

**RESTRUCTURING NIGERIA INTO A ONE-PARTY STATE:
ASSESSMENT OF THE FOURTH REPUBLIC**

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ABSTRACT: The rate of pulling opposition political parties into the orbit of the party in control of the centre by the (ruling party) federal power towards a one-party system has continued to raise dangerous alarms and unanswered questions relating to Nigeria's cultural and political diversity and the future of the country's multi-party democracy. In our attempt to address this phenomenon, secondary sources of data were largely used while the descriptive method of data analysis was adopted. The study anchors on Marxist theory of post-colonial state to postulate that pulling opposition figures into the orbit of the party in control of the centre by the federal power to guarantee diminished opposition representation is attributable to the character of Nigeria as a postcolonial state. The study therefore concludes with recommendation that restructuring the economy along socialist line (socialist transformation) is the ultimate measure against related problems of postcolonial state. Socialist method would enhance decentralization of power and as well power distribution among multiple political parties suitable for Nigeria's pluralistic nature. Again, two-party system should be alternatively adopted for Nigeria in accordance with the recommendation of 1988 political Bureau Report to strengthen democratic consolidation and electoral stability.

Keywords: Party Politics, Party System, Party Ownership, Postcolonial State, Centralization of Power and One-Party State

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of Nigeria's Fourth Republic with tendency of restructuring the country into one party state constitutes a major problem against national development. Nigeria's demographic diversity and ethnographic features demonstrate that one party system would be a source of threat to national cohesion and the continued existence of the country because of her pluralistic nature. Pluralism has been a major factor for the choice of multi-party system in Nigeria democracy.

Some vibrant liberal democracies in the contemporary world are built on effective multi-party systems. Examples include France, Italy, Germany, India, Indonesia, Brazil, Argentina etc. Multi-party system is known for increased representation, promotion of competition and accountability, provision for diverse perspectives, enhancement of participation, checks and balances, innovation and adaptability including other benefits but they appear elusive in Nigeria following the

restructuring of the country into one party system through severe dominance by the ruling party, political polarization and monopoly of power by the Executive.

Monopoly of power by the Executive has been the dominant feature of the Fourth Republic since its inception in 1999. This is predicated on the manner of formation and ownership of political parties basically privately oriented contrary to popular type. Founders (Champions) of political parties assume ownership of the parties purposely for self-identification or demonstration of influence, wealth and reputation. This facilitated electoral victory, thereafter monopoly of power as well when sworn in as the Chief Executive. This paves way to civilian authoritarianism with associated centripetal force; concentration of power in the centre that dismantle and pull related structures including weak political parties to the dominant party; ruling party in the centre.

The foregoing explains the crisis of defection from other parties to the ruling party that grows larger to the extent that the rest become proportionately insignificant. They therefore lack the required capacity to bear the weight of representation of regional or group interests, they cannot function for promotion of competition and accountability, neither can they provide for checks and balances or other benefits of multi-party system. Consequently, the party system assumes the structure and character of one-party state with limited or no opposition.

The study therefore, attempts to interrogate the driving force of multi-party challenges in Nigeria with a view to creating a new path towards harmonious party politics necessary for multiparty democracy in Nigeria as a pluralistic country.

Conceptual Clarification

Central to this discussion are the concepts of party politics, party system and party ownership. Proper analysis of these terms for the purpose of explaining their meanings is important in enhancing adequate understanding of the present discourse. Therefore, they are considered one after the other.

Party Politics: Party politics in Nigeria emanated from forces of colonialism since the traditional political system operated without political parties. As a colonial legacy and aspect of foreign culture, some Nigerians clamour for abolition of political parties but this is difficult because of the roles of political parties in democratic institution. Party politics concerns itself with the politics institutionalised in the party system with predominant foreign culture and orientation responsible for lack of peaceful co-existence, severe competition and violent struggle, ethnic crisis, religious conflict etc which mount seriously to separate the country apart, couple with persistent electoral crisis and electoral failure.

Party System: Party system is categorized into one party system two party system and multi - systems currently being practiced in Nigeria. The crisis of party politics in Nigeria is attributed to the multi-party system. Consequently, some scholars advocate for a two-party system, Elaiye (2005, p.360). This is a proclamation of 1988 Political Bureau Report (Recommendation) which according to Okibe (2000, p.216) represents the common views of the diverse Nigerian people”.

Government rejected the recommendation basically on the problem of how to arrive at the two-party system given the impatience of Nigerian people.

Party Ownership: The manner of formation, mobilization and orientation of political parties in Nigeria created serious problem associated with party ownership. The founders of political parties in Nigeria assume ownership position of the parties. Political parties are therefore formed purposely for personal identification, self-aggrandizement and gratification rather than public purpose. The political parties lack the required capacity to realize the *raison d'être* since they cannot perform the expected constitutional functions. The political parties are employed by politicians to achieve private interests which conflict with public value or general will of the society, hence severe crisis of party politics which gave rise to electoral violence and electoral failures.

Theoretical Orientation

The study adopts the Marxist theory of postcolonial state for analytical framework basically on the reality of Onyishi (2009), p.145 statement that “the emergence of colonial governance on the Nigerian scene marked the advent of modern state”. Again, restructuring the party system into one party type through monopoly of power and bureaucratic authoritarianism is the dominant feature of (the modern) post-colonial states especially Nigeria. The theory was developed by Karl Marx as a critique of the inherent features, contradictions and dynamics of post-colonial, peripheral capitalist and developing states and as a reaction to the liberal theory propounded by western scholars which argues that the state is an independent force and a neutral observer that caters for the common interest of the community members. This was dismissed by Karl Marx who contended that the state has not always existed. He proved that societies without idea of state power had existed.

Marxian persuasion is that state is a product of society at a particular developmental stage characterized by irreconcilability of classes; the oppressor and the oppressed. The oppressor is the economically dominant class which also through the medium of the state power became politically dominant. Therefore, state is an organ of class domination, exploitation, oppression and subjugation. The state power which arises out of the society with overriding influence places itself above the society and functions arbitrarily protecting and favouring the dominant class especially in post-colonial societies like Nigeria as exemplified in restructuring the party system towards one-party state.

The argument of this school is premised by the fact that the economy of post-colonial state like Nigeria has not been decolonized in reality. Therefore, the society lacks the expected freedom from colonial features in a manner that the political hegemony of the colonizers is still a major factor in the country's underdevelopment which manifests in different dimensions especially the crisis of party politics with the associated restructuring party system into one party through monopoly of power and bureaucratic authoritarianism inherited ab-initio by post-colonial states at creation. Bureaucratic authoritarianism metamorphosed from colonial bourgeoisie; agents of colonial powers during colonialism. This was bequeathed to Nigeria and currently disguised as bureaucratic authoritarianism and functions as a means of monopoly of power bureaucratically and politically, used to facilitate restructuring the party systems into one party structure, in form of one party state for intensification of centralization and monopoly of power.

Marxist approach is of the view that the only way to permanently solve the problem of party crisis in a post-colonial state like Nigeria would be to abolish capitalism, and then shift to a communist or socialist system. In non-socialist societies, the basic function of the state is to protect and serve the interest of the powerful dominant class of imperialist capital owners who benefit from shaping the party systems into one party structure to enhance concentration and monopoly of power used for selfish interest and maintenance of self in the system of bureaucratic authoritarianism that erodes democratic framework through one party system. Marxist theory of post-colonial state advocates for violent overthrow of the state system to engender a communist or socialist order that guarantees decentralisation of power and its distribution among multiple political parties based on popular ownership rather than the prevailing problem of integrating the parties into a one-party system based on private ownership of political parties.

Private Ownership of Political Parties in Nigeria

The ownership of political parties in Nigeria is privately oriented contrary to popular type. This is predicated on the mode of party formation, mobilization, orientation and functions. The founders of political parties in Nigeria assume ownership position of the parties. They use the parties for self-identification, self-aggrandizement and gratification. This political parties are therefore, severely abused, they lack the required capacity to perform the expected functions, consequently they fail to realize the *raison d'être*; to serve public purpose, they rather focus on private interest of politicians with desire for intensification of efforts for monopoly power that would swallow weak parties, hence restructuring the system into one party structure (one party state).

The One-Party State in Nigeria Agenda

One- party state agenda accompanied the emergence of Nigeria's Fourth Republic in 1999 with people's Democratic Party (PDP) as the champion. The party's ownership was ascribed to Olusegun Obasanjo primarily because of his wealth and reputation as the former Head of State (President) and a retired Army General. Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) consequently attained status as a dominant party, with Obasanjo as the presidential candidate. The stated facts informed his election as the second Executive President of Nigeria in 1999 and as well his subsequent election for second tenure in 2003.

Obasanjo's (first and second tenure) system of administration demonstrated dominant features of one-party state in form of potential for authoritarianism and centralised power that shrank opposition parties and influenced election of the candidate of his choice late Umaru Yaradua in 2007 as his successor. This successorship was extended to Goodluck Jonathan, Yaradua's Deputy who assumed office after the death of Yaradua. Jonathan consolidated party ownership and style of centralization of power towards one party agenda that facilitated his election as the president of Nigeria in 2011 through All Progressives Congress (APC). All Progressives Congress (APC) inherited the one-party Agenda in 2015

According to Saliu (2018, p.116) in the early hours of Wednesday, 1st April 2015, the INEC Chairman Professor Atthiru Jega announced the results of the 2015 presidential election. In the announcement, the APC candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, polled 15,424,921 votes, representing

about 53 percent of the votes, while Goodluck Jonathan of the PDP scored 12,853, 162 votes, representing 44 percent of the total votes. The APC clearly won”. Consequently, Mahamadu Buhar of the APC party succeeded Goodluck Jonathan of the PDP party as the President of Nigeria in 2015.

In the context of this discourse the ruling party in monopoly of all powers-political, bureaucratic etc is traditionally the custodian of the one-party agenda, therefore the APC party under the leadership of Muhammadu Buhari assumed position as the champion since the inception of his first tenure in 2015 till the completion of the second tenure in 2023 with predominant one-party style of governance system that guaranteed successful transition of power to Bola Tinubu with the APC party that won the election and assumed office as the President of Nigeria in 2023. His administration demonstrates the following factures of one-party system; centralised power, limited freedom, complete control over the rest organs of government, limited accountability, ideological conformity, authoritarianism and restriction to opposition which is illustrated by the tables below: (How the APC with federal power is pulling opposition parties into the orbit of the party in control of the centre).

Senators

	2023	2025	Change
APC	59	75	+ 16
PDP	36	26	-10
LP	8	4	-4
APGA	2	2	0
NNPP	2	1	-1
SDP	2	1	-1
YPP	1	0	0

Representatives

	2023	2025	Change
APC	178	232	+54
PDP	118	83	-35
LP	34	22	-12
UNPP	19	15	-4
APGA	5	5	0
SDP	2	2	0
ADC	2	1	-1
YPP	3	1	-2

Governors

	2023	2025	Change
APC	20	26	+6
PDP	14	8	-6
LP	1	1	0
APGA	1	1	0
NNPP	1	1	0

Source: Sunday vanguard, October 19 2025, p.9

The above tables present and shows the rate of shrinking the rest political parties by the ruling party (APC) between 2023 and 2025, obviously the situation would deteriorate further with time, demonstrating the reality of one-party system and reviving debate about Nigeria's cultural and political diversity and the future of multi-party democracy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study examined the shaping of Nigeria into one-party state that has brought the country's multi-party democracy to the collapsing point. Our investigation revealed that since the inception of Nigeria's Fourth Republic in 1999, the ruling party with the Federal Power has been pulling the rest parties to itself in control of the centre to achieve diminished opposition representation in order of one-party system. This type of party politics has been a serious threat to peaceful co-existence in Nigeria.

The structure of the party politics is generated and sustained by the character of Nigerian state coupled with capitalist mode of production inherited from colonialism that laid dangerous economic foundation responsible for monopoly of both power and economic resources, suppression, bitterness, disunity, exploitation etc which directly impact on the governance system especially the electoral process.

The findings conclude that the problem is rooted in the historical foundation of the country as a post-colonial state, therefore demands concrete and radical approach, not ordinary measures in form of electoral reforms.

The study therefore recommends that the economy of the State should be restructured along socialist line, socialist transformation in accordance with the 1988 Political Bureau Report as alternative to the current imperialist capitalism. Secondly, two-party system should be adopted to replace the current multi-party system. This would enhance democratic consolidation and electoral stability.

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