participatory, deliberative, and collaborative ways'.

Jega (2006) correctly listed the constitutive elements of democratic governance to include the following;

i) Representation**:** People having the freedom to choose their representative through periodic free and fair election.
ii) Participation: People being involved in the processes of policy formulation and policy implementation, and in the general management of public affairs.
iii) Responsive and Accountable Governance: Delivery of service to the people and communities in a manner that creates utilitarian value i.e. policies of government bringing greatest happiness to the greater number of people.
iv) Egalitarian Society: Equality before the law, rule of rule, constitutional regime, fairness, economic and social justice.
v) Transparency and Accountability in both public conduct and in the management of commonwealth (public resources).

The attainment or elusiveness of these elements in a political system is, simply, a measure of its democratic stature. According to Oyovbaire (1987), democracy as a system of government seeks to realize a generally recognized common good through a collective initiation and discussion of policy questions concerning public affairs and which delegates authority to agents to implement the broad decisions made by the people through majority vote. Thus, in contemporary times, democracy has been referred to as the expression of popular will of the political community through elected representatives. The contemporary democracy, according to Raphael (1976), rests on representative government.

Democratic governance in Nigeria has been a different thing when compared to what is obtainable in other parts of the world. The respect for human right and the rule of law which are the main features of democracy are not visible especially Election rigging and gangsterism is the order of the day that one can hardly differentiate between democratic government and autocracy.

In modern societies, political parties are very essential to political process. They have become veritable instrument or adjunct of democracy in any democratic system. Political parties are not only instrument for capturing political power, but they are also vehicles for

the aggregation of interests and ultimate satisfaction of such interests through the control of government. Obviously political parties are crucial to the sustenance of democratic governance.

In revisiting basic questions concerning the values and nature of democratic governance, the concept is approached by emphasizing two of the main pillars of the liberal democratic tradition; citizen participation in the determination of government itself and in decision making processes; and a rights 'platform' that supports and protects the role of individuals in the governance process. This explains, to a large extent, why democratic governance is defined by Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and Office for Democratic Institution and Human Rights (ODIHR) as a 'system of government where institutions function according to democratic processes and norms, both internally and in their interaction with other institutions' (www.osce/odihr/demgov). According to these organizations, key principles of democratic governance are political pluralism, institutional accountability and responsiveness, active civil society, human rights, the rule of law and democratic elections.

Broadly speaking, democratic governance, in the expressions of Roberts and Edwards in Bello-Imam and Obadan (2004:3) depicts: Popular participation, absolute respect for the rule of law, a general guarantee of fundamental freedoms which lubricate popular participation, periodic, competitive, free and fair elections with the vote of every citizen counting equally, respect for majority rule as well as the readiness of minority to acquiesce in the decision of the majority, accountability, guarantee of separation of powers in practice, transparency, and responsiveness in governance and opportunity for change of government or any leadership found wanting. Ideally, democratic governance operates with democratic institutions like political parties, the judiciary and the legislature, which are adduced by classical democratic theory as bulwarks of democracy.

The dominant role of political parties in democratic governance is much stressed by Agorundu (2009) and Achi (2005). Agorundu not only described political parties as 'central organs in any democratic setting', but also alluded to the fact that strong and viable parties are a 'prerequisite to an enduring democratic culture'. He further noted that party politics based on principles of equity, representation, diversity and choice is important for the democratic governance. Similarly, the critical links between political parties and sustenance of democratic governance reinforces what Achi (2005:109) refers to as 'non-negotiable imperative of strong political parties as a bulwark for the survival of democracy'. From the above; it will be valuable to say that political parties constitute the link between diverse groups in society attempting to achieve organised political actions. In that sense therefore, a political party is a coalition of groups of individuals party is a coalition groups of individuals seeking access to state in an election.

On Election

Elections are very central to the practice of democracy all over the world. Elections have offered a way through which the people freely decide who their leaders should be. It is believed that all democracies hold elections, but at the same time, not all elections are

democratic. Undemocratic elections are those elections in which there may be only one person or a list of candidates for electives posts with no alternative choices. Such elections may offer several candidates for each office, but ensure through intimidation or rigging that only the government approved candidate is chosen. Other elections may offer genuine choices but only within the incumbent party. These are not democratic elections (Kirkpatrick, 1984). The Question them is what is election?

Collier and Vicente (2007:3) opined that, in many of the newly democratic low – income countries the only aspect of democracy that has been introduced is elections. But significantly, within these societies, there are neither 'checks nor balances' upon the use of power, nor effective rules for the conduct of the election. This is why according to them, records of elections in Africa and other low – income democracies are not encouraging. A more concise definition of election was given by (Kirkpatrick et al), who define democratic elections a being not merely symbolic, but competitive, periodic, inclusive, definitive election in which the chief decision – makers in government are selected by citizens who enjoy broad freedom to criticism and to present alternatives. It has thus been argued that without significant democratic process falls short of its goals (Powell, 1992). The essence of election is that it offers preference to the electorates who can decide between alternations. Although, in Africa, likely reason for the failure of most elections to discipline governments into improved performance is that the participants rely upon illegitimate strategies to victory (Collier, and Vicente, 2007).

Objective of the Study

This paper examines an important aspect of Nigeria's Democratic Governance, which is about Political Parties in general and that there is a direct relationship between the character and conduct of a country's political parties and the degree of democratic consolidation and Governance in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted in this study is the group theory which was propounded by Arthur Bentley. The group theory received the blessings of scholars like David Truman, Robert Daniel; Grant McConnell, Theodora J. Lewis, Earl Lathans among others. They saw power as diffused among many interest groups competing against each other. Earl Lathan described a society as a simple universe of groups which combine, break and form coalitions and castellation of power in a restless alteration. The theory was adopted because of the strong view of scholars such as Bentley (1980) who was of the strong opinion that institutional approach should not be used for political analysis as these institutions are static as against politics which is dynamic and full of activities. He argued that politics is a group affair and each group is competing against one another for power. The group Bentley, added, is a pattern of process involving mass of activities and not a collection of individual. The group emerges from frequent interaction among its individual members which is directed by their shared interest. The interest leads to the organization of the groups.

The adoption of this theory as basis for the examination of the role of political parties in electoral democratic in Nigeria is as a result of the inter play of forces and struggle for power among different political parties which are formed along various ethnic/religious groups in the Nigerian society which resulted shortly after independence. Political parties were formed along ethnic or sectional line.

Functions of Political Parties

Political parties perform a number of functions in any political system. Some will be mentioned here to buttress their expected contributions to the achievement of a democratically stable polity. Political party should exercise political power (authority) (yaqub 2002). Schumpeter has stressed so much on this requirement for a system to be tagged truly democratic.

Political parties are equally expected to serve as instruments of political education, interest aggregation, political socialization and political recruitment. Parties are institutions that help organize, move or affect agenda of government etc. The functions of political parties specifically include; educating, articulating, and aggregating issues that the parties feels the public is not well informed about or about which they want to make their position clear. In the words of (yaqub et al) it is the basis of competently performing these roles that a political party can stand a good chance of displacing and thereby, taking power from a political party currently in the saddle.

In the course of preparing to capture state power and exercise authority in the future, the party must devote its attention to recruiting and training people to occupy political positions in the state. They thus, articulate alternative policies, while serving as legal opposition to the party in power by performing these functions, it is expected that parties will reduce the incidents of antinational building factors like ethnic chauvinism, bigotry and other communal and cultural intolerance, particularly in ethnically and culturally diverse countries.

Merkel (1977) summarized the basic functions of political parties as follows;

a. Recruitment and selection of leadership personnel for government offices.
b. Generation of programmes and policies for government
c. Coordination and control of governmental organs
d. Social integration through satisfaction and reconciliation of groups demand or the provision common belief system or ideology.
e. Social integration of individuals by mobilization of support and by socialization

Political parties according to the political bureau (1987) can be seen as both the expression and management of conflict within a political system. Political parties therefore, are to be seen not only as products of their environment but also as instrument or institutions organized to affect the environment. Viewed this way political parties function as:

i. Agent of political participation and
ii. Aggregation of demands. Individuals and groups normally express in discreet terms the functions they want the government to perform for themselves or others.

Thus some people may demand roads and bridges; some may demand free education and health services, while others may demand subsidized houses or adequate agricultural facilities or logistics. The parties normally collect and articulate these demands or interest upon which both ideas and programmes are evolved.

iii. Through the instrumentality of the political parties, political attitude and behaviour of members could be mobilized more effectively towards the ends and goals of government. It is through political parties that political ideas are transmitted within the realms of political structures

iv. One other major function of political party is in the area of legitimacy of authority. Political parties are more flexible instruments for winning popular support. Equally in countries where parties exist, it is easier to deal with leadership succession than in countries without political parties.

v. Sectional religious and ethnic loyalties are arrested through truly national political parties. Put differently, political parties help in the achievement of national integration.

vi. Other specific roles of political parties include: spreading general understanding of the national philosophy and national objectives, drawing up canvassing strategies for attaining national objective, sustaining the fraternity of the people examining entirely government politics and their implementation in the light of national philosophy and national objectives and inculcating national pride, self reliance in members, representatives and in the public generally (see Nigeria's political bureau report, 1987 p. 125). It is therefore an instrument of generating national consciousness in any dramatic and civilized nations of the world.

The Challenges of Political Parties

These challenges can be view into the following headings:

i) **Absence of Internal Democracy within the Political Parties:** Most political parties do not practice internal democracy because their leaders hardly emerge democratically, hence the rising culture of political violence and assassinations especially in some sections of the country. Internal (party) democracy could be defined as a democratic process which involves accountability and transparency in all party affairs most especially in selecting party leaders, flag bearer, executive and other party officials in a political party (Ukaeje, 2011). Internal democracy thus connotes political parties giving full expression and unfettered access to their members to participate in the decision making process. It also means running affairs transparently, in accordance with agreed rules, and in a manner that is fair and just. (Kari and Uchenna, 2001).

Among the most elementary yet significant aspect of political development in a democracy are the concentration of party congresses and the conduct of transparent and successful party primaries to elect leaders and candidates (i.e flag - bearer) respectively. Since 1999, the trend has been that party primaries among virtually all political parties in Nigeria are usually pre – determined with party "God – fathers" having the final say in the selection of both party leaders and candidates (Simbine, 2013:15). There is lack of internal

democracy and poor governance systems in the political parties as indicated by non inclusive system of participation and decision making, lack of opportunities from broad input, absence of well define structures, rules and processes, denial of individuals and group rights, and weak mechanism for redressing grievances (Ikelegbe, 2013:3). Obviously, political Godfathers are always unwilling to allow internal party democracy, a circumstance that leads to frequent conflicts and constrains the development of parties as popular organizations. Expectedly, this leads to internal party crisis and frequent decamping of aggrieved politicians to other political parties where their aspiration can be accommodated (Simbine,et al). Party leaderships have lacked popular bases and legitimacy and insensitivity. The existence and dominance of party patrons and political machines have become the covert and clandestine platform for warfare like struggles to access and retain political power (Ikelegbe, ibid).

Nigeria parties have neither risen above ethnic considerations nor exhibited internal democracy in their structure, organization and practice of politics. Rather, they have not only been ridden with internal crisis but also turned out to be vehicles of corruption in material and ethical terms in the country; turning politics into a vocation not designed for the public interest but for primitive accumulation and the collection of rents (Jinadu, 2013) unlike what existed in the first and second republics, virtually all the political parties since the fourth republic concerned lack internal democracy, absence of which…breeds moneterization of politics and the tendency of political vagrancy, institutionalized bitterness and violence in the attempt to gain and retain political power at all cost(Simbine, 2007).

ii) **Lack of Institutionalization and Personalization of Political Parties:** Parties in Nigeria have not been able to attain the expected degree of institutionalization especially in the areas of material cohesion and discipline, this deficiency has also contributed to the decline of their conflict management capacities at both intra and inters – party relations levels. The level of crisis both levels of party relation are worrisome. It is such that none of the parties have been able to hold together without severe conflict that most times threaten their very heart (Simbine, 2013:18). Party and party system institutionalization is measured by the internal and external activities of parties. Internal refers to all those factors that are only internal to party organization, such as internal democracy. e.t.c. and external refers to the relationship of parties with their external environment (Kura; 2011).

The internal characteristic and power configurations of the political parties have manifested in huge organization weaknesses and internal conflicts. The parties have particularly been plagued by suspensions and expulsions of the party members, cross carpeting particularly prior to elections and deep divisions and factions that have manifested sometimes in violent clashes (Ikelegbe, 2013). Intra – party violent conflicts have been particularly heightened during election periods because of the imposition of favoured and fusions consensus candidates, and the swapping of nominated candidates by party chieftains. The absence of equalitarian platforms and the subversion of the will of ordinary party members and delegates in party primaries, have grieved several party

leaders and members and underlined numerous detections and cross carpeting (Ikelegbe, 2013:18-19). More empirically, whether parties in a particular polity are able to effectively perform these functions is a matter of the degree of party and party system institution (Kura, 2008).

Un– institutionalized parties will always find it difficult to develop deep roots in the society in which they exist and operate. This factor has led to a low rate of party identification among voters, which also leads to high electoral volatility (Simbine, 2013:18). When parties generally lack strong institutionalization, they show case a low level of organization and become even more available to be hijacked by a few party leaders who dictate to the majority. According to Omotola (2009:612), it is incontrovertible that the mere adoption of party pluralism will not automatically advance the cause of democracy without the institutionalization of concrete parameters to promote and sustain strong political culture and due process in theory and practice. The frequent changes being experience in the leadership of the PDP is a pointer to serious and unmanageable disagreements and crisis of leadership and legitimacy and a fault line in institution. For example between May 1999 and 2012 the PDP changed its national chairman more than Ten (10)! Has been led by Solomon Lar, Barnabas Germade, Audu Ogbe, Ahmadu Ali, Vincent Ogbulafor, Okwesidieze Alwodo, Halima Muhammed Bello, Bamanga Tukur, Adamu Muazu and presently a contention between Amoudu Sherif and Ahmed Maikarfi (Nigerian Bullefin 2016) An obvious fact is that none of these changes was succession orderly, open, free, independent and reflective of the actual wishes of the majority of the party faithful. Rather, each (with the exception of the pioneer chair) was predicated upon the endorsement, whims and caprices of a given section of the party elite led often times by the (incumbent) president (Adejumobi, 2002: 36-53).

God Fatherism

God fatherism has become a dominant feature of the party system in Nigeria today. Ayoade states that godfather is …a benign political accretion of the position of either political notables' or dreaded political rascals who are recalcitrant to the deterrence of the legal regime" (2008:85). Godfatherism has been described as "an ideology which is constructed on the belief of that certain individual posses considerable means to unilaterally determine who get party ticket to run for an election and who win in an electoral contest" (Ogaundiya, 2009:2860: To Ayoade (2006), Godfatherism is not philanthropy, it is often marked by devious and undemocratic acts such as violence, bribery and corruption all for the sake of perpetuating the wishes of the Godfather. There is a symbolic relationship between the Godfather and the Godson (patron-client relationship). The Godfather" invests" reciprocate by reimbursing the Godson in kind and keeping absolute loyalty to the Godfather in all respects, including decision making whilst in public office. The key goal of all Godfathers is rule by proxy or rule through protégés (Ojo and Lawal, 2013; 187).

Godfather politics typically ensures that results are declared even when there is no evidence that voting actually took place. It typically plays electoral politics with or without respect for the established rules of conduct governing the process, and does not display any sense of moral restraint in its appreciation of what constitutes appropriate behaviour in a democratic political order. It is not surprising therefore that constitution elections results, whether at the intra – party level or at the level of general elections are always disputed by those who are declared losers. In fact, all five presidential elections since 1999 have been the subject of judicial intervention (Abutudu, 2013. 10 – 11).

The hijack of political parties by Godfathers has virtually choked up the party system as channel for the aggregation of local or constituency interest. The preferences expressed by the party typically turn out to be personal interests of the Godfather. The sustainability of the control of the political inched by the Godfather cannot be left to the uncertainty of being subjected to the preferences of the voter in a free and fair election. The desperation has typically led to the explicit crude criminalization of the electoral process (Abutudu, 2013:12). Therefore, because Godfathers have significant influence on the internal workings of political parties, they are in deliberately involved in the stability or otherwise of these parties. In other words, because they are the modulators and epicenter of political in-fighting and struggle for power and perquisites of office, they are one causative factor in understanding political Nomadism (Momoh, 2013:17).

Incessant Party/Political Violence

Perhaps the most damming record of political parties on clean politics is the persistence of violence in our political system (Ibeanu 2013:13). Apart from election conducted by the colonial government and the military, others particularly the 1964, 1983, 2003, 2007, 2011 and even the last conducted elections of 2015 were played by violence and crises. Elections in Nigeria since the inception of the fourth republic have being played with irregularities and violence (Nweke 2005:386). These elections were plagued by incidents of violence that included theft and snatching of election materials, killings, arson, abductions, assault, intimidation, destruction of properties and election materials, and chaos; more specifically incidents of electoral violence have included assault of electoral officials and voters, hijack and seizure of diction materials, attacks on security officials and violent clashes between rural things and sympathizers of political parties (Nweke 2005 : 386).

The major parties in Nigeria are to varying degrees involved in their formation, mobilizations, primaries and general elections. Some parties have loyal armed groups that are fairly known in some states and communities that are deployed to protect their interests (Ikelegbe, 2013:20). During the fourth Republic, the breeding and use of things has assumed a new dimension in the contemporary scenerious, it has assumed a multiple – layered dimension because both opposition and the ruling parties now breed things; Also, within the parties, leading figures and aspirants now maintain hordes of people mostly male who perform sundry act such as errands guards and harassment of political opponents (Abdul – Jelil, 2009:11). Individual things, cult groups and armed guards hire out their service to party leaders, who arm and pay them for specific violent roles during primaries and elections. One of the violent methods engaged by these chieftains is

assassinations. Politically motivated assassinations have been a major feature of the struggles for power and resources within and between political parties. Other forms of violence are violent attack on the properties, campaign and party offices and supporters of opponents (Ikelegbe, 2013).

Conclusion

From our discussion above, we have seen that the role of the political parties in Nigerian elections were anti democratic both in character and in functions: offence on emerging democratic country like Nigeria needs strong and sustainable political parties with the capacity to represent citizens and provide policy choices that demonstrate their ability to govern for the public good. Since the ushering in of the fourth Republic in Nigeria, we have witness an increasing disconnect between the Nigerian citizen and their elected leaders, which is also shown in the decline of political activism, and a growing sophistication of anti – democratic forces. The reasons are that the roles and functions which political parties are suppose to play are relegated to the background. The citizens are robbed of their rights as active participants' in polities and democratic elections.

Today in Nigeria, the deficiencies in party system development are so widespread that they have become a central concern for the democratization process to the extent that the political parties are increasingly seen as a threat to democracy. The acknowledgement of such impediments to Nigerians democratic development has resulted in growing attention to the question of how, more coherent and representative parties and party systems can be sustained in fragile environment. The above challenges have therefore necessitated the introduction of ambitious reforms in Nigeria aimed at changing the way parties are form, organize and behave. These party regulations attempt to shape the development of democratic competition but sometimes struggle to allow reasonable free party formation and competition, including parties which take into cognizance the mass of the citizens.

Recommendations

In the light of the finding of this work, the following recommendations are made:

i) All the political parties need to be re – organized on the principle of inclusiveness rather than exclusion, party officials needs to be re-trained to carry out their functions effectively.

ii) Critical need needs to be paid to the political parties as institutions that play diverse but central roles in democratic consolidation.

iii) The parties need to be re – engineered from mere institutions for acquiring political power to effective institution that are capable of structuring, mediating and reconciling social interest and conflicts. This means that issues of organizational capacity, effective leadership, internal democracy, discipline institutionalization and personalization geological platforms of mobilization and linkage to society and the masses have to be tackled.

iv) All political parties should practice internal democracy to make them strong, effective and efficient through consistent observance of principles of transparency, accountability, consultation and consensus building in policies and decision making.

v) Government should provide a ground for political education, such as awareness and enlightenment of people on elections tips.

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