

THE MISSING RIB OF NIGERIA'S DEMOCRACY

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Abstract

Political parties are the pillars of democracy in all societies, either developed or developing nations. Hence, there cannot be a democracy without the political parties. Parties control the governmental machinery of every democratic nation, and through the policies and decisions they undertake, they steer the nation towards attaining its set development goals and objectives. To this end, vibrant, purpose-driven and well-structured party system is highly essential to both the growth and sustenance of democratic ideals and the actualization of a country's development aspirations. In emerging democracies such as Nigeria, therefore, the need for a well-patterned and functional party system is of high imperative. Unfortunately, the character and nature of the Nigerian political parties in the Fourth Republic, and the pattern of party politics common among them runs in contradistinction to these widely held views and known facts. Rather than acting as catalysts to the growth and consolidation of democratic norms and values vis-à-vis the country's overall development, the Nigerian parties have largely tended to be a cog in the nation's wheel of social, political and economic growth and success. It is against this backdrop that this paper basically argues that all the ills besieging the Nigerian state since the advent of the Forth Republic is mainly due to the failure of the parties, especially the dominant ones to play their expected role in the country. To advance its argument, this paper is divided into several sections. The first segment consists of the introduction, while the second part examines the role of political parties in democracy. The third part dwells on the emergence of Nigeria's Fourth Republic, and the fourth periscopes the role of the political parties in the politics and governance of the Fourth Republic. The fifth x-rays major Nigerian problems and the contribution of the political parties to their persistence. The sixth part investigates factors responsible for the inability of the political parties to contribute impressively to resolving Nigeria's problems. The seventh segment consists of the recommendations of the study, while the eighth part is the conclusion.

Key Words: Democracy, Political Parties, Democratic Consolidation, Nigeria.

Introduction

In modern democracies, political parties unarguably provide the governmental administrative machinery for managing and steering the affairs of a country towards the attainment of its set national goals and objectives. As an upshot, parties in advanced democratic states have particularly proven to be agents and vehicles for real and authentic sociopolitical change and transformation in the societies. Indeed, being in control of the administrative machinery of government political parties are most

actively involved in making policies and decisions that the government pursues on the behalf of the entire country. Thus, parties are the initiators and executors of the ideas that make for the attainment of the desired development in every democratic society. They are fundamental pillars, an essential component without which a constitutional democracy cannot function optimally. In fact, political parties are for democratic system and development what the blood is to the human body system.

Parties perform a number of essential functions that make democracy in modern states viable. Ideally, they represent political constituencies and interests, recruit and socialize new candidates for office, set policy-making agendas, integrate disparate groups and individuals into the democratic process, and form the basis of stable political coalitions and hence governments. Collectively, this means that political parties are one of the primary channels for building accountable and responsive government. Beyond these functional activities, parties also provide a number of deeper, systemic support that help make democracy to work effectively. For instance, they mediate between the demands of the citizenry on the one hand and the actions of the government on the other, aggregating the diverse demands of the electorate into coherent public policy; they make effective collective actions possible within legislatures. Without the predictable voting coalitions that parties provide, there would be chaos as legislative majorities shift from issue to issue and vote to vote; they provide a link between ordinary citizens and their political representatives. Parties are also the primary channel in democratic systems for holding governments accountable for their performance (Reilly, 2008). Thus, political parties have a big role to play in promoting democratic effectiveness and functionality. They are the link between the government and the people, and the means by which the lives of the masses are most intimately affected by making their concerns reflective of government policy agenda. These are in addition to them being the vehicle through which candidates assume offices especially in the absence of independent candidature.

Regrettably, Nigerian political parties have been behaving characteristically contrary to these facts. Their roles in discharging these highly important functions have been historically unimpressive and highly abysmal. They apparently lack knowledge of their expected roles in the country. To this extent, rather than serving as mechanism for ameliorating the many challenges confronting the country, Nigerian parties can be said to be responsible for the various burning issues that are plaguing the country owing to their nonchalant attitudes towards sensitive and important national matters. It is against this backdrop, therefore, this paper is out to argue that all the challenges or problems facing the Nigerian state in the last sixteen years beginning with the administration of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, who came to power as the first Nigerian President under the current democratic dispensation - the fourth Republic, can be rightly attributed to political parties not being able to play their critical roles in the country.

To make more sense of its argument the paper is structured into several segments. The first segment consists of the introduction, while the second part examines the role of political parties in democracy. The third part dwells on the

emergence of Nigeria's Fourth Republic, and the fourth periscopes the role of the political parties in the politics and governance of the Fourth Republic. The fifth is an examination of major Nigerian problems and the contribution of the political parties to their persistence. The sixth part investigates factors responsible for the inability of the political parties to contribute impressively to resolving Nigeria's problems. The seventh segment consists of the recommendations of the study, while the eighth part is the conclusion.

Political Parties as a Major Institution in Democracy

There is a convergence of opinions among scholars about the inseparable nexus or connection between political parties and democracy. Political parties are indispensable to the democratic system. The functionality of modern democracy depends, to a large extent, on the viability of political parties. Indeed, in the contemporary world, nowhere does democracy make sense without political party (ies) (Ogundiya, 2011). In fact, Schattschneider (1942) claimed that; "political parties created democracy", and to Aldrich (1999:3), democracy is "unworkable" except in terms of political parties. Thus, policy makers and democracy promotion organizations often display a strong normative bias in favour of cohesive, organizationally developed political parties (Reilly, 2008). The foregoing obviously underscores the indispensability and essentiality of political parties in the democratic system. According to the US National Democratic Institute (2008), for instance:

Political parties form the cornerstone of a democratic society and serve a function unlike any other institution in a democracy. Parties aggregate and represent social interests and provide a structure for political participation. They train political leaders who will assume a role in governing society. In addition, parties contest and win elections to seek a measure of control of government institutions.

Similarly, the United Nations Development Programme (2008) maintains that "political parties are a keystone of democratic governance. They provide a structure for political participation; serve as a training ground for political leadership; and transform social interests into public policy." Furthermore, Diamond (1997) aptly observed:

Political parties remain important, if not essential instruments for representing political constituencies and interests, aggregating demands and preferences, recruiting and socializing new candidates for office, organizing the electoral competition for power, crafting policy alternatives, setting the policy making agenda, forming effective governments, and integrating groups and individuals into the democratic process.

This implies that political parties are indeed a major institution, the pillars without which the democratic system cannot stand. For a democracy to function effectively, political parties must be well organized and adequately structured to meet the need of the various competing groups in the society. A functional and effective party system is the one that has a strong base in the society (Ogundiya, 2011). Strong parties according to Johnston (2005:3) “are essential to open, competitive democratic politics, particularly in emerging democracies”, such as Nigeria. It is therefore not surprising that Diamond (1997, cited in Manning, 2007:721) stressed that:

Institutionalized party system thus increased democratic governability and legitimacy by facilitating legislative support for government policies; by channeling demands and conflicts through established procedures; by reducing the scope for populist demagogues to win power; and by making the democratic process more inclusive, accessible, representative and effective.

Inherent in these arguments is the fact that the operation of democracy is not only unthinkable and/or inconceivable save in terms of political parties, but its consolidation is also impossible without a virile and institutionalized party system (Ogundiya, 2011). Indeed, political parties play vital roles in promoting democratic consolidation and stability. For Huntington (1968); parties forge unity out of disparate and potentially dangerous social forces. Parties are first and foremost, tools of social organization and control, whether they are ruling parties in a single party regime or opposition parties in a more open system, therefore the essence of political parties goes beyond the organization of people for winning elections. In support of major aspect of this view, Johnston (2005:5) argues that:

In their many forms, they do not just contest elections, but also mobilize and organize the social forces that energize democracy, on a continuing basis. Even the most determined democrats require a lasting organizational base, a pool of resources, and legal standing in the political process. Parties connect leaders to followers and simplify political choices, framing them in terms of citizens’ own interest. In many societies, parties provide a range of nonpolitical benefits as well, including social activities; recognition and status for people and groups with a sense of security, connectedness, and efficacy.

Viewed from all angles, therefore, political parties are the life-lines of the democratic system. As Maclver (cited in Akita, 2012) rightly observed that, the party system was in particular the mechanism by which the class stale was transformed into the nation-stale. Party attains fruition in democracy and democracy finds completion through party system. The party system implies an elective and a representative

system of government. It is through this institution that the government can be made answerable to the people and therefore responsive to the needs of the general masses and the community as a whole rather than a section of it. It provides the much desired flexibility in the government structure. Political parties secure harmony of action among the various organs of the government. Lowell (cited in Akita, 2012), also holds the view that political parties serve as 'the brokers of ideas'. They raise issues, present facts, analyze them and present alternative solutions. They also act as a unifying force. Every party has to formulate programme that can appeal to all the voters, or at least to a majority. This way, class differences, get reconciled. Hence, because they channel, aggregate, and express political demands, political parties play an important role in the management of conflicts in societies divided along cultural, linguistic, religious, regional, or other lines. However, the impact that parties have on the actual expression of conflict varies depending on the way in which such cleavages are expressed by the party system. Ethnically-based parties, for example, typically claim to represent the interests of some groups. By making communal appeals to mobilize voters, the emergence of such parties typically has a centrifugal effect on electoral politics, thereby aiding extremists and heightening ethnic tensions. By contrast, multi-ethnic parties need to appeal to a broader support base, and thus tend to have a more centrist impact, aggregating diverse interests and de-emphasizing mono-ethnic demands. India's Congress Party is often held up as a classic example of the advantages for social integration and conflict management of a broad-based governing party committed to national cohesion and stability (Reilly, 2006).

Furthermore, by competing in elections and mobilizing citizens behind particular visions of society as well as through their performance in the legislature, parties offer citizens meaningful choices in governance, avenues for political participation, and opportunities to shape their country's future. Although in multi-party systems, and based on the constituencies they represent, political parties often express conflicting viewpoints, but these principled differences of opinion are not only an important part of the democratic process, but the exchanges they generate can also help to create a better understanding of the issues and possible solutions, potentially leading to new insights or workable compromises (National Democratic Institute, 2013). It is therefore incontrovertible that a healthy party system promotes a healthy democracy (Ogundiya, 2011). When functioning properly, political parties develop common ideas among a significant group in order to exert pressure upon the political system. Thus, they help place citizens' local concerns in a national context. Citizens may be divided over interests, leaders, or policies; political parties can organize these differences, creating grounds for compromise and helping societies to unite. Through their efforts to control and influence public policy, political parties play an intermediary role, linking the institutions of government to economic, ethnic, cultural, religious and other societal groups. They can rally support behind important legislation, advocate positions that improve the public welfare, and advance citizens' interests. Therefore, in all sustainable democracies, the party system must be deeply and durably entrenched in the fabric of society (National Democratic Institute, 2013).

Thus, despite the perception that political parties in theory represent the political expression of underlying societal cleavages and parties and party systems have not usually been thought amenable to overt political engineering (Lipset and Rokkan, 1976), the working of entire governmental machinery depends upon them. The fact of the matter is that political democracy cannot be conceived of without political parties. They are a motive force behind all state activities. They put into practice the public opinion which they have been instrumental in molding and expressing. They help in the formulation and expression of a general will which is the core of democracy (Akita, 2012). It becomes clear therefore that political parties are indeed an essential component of democracy. They constitute the very pillars upon which democracy is erected. Thus, in an emerging democracy such as Nigeria, the need for vibrant and pro-active political parties is therefore urgent and necessary if the country's democracy must be consolidated.

Nature and Character of the Nigerian Fourth Republic

Nigeria's transition from an autocratic military regime to a democratically-elected civilian administration in May 1999 marked an important milestone in the short, but checkered history of the post-colonial era of the country. The transition ended sixteen straight years of authoritarian rule under several military heads of state. Even though some Nigerians were openly skeptical that the military would relinquish power and return to the barracks, most people in the country were optimistic that the nation had finally seen the last of the self-appointed military saviours. Despite the fact the election and the whole transition that ushered in the new civilian rulers were marred by irregularities and fraudulent practices, the general consensus in the country was that the imperfections were simply the price that Nigeria had to pay for putting an end to military dictatorships that had plagued the nation since the first military coup in January 1966 (Agbese, 2005).

By any yard-stick, military rule was a monumental disaster for Nigeria. Despite the country's huge endowments in human and material resources, Nigeria under military rule had all the classic features of a failed state. Thus, in view of the sordid record of military rule, there was a widespread expectation in the country on the eve of the military's departure from politics that the elected civilian administrators would set to work immediately to improve the living standards of the people. In specific terms, Nigerians expected that the termination of military rule would lead to drastic reduction in corruption, criminality and wanton violation of human rights. They also expected that public institutions such as schools and hospitals which had been left in a state of utter disrepair by the military would be rehabilitated to provide needed social services. Similarly, Nigerians had hoped that the termination of military rule would put an end to the divide-and-rule tactics which had become the hallmark of military administrations. The hope was that with an end to such tactics, ethnic and communal violence, which had claimed so many lives, would be drastically curtailed. In addition, a civilian administration was expected to lead to better management of the nation's resources and with good governance, unemployment, insecurity and criminality would be reduced. Indeed, Nigerians were

looking forward to a situation in which power would be used for the benefits of the people and not for the illegitimate accumulation of public resources by those with access to political power. Part of the public expectations was that the new civilian rulers would use power responsibly and efficiently (Agbese, 2005).

These hopes and expectations occupied the minds of Nigerians, who were already embittered and aggrieved by the long experience of autocratic military rule known for its utter desecration and abuse of human rights, hence the warmth welcomed and huge support to the push to replace militocracy with democracy in the country. Fundamentally, the rude termination of the Third Republic by the Babangida administration through the controversial pulling down of all democratic structures in the name of annulment of the freest and fairest presidential elections held on 12, 1993, and the consequent imposition of sanctions on Nigeria by mostly her Western trading partners, set the stage for another transition to democracy. The onus fell on General Abacha who came into power after dismissing the Interim Government headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan. The coming of the Government was heralded by the expectation of a segment of the political class that it was going to stabilize the polity dangerously threatened by the chain of events released on the nation by the General Babangida's regime especially its controversial annulment of June 12 elections and hurried exit from power, and afterwards, handover power to M.K.O. Abiola. But the succeeding military regime was not in a hurry to vacate the seat of government. It certainly had its own agenda to perpetuate itself in power. Thus, this single minded objective necessarily ran contrary to the expectations of its allies among the practicing politicians (Saliu, 2004:7).

Subsequently, the arrest of Chief M.K.O. Abiola, the winner of the 1993 presidential polls in 1994 by the Abacha regime and its refusal to put him on trial, were later to reveal the determination of the General Abacha regime to have its own political transition programme. Hence, a constitutional conference was convened in Abuja to chart a new course for the nation. The submission of its report a year after to the military regime was to serve as a basis for the march towards another republic in Nigeria. To this effect, political parties were formed and registered by the Electoral Agency, and some controversial elections were held. However, the period of three years set for the transition programme was heavily criticized. In the same way, the manner of controlling and running the six registered parties by the military regime had made some critical minds to frown at it and to keep a safe distance from the parties as well as the entire transition programme (Saliu, 1998/1999; Simbine 2002).

More importantly, the exhibition of certain behavioural patterns which were not consistent with the standard behavior expected of a transiting regime created a pool of doubts in the minds of politicians and observers of the Nigerian political scene (Saliu, 2004). For instance, people were not impressed with the arrest without trials and the general insecurity which the government did not do anything about. Persecution of political opponents and the remote control approach to running the parties and the bizarre nomination of General Abacha as the sole presidential candidate for all the six registered parties, did not work for credibility either for the government or those put in charge of party administration. Cumulatively, the entire

transition programme suffered from excessive control and manipulation. It was while in this situation of not knowing what next would happen to the programme that the news of the death of General Abacha came. The General Abubakar Abdulsalami administration that succeeded General Abacha's regime had two options; to continue with what remained of the previous transition or enunciate its own transition programme. It however settled for the latter with the re-registration of political parties and following this up with a firm commitment not to succeed itself or perpetuate itself in power (Saliu, 2004).

The general acknowledgement or realization of General Abubakar Abdulsalami's administration readiness and genuine commitment to initiate and implement a successful transition programme that would usher the country into another democratic era simulated a new political atmosphere, leading to the re-grouping of the politicians and the resultant emergence of new political parties out of which only three were eventually registered and recognized by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Subsequently, elections were held into political positions at all levels, which saw Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, candidate of the People Democratic Party (PDP) as the winner of the presidential election. And on May 29, 1999, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo was sworn in as President and Commander-in-Chief of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to serve a four year term in office. This marked the beginning of the current Fourth Republic in Nigeria.

However, after sixteen years of democratic rule, Nigeria's social, political and economic situations have largely remained the same, if not even worse than the situation under the military rule. Bad governance, high level of corruption, mass unemployment, dilapidated infrastructures, religious, ethnic and communal conflicts; insurgency, among others, have become permanent features of the Nigerian state under the current democratic dispensation. Scholars have adduced various reasons to explain the persistence of these numerous problems in Nigeria, but no one reason or factor can best explain the prevalence of these challenges than the fact that the political parties in the country have failed in performing their highly expected functions or duties. Democracy inherently rests the governmental administration of a country on the parties and the level of patriotic and national consciousness among the political parties determines how abreast and concerned they would be in addressing or ameliorating the challenges of such a nation. The Nigerian case presents a scenario where all the challenges facing the nation since the advent of the Fourth Republic can rightly be attributed to the fact that the political parties do not exhibit any concern for the numerous sensitive and delicate issues bothering the nation. Omoroyi (2001) has argued that, in many cases the so-called political parties since 1999 have become a major part of the problem in Nigeria.

The Place of the Political Parties in the Politics of the Fourth Republic

Political parties have long been recognized as essential components of representative democracy. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how the governance of modern states could be accomplished without meaningful political parties. By organizing voters, aggregating and articulating interests, crafting policy alternatives

and providing the basis for coordinated electoral and legislative activity, well-functioning political parties are central not just to representative government but also to the process of democratic development in transitional democracies (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Sartori, 1976; Aldrich, 1995). Yet, in many countries, particularly in transitional democracies, parties exhibit a range of pathologies that undercut their ability to deliver the kind of systemic benefits on which representative politics depends. For instance, they are frequently poorly institutionalized, with limited membership, weak policy capacity and shifting bases of support; they are often based around narrow personal, regional or ethnic ties, rather than reflecting the society as a whole; they are typically organizationally thin, coming to life only at election time; they may have little in the way of a coherent ideology; they often fail to stand for any particular policy agenda; they are frequently unable to ensure disciplined collective action in parliament, with members shifting between parties; as a result, parties often struggle to manage social conflicts and fail to deliver public goods and thus to promote development (Reilly, 2008).

These deficiencies in party development are so widespread that they have become a central concern in many emerging democracies, to the extent that they are increasingly seen as a threat to stable democracy itself. The recognition of such impediments to democratic development has spurred growing attention, both domestically and internationally, to how stronger, more capable political parties can be sustained and developed in fragile environments (Reilly, 2008). Internationally, the response by Western governments to this problem has been a plethora of party assistance programmes that seek to help political parties in new democracies become stronger, more coherent and more inclusive organizations – that is, more like the idealized view of how parties are supposed to operate. These programmes have received considerable funding from donor agencies and generated a considerable number of new training programmes and other initiatives. But these have had limited impact, rarely if ever transforming the fundamental organizational and operational characteristics of recipient parties (Carothers, 2006).

Domestically, a rather different response has been evident, with political elites in transitional states often seeking to influence their party systems by reforming the rules of the game regarding how parties form, organize and compete. These forms of party regulation and engineering represent an increasingly widespread and ambitious attempt to shape the nature of emerging party systems. For instance, a number of emerging democracies have placed restrictions on ethnic or other sectorally based parties, up to and including banning them from competing at elections. Others have introduced positive incentives for cross-national party formation, by introducing regional branch or membership requirements for parties to compete in elections. Some have introduced cross-national support thresholds or other kinds of spatial rules. Many emerging democracies use electoral systems to try to shape the development of their party systems, and a small but increasing number have also introduced rules governing voting in parliament as well, in an attempt to ensure greater party discipline. Finally, international organizations have become increasingly active in this field, intervening directly in party systems in post-conflict

states such as Mozambique, Kosovo and Afghanistan (Reilly, 2008).

Specifically, Nigeria was ushered into the Fourth Republic by three political parties namely, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Alliance for Democracy (AD) and All People's Party (APP). The three parties therefore contested for the 1999 elections in which the PDP won more seats and the presidential elections. A landmark judgment in favour of a court case instituted by the late Gani Faweyinmi in 2003 was to revolutionise the political space in Nigeria when it gave a knock to INEC for restricting the number of political parties. On account of the judgment, a kind of explosion took place in the number of political parties. Their number increased to about sixty three by the 2011 elections. This sheer huge number in a way was a confirmation of the Supreme Court judgment on the freedom of association enshrined in the 1999 Constitution (Saliu, undated). On the other hand, there are Nigerians who detest the high number of political parties in existence in the country with the possibility of some other new parties being registered. This perspective has encouraged some actions on the part of INEC to shed the political environment of some excessive weight by deregistering some of the political parties. But the irony is that some other political associations without any better outlook are haggling to be registered by INEC with one or two of them drawing out the electoral body into their registration palaver. INEC so far has however discharged itself creditably on the matter (Saliu, undated).

Nevertheless, according to Omoruyi (2001), what we have in Nigeria today since 1999, as political parties are just political parties in name. Buttressing his view, Omoruyi (1999) goes on to state that they are difficult to place in terms of origin, structure, organization and function, if we apply Ostrogorski, Hodgkin Duverger, and Sklar to these organizations that call themselves political parties in Nigeria. Their composition is fluid and unstable; they can be viewed as instrument of transition from military to civilian rule and for the future and with the prospect of more parties, they raise more questions than answers to the lingering political problems of Nigeria (Omoruyi, 2001). Overall, the liberalization of the party regime did not significantly change the nature of political parties. Parties are run by godfathers and barons rather than members, and consequently, the political relationship within the parties is essentially one between patrons and clients and the clients are mobilised on pecuniary, ethnic or regional bases (Liebowitz and Ibrahim, 2013). Hence, notwithstanding the number, all the political parties under the Fourth Republic exhibit virtually the same characteristics. They all claim to be democratic actors but there is little to suggest that on the aggregate they are adding value to the country's democracy (Saliu, undated). Internal democracy which permits the exuding of democracy to the outside world has a little place in the operations of the parties (Jega, 2013a).

Nwobodo (2012) rightly observed that:

The weakness of political party structures emanate from actions of "Party Bosses" who hand pick their loyalists to leadership positions regardless of qualification, character or competence. Having freely joined the political party of our choice we should

have unfettered access to contest, to hold any position of our choice in the party. Which position we succeed in holding should be at the wishes of members of our party and not the whims and caprices of any God father or God mother in the party hierarchy. Party leaders have every right to support any candidate of their choice to any position. They can campaign for such candidates, but at the end of the day, a free and fair election must take place for the most popular candidates to emerge. True leadership that emerges from the collective will has a high index of success.

What is seen among Nigerian political parties today is on the contrary. In most cases, decisions are taken without following the democratic procedures. Party primaries of 2010 and 2011 involving the visible political parties were anything but democratic. Several parallel primaries were held but only those conducted by the acceptable leaders of the parties were upheld (Saliu, undated). They preach and popularize democracy but they are not by any means democratic. Thus, so long as they lack internal democracy within them, Nigerian political parties are obviously missing in supporting the growth and entrenchment of democratic doctrines on the broad national context. Their internal leadership styles as well as their governance pattern when they assume public offices do not depict anything democratic.

What could be said about the issue of party ideology? The ideology question and the left/right divide have largely disappeared from Nigerian political parties so conflicts are focused on the issue of personalities, ethnic groups, geopolitical zones and the control of power. And yet, ideology matters in Nigeria. Nigerians are profoundly opposed to the liberal economic policy articulated and imposed on the country by the Bretton Woods institutions. Political parties can therefore articulate this vision but they don't. The Constitution requires that all political parties draw their manifestoes from the Chapter Two of the Constitution on directive Principles of State Policy. That section of the Constitution places a lot of obligation on the state to provide for the welfare of the citizens. It is virtually a social democratic manifesto. In Nigeria, party manifesto however elicit little interest or debate because the parties simply provide them to satisfy a constitutional obligation. The key challenge for political party development is therefore to bring issue based politics back to the agenda. During the Second Republic, for example, the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) was known for its commitment to free education, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) for its housing policy and the People's Redemption Party (PRP) for its opposition to taxing the peasantry. It is difficult today to associate any issue with any political party. The motivation for engagement in party activities in Nigeria today is simple - power and money. The motivation for political contest is dominance and control not ideology of issues (Liebowitz and Ibrahim, 2013).

Indeed, ideology drives the wheels of activities of a political party. It is the compass that gauges the range of issues that are of interest to a political party, and which such party is known for. It is however regrettable to assert that Nigerian parties

copiously lack of ideologies. There are no well-articulated set of issues a single political party in Nigerian is known for. This makes it difficult to describe these associations as political parties. In the right sense, they are mere gatherings of men and women who seek political positions for their selfish interests, but do not have any programme or agenda to pursue for the betterment of the country and the citizens. There is no sense of nationalism and patriotism among them. They are all driven by the quest for dominance and the actualization of their organizational and personal interests. Suffice it to say, that the parties have not assumed all the desirable roles in the country's Fourth republic.

The country's political parties are only visible and vibrant when there are elections to contest and once they are concluded, their aggregate impact on the polity is dismally low. Even where they have formed governments, their elected officials instantly become the leaders of the party executives (Na abba, 2013). Perhaps this is not surprising as the culture of raising money from the rank and the file of the members has disappeared as only the moneybags who revolve around the executive office holders and businessmen who are cronies of politicians in power ultimately hold the aces in the political parties are fund- providers. Early founding fathers devoted time to party organization, membership mobilization, mass fund raising, interest aggregation and its articulation. However, from 1979 onwards, political parties began to reduce reliance on membership funding, and rather became increasingly funded by either money bags, incumbents channeling state recourses to fund their parties, or by partisan government contractors. Subsequently, individuals rich enough created, organized and funded their own parties, paying little if not any attention to party organizational structures or membership mobilization (Jega, 2012). The party ought to be independent in its funding in order to act equitably as he who pays the piper dictates the tunes (Nwobodo, 2012). Despite the regime of public funding of political parties entrenched in the 1979 Constitution, the use of patronage by parties to raise funds has persisted. Illegal financing deals that contravene the law are sanctioned by the political system. Typical sources of funding for political parties include: personal resources and financial assistance from friends and associates, sale of membership cards, constitutions, manifestoes, souvenirs, monthly contributions, funds from government for parties that have formed governments (Egwu, 2012).

These sources are never enough for Nigerian political parties whose funds largely derive from the purses of few wealthy party members. Leaving the funding of parties in the hand of few financially capable members places them on a high pedestal to exercise much undue influence and control over the party affairs. Funding of party is supposed to be a collective responsibility of all members so as to accord every member equal respect and stake in the activities of the party, rather than a handful of individuals being more favoured or respected because of their financial contributions to the party. This is the bane of political parties in Nigeria in the current democratic space, where individuals strive to donate huge sums to their parties so as to earn them the privilege to have much say in the decision making process and all the affairs of the party. In fact, the danger of this trend is that it has leveled ground for some party members to indirectly regard themselves as the owners of the parties, forcefully

asserting themselves in the scheme of things of the parties and wielding enormous powers, howbeit to the ruins of the parties as their influence have tended to result in internal factionalization and fractionalization of these parties.

Another major character of the political parties under the Fourth Republic in Nigeria is gross indiscipline. Discipline is an important factor in strengthening party structure. No society thrives on indiscipline. In most of the constitutions of political parties in Nigeria, a good section is set aside for disciplines but this is always observed in breach. This is usually due to corruption or interference by Godfathers (Nwobodo, 2012). In many parties, financial and procedural accountability is deficient. Many hardly obey their own constitutions and look for shortcuts in complying with electoral laws. Most of the parties are factionalized and conflict ridden (Jega, 2012). Ultimately, what seems evident is that many of these party laws and rules are not followed or are manipulated to support the interests of powerful individuals and groups in each party, especially on the dimension of internal democracy (Liebowitz and Ibrahim, 2013). As Ibrahim (2011:101), noted, "Parties have formal processes of the election of leaders but these processes are not followed, and when they are, the godfathers have developed ways of determining the outcomes". Therefore, while the legal framework guiding party activities is reasonable, adherence to them is often problematic. Most of the parties have a fairly strong foundation in terms of their party constitutions. These constitutions provide for the establishment of a clear and coherent party structure and for the conduct of internal democracy within the party (Liebowitz and Ibrahim, 2013). Moreover, all of the parliamentary party constitutions also prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender (Ezeilo, 2012), and some parties go further to include commitments like "ensuring gender balance in governance" (Labour Party) and mainstreaming women's concerns in all policies and programmes (PDP). However, it is less clear the extent to which the parties have rules and policies governing both elections and the day-to-day functioning of party offices and activities (Liebowitz and Ibrahim, 2013).

The question that comes to mind therefore is: To what extent do these parties obey the constitutions of the country when they assume governmental positions after being elected into political offices at various levels of government giving that they do not have regard for the constitutions of the parties from where their candidates emerge? The accurate answer to this somewhat long but fundamental question is simple. The result of the high level indiscipline and disrespect to party constitutions Nigerian politicians and parties is evident in the gross breach and desecration of the constitution of the country when they are in power. Of course, during Obasanjo's administration, a good number of court's rulings were nullified or neglected by the president, and he claims to be a democrat and kept emphasizing on the primacy of the rule of law until he left office as president after eight years of his two terms. Various State Governors and Local Government Chairmen have also replicated the trend in their capacities as incumbents at their own levels, thus abrogating the rule of law and entrenching poor governance culture in the country.

The issue of monetization or the role of money in politics generates another concern about Nigerian political parties. Fundamentally, Nigeria's political history is

replete of money politics. The cumulative experience provides incentives for the series of reforms in this regard since 1999. In Nigeria, the conventional wisdom today is that you are either super rich to contest or you come under the influence of godfathers and money bags (Egwu, 2012). Consequently, excessive use of money even in the face of regulations frowning at it has characterized the politics of the country (Adetula and Adeyi, 2013). While it is accepted that party politics is impossible without money, money should be treated as an essential resource for good practice. The role of money in politics is as important as other contentious issues, e.g, electoral system, institutional design of government, etc. However, unregulated (self-help) use of money distorts the electoral process, increases cost of governance and fuels grand corruption (Egwu, 2012). It is not therefore surprising that after spending beyond stipulated amount for electioneering campaigns and the characteristic inducement of the electorate with money by parties and candidates, Nigerian politicians resort to looting of public treasury as a means of recovering the enormous amounts often spent in campaigning and buying of votes as well as in influencing the officials of the electoral body to manipulate procedures in their favour.

This explains while after almost fifteen years of democracy Nigeria is still battling with challenges of corrupt and irresponsible government, extreme poverty and hardship, lack of infrastructures, high rate of unemployment, among others, which have remained features of the country from the military era largely due to lack of people-oriented governance culture in the country. Importantly, excess use of money creates a non-level playing field and particularly disadvantages the poor and female candidates. Thus, there is the need for adequate legal framework in controlling the use of money in politics and the rent-seeking behavior of political elites. Under the two-party system of the Babangida era, candidates openly raised funds which could not be tracked. Presidential hopefuls in the 1992 elections spent above N1billion during the primaries while the not so rich spent not less than N120million. Cost of election has become prohibitive as a result of unregulated inflow of money into politics. Moreover, under the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, INEC has constitutional responsibility to monitor finances of political parties, conduct annual examination and audit of political parties and publish a report for public information. However, the responsibility to monitor the use of money in the campaign activities of political parties and their candidates appears overwhelming to INEC (Egwu, 2012). In view of all this, one therefore begins to wonder the possibility of evolving sound and firm democratic practices, especially in terms of the electoral processes which govern the emergence of the country's leaders. Political parties, their candidates and their unregulated flaunting or use of money during electioneering campaign have defaced Nigerian politics and elaborated the notion that politics is a game for the rich.

This section of the paper would not be complete if mention is not made about the crude nature of politics that Nigerian politicians and their parties play in the country's evolving democracy. The nature of political life among Nigerian parties is undoubtedly uncivilized. As unequivocally observed by Liebowitz and Ibrahim (2013), civility is one quality that is largely absent in political party life in. The most

important aspect of the internal functioning of political parties in Nigeria since 1978 is that they have a persistent tendency to factionalise and fractionalise. As people go into politics to seek power and money, the battle for access is very intense and destructive. Thugs, violence and betrayal are often the currency for political part engagement. Indeed, the period leading to each election is marked by the assassination of party leaders and contestants for various offices. The reality in the political field is that parties are essentially operated by political ‘godfathers’ who use money and violence to control the political process. They decide on party nomination and campaign outcomes and when candidates try to steer an independent course, violence becomes an instrument to deal with them. The result is that they raise the level of electoral violence and make free and fair elections difficult. As Ezeilo (2012) asserted, the level of violence, thuggery and monetization of Nigerian politics provides a significant disincentive for women to take part as candidates, and the monetization aspect also makes young people less likely to influence politics in an effective way due to their low level of access to resources. Agreeably, the female politician is the major victim of lack of civility in the political process. She suffers from various modes of marginalization many of which are hurtful and full of invectives (Ibrahim and Salihu, 2004).

In general, party officials refused to take the candidature of female aspirants seriously. Ironically, one of their main reasons was the affirmative action policy adopted by some of the parties waiving the nomination fees for female aspirants. Party executives in most constituencies set out to label women as aspirants with less than the required commitment to party. Party barons at the local levels repeatedly argue that by convincing the national executives to remove nomination fees for them, women have demonstrated a lack of commitment to the development of the party. This argument was used to make declaration that male candidates are more committed to the party because they make their financial contributions willingly and that commitment should be recognized and rewarded (Liebowitz and Ibrahim, 2013). The alienation of women from politics has however been the trend in Nigeria before the Fourth Republic and it is the highest display of the uncivilized political life in Nigeria. Thus, given the general lack of civility in party politics and the prevailing culture of violence and invective, the Babalakin Commission of Inquiry into the 1983 elections (cited Liebowitz and Ibrahim, 2013) stated in clear terms that “the nature of politics and political parties in the country is such that many men and women of ability and character simply keep out of national politics. For the most part, political parties are dominated by men of influence who see funding of political parties as an investment that must yield rich dividends” (FRN, 1986:348).

Viewed in the light of the above, it would be seen that the conception of politics and party politics in Nigeria as “a war with bloodshed” and the persistent culture of underrating and marginalizing women in the political process is not a trend that is peculiar to the present crop of political parties in Nigeria. It is rather better to be seen as a notion or practice passed on to the new generation parties by their predecessor political parties. It is for this reason that many have argued that the democratization process in Nigeria is dominated by the male gender, while the critical

role of the female folk in the process is generally undermined. This calls for a change in orientation and perception among the political parties and their leaders.

There is therefore a lot of controversy regarding the role of political parties in the politics of Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Many of them including the dominant parties lack clearly stated objectives. They create problems rather than solve them. The parties are and their candidates cannot be said to be representing the interest of the masses. In the actual sense they do not communicate the demands of the electorate to the central government, neither have they championed any progressive national course in the interest of the entire country. The gap between the government and the citizens widens on daily basis because the parties are not alive to their responsibilities. Moreover, based on general knowledge, they have not also serve as platform for reconciling the numerous conflicting interests in the country. They lack broad national out-look. Most of them are narrow-focused, mainly fashioned along ethnic or tribal line. Indeed, the parties have not transcended ethnic politics in the country. Patterns of voting and party's performances in electoral contest show the tribal or regional roots of the parties. An analysis of the 2011 shows these regional roots of the dominant political parties with General Buhari of the CPC making his greatest electoral impact in the North, while Dr. Goodluck Jonathan of the PDP was more widely accepted particularly in the South-South and South East (Saliu, undated).

Notwithstanding their tribal or ethnic features, the parties are still polarized along factional and sectional lines within them. This underpins the incessant internal upheavals and disagreements that often trail them, which reduce their capacity to impact on the nation-building agenda of the country. Their administrations do not have any policy benefits for the citizens. On foreign policy front they are obviously missing including the parties in government both as a result of lack of focus and knowledge of foreign policy matters. On the domestic or national scene one can hardly see the parties in positive light even in the face of serious issues affecting the country which they govern. Where their collaboration and togetherness is most needed, they see themselves more as enemies and bring politics to the fore. Indeed, this is particularly noticed on the issue of Boko Haram. There are no concrete suggestions on how to tame the menace. Surprisingly state governors whose utilization of the monthly and other allocations is in public domain for scrutiny, have suddenly turned themselves into on-lookers on the Boko Haram issue. More disappointing is the assumption that it is only a PDP's affair whereas Borno State is being ruled by a governor from the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP). It is possible that the parties through their members are not encouraged to make their inputs because of the attitudes of Governments at all levels in the country (Saliu, undated).

This does not apply to the Boko Haram issue alone, Nigerian parties are known for their attitude of shifting blames on one another in serious matters of country-wide concern. For them, every issue is seen as an opportunity to mobilize support not to address whatever challenge that springs up in the country, but to advance their party interests against each other. Thus, they have no interest in the betterment of the country and the welfare of its citizens, but are more concerned

about how to capture political power in order to control the nation's resources and enrich themselves stupendously. In all, political parties in Nigeria's Fourth Republic do not fit the model of what a political party really means in terms of their structures, associational behaviours, outlooks, visions and missions, purpose, among others. Thus, there is urgent need for a reform so as to revitalize them and simulate their relevance and contribution in the country's ongoing transition or democratization process.

Examination of Major Nigerian Problems and the Responses of the Political Parties

Based on its historical antecedents and as a third world nation, Nigeria is faced with numerous challenges that have persisted in its body-politic over the years such as: leadership and governance crisis, the unresolved question of national unity and integration, weak democracy, development crisis, the issue of corruption and embezzlement, electoral frauds and malpractices, incessant conflicts and violence, among others. This paper briefly undertakes an examination of these problems with respect to the role of the political parties in contributing to the persistence.

Leadership and Governance Challenges: In the wake of the wide-spread disappointment with the long autocratic military era and the eventual transition from military to civilian administration, Nigerians expected that the arrival of the new civilian political administrators would put an end to the apparent mal-administration, irresponsible and unresponsive governance and leadership style of the military juntas which the country had experienced over the years. The core function of political parties is to function as an agency of good governance. Unfortunately, political parties in Nigeria are characterized by precipitous decline in accountability and transparency in administration due to: unwholesome influence of money, (God-Fathers), weak and personalized party structures, and the combination of factions and undemocratic internal party democracy. The glaring lack of internal democracy continues to have negative and destabilizing spillover effects on federalism and democracy in the country. It continues to generate latent conflicts within the parties, transforming them into manifest ones, which have generally imploded to undermine or erode the long-term prospect for federalism, democracy and good governance in the country (Jinadu, 2012).

Thus, the civilian administrators emanating from the dominant or ruling political parties in the Fourth Republic have unarguably tended to be worse than their military counterparts. Of course, it is beyond contestation that the political parties and their candidates in political offices are not in any way better than the "khaki boys", instead they are more irresponsible and unresponsive to the needs and yearnings of the public than the military rulers. Since the return of democratic governance in 1999, Nigerians are yet to see the dividends of democracy as politicians who control government at all levels are corrupt, self-centered and grossly unaccountable to the public. From all indications, they lack well-thought and clearly spelt-out agenda for engendering improved governance that makes the people the core concern of

government, rather elected political officials pay more loyalty and allegiance to their respective parties and show more interest in advancing their parties' dominance in governance and politics of the nation than the betterment and progress of the country they are elected to govern. Thus, political parties that control government through their elected candidates have not been impressive with the way and manner they manage the affairs of the country. Nigeria still suffers huge problems traceable to the institutionalized poor or bad governance practice and unaccountable leadership in the country.

Development Crisis: Democracy is globally conceived as being synonymous with rapid and even development. This notion or believe was and is still the same for an average Nigerian. Issues relating to the country's national development suffered serious neglect by the military rulers who were known for their high tendency for self accumulation and aggrandizement. Indeed, for example, infrastructures such as schools, roads, and hospitals were barely functioning, and the military and other well-to-do Nigerians lost confidence in these public infrastructures to the extent that they no longer send their children and wards to Nigerian schools. Similarly, when they or other members of their families get sick, they do not put their fate in the hands of Nigerian experts/physicians. They recognized that physicians in the country operated hospitals without medical equipments or drugs (Agbese, 2005). Moreover, mass unemployment, poverty and extreme hardships were very high among Nigerians, and the country's human right record was negative and poor. These elements that characterized the Nigerian state under the military era have come to be firmly entrenched and exacerbated in the current Fourth Republic.

Despite handing over power to the civilians, Nigeria's prevailing development conditions have drawn the greatest local and international concern than ever due to the decline in the expected roles of political parties and their candidates in power. Undeniably, there has been a swift daily widening of the gap between the rich and the poor as the economic situation of the country continues to degenerate on minute basis with the mass poor being left at the mercies of the few rich who control both the political power and economic activities of the country and mortgage the development and betterment of the masses for their personal gains (Aliu and Ifejika, yet unpublished). While considerable progress has been made in the area of personal freedoms and liberties since the transition, flashpoints of ethnic, communal, religious and resource conflicts persist. Exacerbating this is the failure of government to address key issues affecting economic performance such as poverty alleviation that has reached about 71 per cent, resource distribution, infrastructure development and security (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance 2001). Poor governance founded on entrenched culture of corruption has made a country endowed with abundance resources a habitation of one of the world's poorest populations and an epitome of underdevelopment (Aliu and Ifejika, yet unpublished). Political parties occupying government positions have not demonstrated any effort at addressing the many challenges of development confronting the country as Nigeria's development index has not improved since the return to civil rule in 1999.

Challenges of National Unity and Integration: One of the critical roles of political parties in a democratic system is to contribute and champion the course of national unity and integration, especially in a plural or multi-ethnic society like Nigeria. However, since her political independence in 1960, Nigeria has continued to grapple with the problem of national unity; such that she can be described as nation with a tripod stand, made up of three blocks; the North, the West and the East, that are in a perpetual state of wobble. While national unity has continued to elude efforts that have been made to achieve it, such unity is considered necessary for development programmes to yield expected fruits. Consequently, in the political engineering, which brought the Second republic into being, one issue which the military had to tackle was the ethnic factor in nation's political system. This was clearly evident in the electoral provisions contained in the transition programme of Murtala/Obasanjo administration in which political parties without national spread were prevented from participating in the electoral process. Thus, under the introduced electoral law and regulations on party formation under the Murtala/Obasanjo administration, political parties were required to be national in outlook and programme before being eligible for registration and subsequent participation in election (Ibodje and Dode, 2007). This rationale behind this policy decision was to make political parties relevant in achieving the goal of national integration and to view our diversity as strength indeed.

Regrettably, notwithstanding the realization of the implication of forming political parties on ethnic lines for the country's long term project of national unity and integration, the present era is has seen a proliferation of political parties without broad national view, but rather mere associations for advancing ethnic or tribal goals and objectives. Based on their structures, memberships, programmes or agenda, it is clear that the present crop of political parties in Nigeria do not have any centripetal features. The goal of ensuring the corporate unity and permanent co-existence of the various ethnic cleavages that make up the country as one is obviously not in their agenda, neither does it constitute an important issue of concern to them, yet they aspire to govern the entire country. It is not therefore surprising that after more than five decades of independence, Nigeria is still puzzled with big question of national unity and integration. This presents a serious challenge to the country's democracy.

Corruption and Embezzlement: Corruption continues to thrive firmly in Nigeria today because the elected officials coming from the platforms of the key political parties are largely corrupt. In fact, this starts from their mode of gaining access to public offices. Nigerian parties, especially the notable ones are known for their acts of frauds, malpractices, violence, bribery and buying of votes, among other under-hand practices that amount to a breach or violation of the country's electoral procedures during elections. The fraudulent means their candidates assume offices is the result of the high level corruption among politicians who hold public positions in the country. Since the advent of the Fourth Republic, many State Governors and Senators have been indicted for corruption and stealing of government money to enrich themselves and donate hugely to their parties at the expense of the country at large. More worrisome is that, even when they plead guilty, they still use the stolen money to buy

their freedom or reduce the gravity of punishment to be undergone by them. For instance, the former Edo State Governor, Lucky Igbinedion pleaded guilty to embezzling 2.9 billion Naira which translates to about \$24.2 million. He had a plea bargain with EFCC and was fined 3.5 million Naira (\$29,167) and did not serve any jail time (Human Rights Watch 2007, Ahemba 2008, and Nossiter 2013). This explains why corruption has remained unabated in Nigeria despite all effort to arrest the hydra-headed dragon. Politicians and their parties claim to be waging war against corruption, but they are the worst perpetrators of corruption in Nigeria.

Just recently, President Goodluck Jonathan, while responding to the allegations that he is not doing enough to curb corruption among his ministers, claimed that most of what is referred to as corruption is not really that at all (*Africa Check, August 13, 2014*). According to Jonathan, “over 70% of what are called corruption (cases), even by Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and other anti-corruption agencies, is not corruption, but common stealing,” adding that the corruption claims appeared “politically motivated” (*Africa Check, August 13, 2014*). To further worsen the situation, barely two weeks after President Jonathan made the controversial statement, Mr. Ekpo Nta, the chairman of the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), one of Nigeria’s anti-corruption agencies, told an audience in Abuja that “stealing is erroneously reported as corruption” even by “educated” Nigerians (*Africa Check, August 13, 2014*). The above statements by these key players in government simply depict the extent of readiness and commitment by government to tackle the menace of corruption that is destroying the Nigerian state. Not only that these speeches are capable of encouraging and promoting more damaging acts of corruption among government officials and the entire citizens, they are also capable of making the country’s war against the unwanted evil futile and unproductive in the long run. Should the entire Nigerians accept the perceptions of President Jonathan and the ICPC boss, the country should be ready to witness an incremental level both in the spate and dimension of the ugly trend in the country.

Electoral Matters: Electoral processes in the history of Nigeria’s democratic governance have continued to be marred by extraordinary displays of rigging, dodgy, “do or die” affair, ballot snatching at gun points, violence and acrimony, thuggery, boycotts, threats and criminal manipulations of voters’ list, brazen falsification of election results, the use of security agencies against political opponents and the intimidation of voters (Nnadozie, 2007; Adigbo, 2008, Onike, 2010 Omotola, 2010, Bekoe, 2011). These characteristics of election in Nigeria are largely due to the odious role of political parties in the electoral process from the First Republic till date. Undoubtedly, Nigeria is yet to experience a completely free, fair, credible and transparent election in the current democratic dispensation as parties and politicians have entrenched illegal practices such as thuggery, rigging, violence, buying of votes and bribery of INEC officials the only means to securing winning in elections.

This trend finds clear expression in the rampant litigations and removal of officials declared winners by INEC by courts across the country since the inception of

the Fourth Republic. Internally, the parties also lack the culture of selecting party flag-bearers democratically, leading most of the times, to rampant defections, fractionalization and fictionalization within the parties themselves. The devastating effects of electoral malpractices and frauds by the political parties are evident in the abysmal performance of Nigeria's democracy. To be sure, after many years of practice of democracy, Nigerians still find it difficult to identify any major gains or contributions of democracy to achieving the country's development objectives, one of which is the alleviation of the extreme poverty among the country's citizens as corrupt leaders usually have their ways to power through corrupt and illegal means.

Weak and Fragile Democracy: As earlier acknowledged, the political parties are an essential component of democracy, the pillars without which a democratic political system cannot stand. They constitute government and take policy decisions for the running of the affairs of every democratic system. Thus, the effectiveness of a country's political parties' in terms of upholding democratic norms and values determines the level of efficacy of democracy in that country. In other words, the health state of the political parties invariably determines the condition of health of a country's democracy. It is for this reason that the glaring lack of internal democracy and the illegal means by which Nigerian political parties assume office in the face of constituted regulations has been a major cause of the weakness and fragility of the country's democracy after fifteen years. Moreover, as part of their democracy consolidation roles, political parties educate the people not only by getting them informed politically with respect to their various programmes and manifestoes and planks but also with respect to the need to get involved in election, and the voting procedures and laws. In addition, political education function of political parties also involved their effort to educating the masses about government action (Ofoeze, 2001).

Another very important function which political parties perform in all political systems where they exist is that they provide link between the governors and the governed. They political parties offer channels through which the rulers can aggregate support from the ruled while on the other hand, not only attempt to control the rulers but also to make them deliver political goods and services as well as to hold them accountable (Ofoeze, 2001). Nigerian parties are observably blind to these important functions. Of course, Nigeria is one of the countries with the most pathetic record of voter apathy due to the lack of the complementary role of parties in providing political and voter enlightenment alongside other relevant agencies. More fundamentally, nothing stimulates the citizens' interest in government policies or actions as there exists a historic wide gap between the government and the people. This gap has come to be more noticeable in the unfolding democratic dispensation, where elected representatives pay more attention to their party affairs, and estrange themselves from the electorate whom they claim to represent.

Management and Peaceful Resolution of Conflicts: Responsible political parties democratic societies such as those of the Western societies, contribute, immensely, to peaceful and orderly social processes among the citizens. This is especially so

because in their bid to secure broad support among the various segments and strata of the society in order to secure majorities necessary to attain their goal of capturing the reins of government, political parties usually shun and avoid those extremist and polarizing acts. This is particularly so in such democratic societies in which the political elites share a consensus on the fundamental issues governing social, economic and political life of the society as a whole (Ofoeze, 200: 28). Attesting to these views, in a seminal work on Kenya's independence negotiations, Rothchild (1973) perceptively argues that democratic institutions offer ongoing opportunities and incentives for the continuation of bargaining and negotiation among parties in conflict. And in many deeply divided societies today, parties turn to democracy in the course of negotiating peace agreements to exit intractable conflicts (Sisk, 2003). In the Nigeria political context, the upsurge of social conflicts or violence presents an opportunity for the political parties to apportion blames and campaign against one another without contributing by any means to resolving crises that are posing serious dangers to the peace and stability of the very political system within which they operate. The actions and in-actions of the political parties since the outbreak of the current Boko Haram insurgency is a typical example.

To be sure, in the wake of the Boko Haram insurgency and its accompanying furious threat and challenge to the national peace and security of the country, key Nigerian political parties are earnestly expected to be united under a single auspice and together, come up with useful ideas and suggestions that would help the government ameliorate the unwholesome development in the interest of the corporate existence and future of the entire nation. In other words, a collaborative or joint support by the dominant political parties to the federal government in tackling the Boko Haram upsurge would have been generally perceived as act of nationalism and patriotism on the side of political parties even as it is still expected of them. Rather, what is being witnessed among the parties is unnecessary arguments and counter-arguments and the exchange of frivolous defamatory utterances that are capable of overheating the system the more, by some party members, who appear to be insensitive of government commendable effort so far in bringing the situation under control. Political parties are pooling in different directions, maintaining their usual opposing stance and using the insecurity situation as an opportunity to castigate and rubbish the image of each other in the very face of a common threat to all, which in the real sense should have been seen as a platform to unite and join effort with the government in order to squarely confront the undesirable situation at hand (Saliu and Ifejika, yet unpublished).

At best, the ruling political parties and their important or high profile personalities whose opinion imputes and contributions would have made great positive impact on resolving the situation have tactically remained indifference to the issue and appear to be mere sympathizers with the federal government on such an overbearing national issue as the Boko Haram rebellion that has already dealt serious blow to the peace and stability of the entire nation. To this extent, political parties can rightly be described as mere observers and spectators of the unfolding Boko Haram incident rather than collaborators with the federal government in the current war

against the holocaust that have claimed lives of thousands of innocent citizens of the country. They do not see themselves as partners with the federal government in tackling the security challenge posed by the lingering Boko Haram crisis, but are all engulfed in formulating mechanisms and mapping out new strategies on how to mobilize and canvass for the support of the masses, who they have no better plans for, in the up-coming 2015 general elections (Saliu and Ifejika, yet unpublished). Aside the Boko Haram crisis, the political parties have been largely indolent and moribund in all serious issues affecting the peace and stability of the entire country. The reasons for the declined positive performance of the political parties in the politics and governance of Nigeria's Fourth Republic are examined below.

Why Political Parties Have Remained Onlookers

Many factors or reasons account for the low or declining contribution of Nigerian political parties to the growth and consolidation of the country's democracy. An attempt is made here to succinctly highlight and explain some of these factors with respect to how they contribute to the glaring poor role of the political parties in the politics and governance of the Fourth Republic.

Corruption and Economic Mismanagement: One major factor militating against the effectiveness and relevance of the present crop of Nigerian political parties in performing their expected roles of facilitating the strengthening of democratic norms and values in the country's democratic space is the phenomenon of corruption and poor management of the nation's economy. Not only that high level corruption looms large in the internal decision-making process and management of the parties' affairs, officials elected on the platforms of these parties are also known for their corrupt tendencies as embezzlement and looting of public funds is considered by them as a means of accumulating quick wealth at the expense of the masses. Thus, parties and their candidates primarily seek political power for self-aggrandizement and not to advance the social, political and economic development of the country.

Owing to the alarming rate of corruption being perpetrated by Parties and politicians in the on-going democratic dispensation, the former Military President, Ibrahim Babangida has argued that corruption is now worse than before. He faulted the widely held perception that he is corrupt, stating that himself and members of his government are angels going by the level of corruption in the country at the current time. In his words, Babangida noted that: "I don't have the facts but if what I read in the newspapers is currently what is happening then I think we were angels" (*The Nation, January 6, 2015:4*). On the allegation that his military regime institutionalized corruption in Nigeria, General Babangida said though he had been aware of such insinuations, the assumption is incorrect (*The Nation, January 6, 2015:4*). He added that:

"Yeah, I know. Maybe I have to accept that but anybody with a sense of fairness has no option but to call us saints. I give you an example, in a year I was making less than

\$7billion in oil revenue. In the same period, there are governments that are making \$200billion to \$300billion. With \$7billion, I did the little I could achieve. With \$200billion, there is still a lot to be achieved” (The Nation, January 6, 2015:4).

Babangida further commented that, “now, even our fiercest critics give us credit for certain things we did” (*The Nation, January 6, 2015:4*). The argument being stressed by General Babangida is that, though his government was generally perceived to be corrupt, the present democratic era has seen a tremendous increase in the level of corruption and fraudulent practices by parties and their elected members running the affairs of the country at all levels. On the other hand, the former Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, Prof. Chukwuma Soludo, has also alleged the present administration of gross economic mismanagement and inefficiency. His argument goes thus:

Not one penny was added to the stock of foreign reserves at a period Nigeria earned hundreds of billions from oil. For comparisons, President Obasanjo met about \$5 billion in foreign reserves, and the average monthly oil price for the 72 months he was in office was \$38, and yet he left \$43 billion in foreign reserves after paying \$12 billion to write-off Nigeria’s external debt. In the last five years, the average monthly oil price has been over \$100, and the quantity also higher but our foreign reserves have been declining and exchange rate depreciating (Pulse.ng, January 27, 2015).

In another development, the renowned economist, Prof. Soludo has also alleged that over N30tn had been stolen under the watch of the Minister of Finance, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala. In response to Okonjo-Iweala’s rebuttal of his earlier criticism of the management of the Nigerian economy under the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan, Soludo said the nation was in for a very turbulent time this year because the economy had been grossly mismanaged (*Punch, February 2, 2015*). As he puts it, “our public finance is haemorrhaging to the point that estimated over N30tn is missing, or stolen, or unaccounted for, or simply mismanaged” (*Punch, February 2, 2015*). The former CBN governor further stressed that if the prices of crude oil in the international market failed to rebound, Nigeria would face an unprecedented level of economic crisis with horrible attendant hardships for the citizenry. He said the sharp decline in the naira-dollar exchange rate from 158 a few months ago to 215 currently showed that trouble was already at the doorstep. He added that “unless oil price recovers, this is just the beginning” (*Punch, February 2, 2015*).

Hence, given their high corrupt tendencies and poor management of the economy, parties obviously appear to be worsening the economic situation of the country rather than showing strong commitment to improving it in order to make for better and good living conditions for the already impoverished citizens of the country to whom the promises and dividends of democracy have all remained dreams rather than realities. What seems rather important to the parties and their members in government is enriching themselves even if it will lead to the total collapse of the economy and further intensify the suffering and hardship being borne by the generality of the masses.

Lack of Party Ideology: It is a known fact that Nigerian political parties lack clear and strong ideological basis. They are not variously known to be pursuing or advancing any specific policy goals or agenda in the interest of the country and the citizens. Further, their unclear campaign manifestoes and failure to deliver on their promises depict that they have no better plans for the masses and the country. Thus, without clearly stated ideological stance and well-marshaled-out programme agenda for the public, the parties do not enjoy meaningful support by the majority of the electorate or citizens during elections and when in government. Not only this, lack of party ideology has also been blamed as one of the major reasons for the rampant defection from one party to the other among Nigerian politicians, which has continued to retard the growth of democratic norms and values in the country.

A former Governor of Sokoto State and Chieftain of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Alhaji Abdullahi Bafarawa, stressed the view that lack of party ideology was the major reason politicians were cross carpeting. According to him, unless leaders of political parties form and maintain political ideologies on their stand, cross carpeting from one party to another will continue to exist (*Punch, January 19, 2014*). He affirmed that “we can’t reach anywhere if we continue to practice our democracy in this way and the reason is because parties lacked political ideologies”. He further noted that “parties must have political ideologies and programmes for the electorate and for parties to have sense of direction” (*Punch, January 19, 2014*). In the same manner, the Rivers State Chairman of the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), has also asserted that lack of ideology in Nigeria’s political system was capable of truncating its democracy. He stated that greed and avarice had always remained the reason for the traffic of some politicians who had thrown caution in the wind (*Daily Post Nigeria, October 10, 2014*). In his words, he added that:

“If the political system had recognised ideology as the basis of political participation, then it would have been very difficult for politicians to interchange parties. It is time to strengthen our political system in order to save our democracy because the more people flirt, the more our democracy weakens” (Daily Post Nigeria, October 10, 2014).

Undoubtedly, the precipitating factor for this current trend of defection is the lack of ideological commitments to any political party by some politicians and the non-existent clear-cut political ideologies of political parties in the country (*Leadership, November 5, 2014*). On the whole, the implication is that Nigeria's democracy is at high risk as the political parties continue to operate without ideological bases. No wonder after sixteen years of the practice of democracy, dominant political parties have not been able to change the fate of the country and its citizens, who had nursed high hopes that democracy would turn their misfortunes to fortunes. What is rather being witnessed is deterioration of every aspect of the national life of the country as the parties in whose hands the control of the government of the nation is do not have any clear-cut direction in terms of policies and programmes to be pursued for the good of the country and its citizens. This character of the Nigerian political parties obviously makes real the saying that "where there is no vision, the people perish". Ideology is the navigation compass for any political party, in absence of it, the nation hits the rock.

Absence of Internal Democracy: Lack of party internal democracy is one fundamental problem inhibiting the efficacy of Nigerian political parties in promoting the growth of the country's democracy. The process of selecting candidates within the parties to be fielded for external or general elections is always characterized by a lot of undemocratic practices, whereby favouritism is enthroned above meritocracy due to the overbearing influence of party leaders (godfathers or godmothers). The violation of this essential aspect of the democratic practice does not only deny floor party members the right to consensually elect candidates of proven integrity and competence to represent the party at polls, it also runs contrary to country's goal to consolidate democracy nationally as undemocratically elected officials have nothing to offer but to constantly violate the constitution of the country and relegate the principle of rule of law to the background while in government.

Lack of internal party democracy is also the major factor responsible for the frequent defections by Nigerian politicians from one party to the other, who often feel cheated or marginalized in their party's internal political process. For example, those who defend Mallam Nuhu Ribadu's defection from APC to PDP have argued that his defection was not morally offensive, seeing that both the party he left and the one he just joined have very few distinguishing virtues (*The Nation August 24, 2014*). In their opinion:

The PDP and the All Progressive Congress (APC) are not far apart ideologically, have their fair measures of political follies and foibles, harbor as many political ragamuffins as the other, and subscribe unflatteringly to, or are burdened by, the same political appurtenances such as short-circuited internal democracy (The Nation August 24, 2014).

In the same vain, the former Minister of Information, Mr. Labaran Maku, who defected from PDP and formally joined APGA to contest the Nasarawa State

governorship election in the forth-coming 2015 elections, after losing to Yusuf Agabi in the PDP primaries in December last year also cited injustice and fraudulent processes in the PDP primary as the reasons for his defection (*Premium Times, January 28, 2015*). Chief Tom Ikimi's departure from the APC, a party he was so instrumental to its evolution and formation is also due to the same reason of not acting on the basis of democratic principles in the internal matters of the party. He also alleged that the party has been hijacked and personalised by someone who claims he has made unequalled financial contribution to the party, and has attributed the success of the party over the years to himself (*see ThisDay, August 27, 2014:12*). Of course, parties whose internal political structures do not give reverence to the democratic principle of merit and popular consent by members as the bases for selecting flag bearers and handling general matters are bound to lose their members to other parties. Aspiring politicians would always seek a platform that would help them not only to test their level of acceptability and support from within their parties, but also to facilitate the pursuit and actualization of their political ambitions in an atmosphere of vibrant internal party democracy. Anything short of this is considered inimical, and hence they have no other option than to consider defection.

Abuse of Electoral Procedures: Nigeria is undoubtedly one of the countries in the world with the highest incidence of violation or abuse of electoral procedures by all stakeholders in the electoral process, especially the political parties. Nigerian political parties are known for their irresistible urge to gain victory in elections through violence, thuggery, buying of votes, bribery of electoral officials, snatching of ballot boxes, among other illegal acts that contravene the rules of free, fair and transparent election. Undeniably, pre-election campaigns, election-time, and post elections periods are usually violent, with campaigning in many areas beset by political killings, bombings and armed clashes between supporters of rival political factions (see Abutu and Obakhedo, 2009). This violence is most often carried out by gangs whose members are openly recruited and paid by politicians and party leaders to attack their sponsors' rivals, intimidate members of the public, rig elections, and protect their patrons from similar attacks. The architects, sponsors, and perpetrators of this violence generally enjoy complete impunity because of both the powers of intimidation they wield and the tacit acceptance of their conduct by police and government officials at all levels (HRW, 2007).

Not surprising, therefore, that the Human Rights Watch (2007) in its follow-up of post-independence events in Nigeria describes the nation's post-independence history as being overshadowed by the depredations of a series of corrupt, abusive, and unaccountable governments. For example, at independence, the country adopted a parliamentary system of government akin to the British type. The first post-independence election organized by that government led by Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa President Nnamdi Azikiwe in 1964 and 1965 were characterized by widespread complaints of fraud, violence and intimidation (Osaghae, 1998). This ugly trend of abuse or violation of electoral principles via violence and rigging of all

sorts has, among other factors, had overwhelming effects on the growth of democracy in the country as it has been proven that parties and candidates that assume political positions through fraudulent means are themselves huge stumbling-block to democracy as they do not adhere to the principles of rule of law when in government. This constitutes a serious threat the country's democracy. The present crop of civilian leaders have constantly been alleged of fundamental constitutional breaches such as human right abuses, neglect of court verdicts, disrespect for official code of conducts to mention a few. This reveals their lack of reverence for the spirits and letters of democracy. This is the result realizable in a political context such as Nigeria, where parties assume leadership following elections that lacked integrity being obviously flawed by high level malpractices and massive irregularities.

Inefficient and Inactive Inter-Party Advisory Council: The National Inter-Party Advisory Council (ICPAC), an association of all the registered 25 political parties in Nigeria, under the chairmanship of Dr. Yunusu Tanko, which is also supposed to serve as an advisory body to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), can be said to obviously absent at its duty post. The body is expected to provide a link between INEC and the political parties and to play a role in sensitizing and impacting the values of democratically approved electoral behaviours and conducts on the political parties so as to make them pivotal in the course of stimulating the growth of important democratic value of free, fair, credible and transparent election in the nation's emerging democracy. However, the council has apparently not been abreast and alive to this highly prominent roles. Further, worthy of note in this direction is the declined role of the Office of the Special Adviser to the President on Inter-Party Affairs headed by Senator Ben Obi. The body has not also been active and effective in discharging its responsibilities. The council has not performed creditably by initiating and organizing programmes that would encourage dialogues and interactions and strengthen healthy relationship among political parties so as to make them responsible and responsive and enhance their cooperation and meaningful involvement in finding solution to important issues affecting the entire country.

Recommendations

To reposition and reinvigorate the political parties to play their highly expected roles in enhancing the growth and consolidation of democracy in Nigeria, the paper recommends the following strategies:

There is no gain saying that the incidence of corruption and economic mismanagement by government officials in Nigeria has reached alarming stage, especially in the recent times, probably because the country's two notable anti-graft agencies have not been doing enough in their collective fight against the menace. Indeed, the EFCC, ICPC and other relevant agencies have not demonstrated enough commitment to tackling corruption in the country. For the nation to win the ongoing war against corruption, the anti-graft agencies should practically add more energy, intensify efforts and modernize their mode of operations. They should start biting rather than just barking, and there should be no sacred cows henceforth. Any

government personnel caught in any form of corrupt act must be made to squarely face the law. Such persons should be adequately prosecuted and punished so as to deter others, and those (Ministers) perceived to be mismanaging the country's economy should be called to question with immediate effect. More essentially, President Jonathan should shun public statements capable of further encouraging corruption among officials in his government and the entire society at large so that the ongoing war against trend would yield the needed result.

The political parties should firmly enthrone the culture of internal democracy in their decision-making structures and processes. Lack of it is the reason for all the ills besieging Nigeria's democracy since the past sixteen years of the practice of the system of government. Internal party democracy is a parameter for testing the level of commitment of parties in a democracy to the promotion and sustenance of democratic ideals, and this is much more needful in growing democracies such as Nigeria, where the norms and values of democratic living are yet to firmly take roots. Achieving this could demand overall re-engineering of the internal management or leadership structure of the parties to flush-out the bad eggs and entrust leadership to persons with proven integrity. These must be people who would not compromise or sacrifice the essential element of democracy within the parties on the altar of ethnicity, religion, friendship ties, among others, but rather strive to make merit and popular opinions among members the determining factors for all decisions and actions of the parties. This way, the country's democracy would be strongly institutionalized from the below as democracy within the parties equally implies democracy in the country at large.

Lack of ideological basis by Nigerian political parties poses fierce danger to the country's democratic growth and overall political development. Not operating on the basis of a given ideological foundation is the reason successive governments in Nigeria have not made any meaningful development impacts on the country and its citizens as they do not pursue specific policy goal in government. This also affects their followership or membership. Thus, the political parties should anchor their activities on strong ideologies and devise programs capable of affecting the lives of the masses so as to strengthen their support base and make clear the agenda they are set to pursue for the nation. Ideology helps the parties to appeal to the masses through manifestoes while canvassing for their support by making the populace know what they stand for. Therefore, a party without a given ideology would be considered aimless and lacking in direction, and as such, would find it difficult to garner the masses' support. Hence, ideology is to a political party what the tap-root is to a tree. Moreover importantly, Nigerian parties should also be more broad and national in outlook, composition and focus so as that their membership would be drawn from every quarter, religion and tribe in the country.

Abuse or violation of electoral processes has continued to thrive in Nigeria because successive government and the relevant agencies such as INIEC have not shown the expected level of determination in tackling the evil. It is for this reason that credible, free and fair elections have continued to elude Nigeria over the years, especially in the on-going Fourth republic, where electoral fraud and violence have

come to be features of elections in Nigeria. Therefore, government and the relevant agencies must rise to the occasion and begin to punish offenders. In this wise, it is highly needful at this time for the government to constitute an Electoral Offences Commission, whose responsibility would be to try and prosecute parties and politicians found in acts of electoral malpractices. To be active and effective, this body must be imbued with adequate powers to deal with electoral and related offences in our country. This would also help to reduce the work-load on INEC, which appears not to show any interest in prosecuting electoral offenders. Essentially, as the 2015 general elections draw near, political parties must strictly abide by and adhere to the recent Peace-Treaty signed by all the political parties that will be participating in the elections. The Police and other law enforcement agencies should not only be well-equipped and prepared to ensure that the polls are credible, itself (the Police) must also ensure that its men are not used by parties and politicians to scare or abuse legible voters while carrying-out their official responsibility.

The National Inter-Party Council and the Office of the Special Adviser to the President on Inter-party Affairs should wake up to their mandated responsibilities. To inculcate discipline and the culture of good partisanship, to show respect for laid-down rules and regulations, and to encourage mutual collaboration and peaceful-coexistence among the parties, these bodies need to do more. There is the need for them to constantly initiate and execute programmes that are capable of fostering closer cooperation among the political parties by creating enabling environment for them to resolve or settle the myriad of issues affecting them and the entire country through dialogue and deliberations. This would help to build healthy party life and strengthen friendly relationship among the political parties in a way that they see one another as co-partners in the ongoing Nigeria project. The IPAC should also become more active in discharging its responsibility as an intermediary body between the INEC and the political parties so as to keep the political parties attuned to the activities and decisions of INEC, especially pertaining to the conduct of campaigns and elections. Proper education of the political parties on the decisions and activities of the INEC would enable them to maintain set standards and respect the rules and regulations governing electoral activities in the country. By doing so, electoral irregularities would be drastically reduced to the barest minimum.

Conclusion

There is a consensus among political scientists and other scholars that no functional democracy can take place without political parties. They are generally perceived and considered one barometer for measuring the democratic health of nation-states. Their existence and operation have been good ingredients of democracy. Parties control government in every democracy and run the affairs of a country through officials elected on their platforms. Strong and vibrant political parties perform other important functions in democracy such as providing voter, political and citizenship education, aggregating popular will and channeling them to the government, serving as link between the government and the citizens, representing the people in government, mediating and managing social conflicts,

reconciling conflicting interests in the polity; promoting good, responsible and responsive governance; initiating and executing government policy agenda, among other important function.

However, the role of the Nigerian political parties in performing these set of functions in the current democratic dispensation in the country has attracted major concern as the parties have obviously failed to discharge these highly important duties. As can be seen in the body of the paper, some of the factors responsible for the declined role of the Nigerian political parties in contributing to the development and strengthening of the country's emerging democracy are numerous. Some of them include corruption, lack of internal democracy, lack of ideological background, ethnic and religious sentiments, violation of electoral rules and regulations, lack of the spirit of patriotism and nationalism, inefficient Inter-Party Advisory Council and inactivity of the Office of the Special Adviser to the President on Party Matters, etc. Notwithstanding the prevailing situation, the Fourth Republic Nigerian political parties could be firmly repositioned and revitalized to effectively discharge their expected role in consolidating the country's democracy if the recommendations of this paper are fully adopted and carefully implemented.

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