

## **POLITICAL PARTIES AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC**

**Akubo, A. Aduku and Yakubu, Adejo Umoru\***

Centre for Inter - African and Human Development Studies (CIDES), Jos, Nigeria  
School of General Studies, Federal Polytechnic, Kaura Namoda, Zamfara State, Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT:** *Political parties play very critical roles in democratization of any nation. Central to the successes and failures of electoral politics is the cardinal and strategic functions of this all important and an integral organ of democratization which is core to its development. The dawn of the Nigerian fourth republic has witnessed renewed and sustained activities of political parties which is the most complex and critical institutions of democracy but undoubtedly has either shaped or stagnated the deepening and consolidation of democracy. With heavy reliance on secondary data supported by analytical approach, the paper x-rayed the role of political parties in the democratic consolidation of Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The climax of the analysis is the identified challenges plaguing democratic consolidation since the commencement of the fourth republic i.e.: Lack of institutionalization and personalization of political parties; Godfatherism; Absence of internal democracy within the political parties and incessant party/political violence. The party system in Nigeria is still weak and vulnerable with no visible signs of adding value to the democratic consolidation. It is recommended that issues of organizational capacity, effective leadership, internal democracy, discipline, institutionalization and personalization, ideological platforms of mobilization and linkage to civil society and the masses should be addressed.*

**KEYWORDS:** Political Parties, Democratic Consolidation, Fourth Republic, Democracy, Electoral Politics, Nigeria.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Mainstream rhetoric in Nigeria media and popular discourses of the polity is often centred on the claim that Nigeria is “consolidating its democracy”. The evidence on the ground, however, contradicts this claim (Momoh, 2013:1). It is perhaps most appropriate to liken the relationship between political parties and the sustenance of democratic rule in a particular society to that which exists between the umbilical cord and the foetus (Yagboyaju, 2012:54). Political parties are at the heart of examining the health of any form of democracy (Orji, 2013:1), for example, maintains that ‘to talk, today, about democracy, is to talk about a system of competitive political parties. Their roles and activities are critical in any assessment of democratic practice (Momoh, 2013:1). With the transition to civil rule in 1999 (Signalling the commencement of the fourth republic), political parties had the mandate to produce the *right calibre* of people to govern (Momoh, 2013:1). One of the most complex and critical institutions of democracy is the political party (ies) (Omotola 2009).

Political parties are traditionally the most significant intermediary organization in democratic societies. Students of political parties have commonly associated them with democracy itself (Orji, 2013:1). Political parties, as “makers” of democracy, have been so romanticized that scholars claim that neither democracy nor democratic societies are thinkable without them (Omotola 2009). In other words, the existence of vibrant political parties is a sine qua non for democratic consolidation in any polity (Dode, 2010). It is patently ironic that political parties largely pursue (and profess) democracy outside the gates and resist it within the gates (Ibeanu, 2013:1). Competitive party and electoral politics is expected to deepen and consolidate the democratic transition, which the country embarked upon in May 1999 (Jinadu, 2013:2). Well-functioning political parties are essential for the success of electoral democracy and overall political development of Nigeria (Adetula and Adeyi, 2013:3).

Indeed, democracy is unthinkable in the absence of viable political parties. Parties are expected to participate in the political socialization of electorates, contribute to the accumulation of political power, facilitate recruitment of political leadership, and serve as a unifying force in a divided polity (Omotola, 2010:125). The objectives which party regulation seeks to achieve, including the lingering question of internal party democracy, namely the push and pull of struggles to get political parties to respect their own rules and act in line with democratic principles in the conduct of their internal affairs, all remains central to the wider consolidation of democracy in Nigeria (Ibeanu, 2013: 1).

Anchoring on platforms offered by political parties, citizens make demands on the state, support specific policy positions, and participate in public policy making and implementation. Political parties therefore provide the vital linkage between citizens and the state, governors and the governed, and elites and the masses (Lawson 1980). The nature, behavior and performance of political parties and the nature of party relations with other parties, groups, and even the state have consequences for the nature of governance, integration, stability and security (Ikelegbe, 2013:7).

The character and tendencies exhibited by political parties has implications for democratic sustenance in the country (Pogonson, 2013: 5). The political party is a critical, formal, institutional, organizational and mobilizational player in the political process particularly in relation to power, democracy, governance, governments and economy (Ikelegbe, 2013:4). The nature of political parties and the nature of party politics have consequences for the nature of governance (democratic consolidation), integration, stability and security. The performance of political parties in terms of articulation, aggregation, representation and organization are critical to political accountability, communication, democratic consolidation and political stability (Ikelegbe, 2013:4).

Is our democracy consolidating or deepening? What is the state of our party politics? How has political parties fared in the consolidation of the Nigeria’s fourth republic? What are the bulks

on the way of political parties in democratic consolidation of Nigeria's fourth republic? These issues and many more form the nucleus of this piece. Our desire in this voyage is to thoroughly interrogate and dissect the issues raised.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The history of Nigeria's party politics since the coming into force of the 1979 Constitution, and even before it, shows strong deficits in the practice of competitive party and electoral politics. The persistent and seemingly intractable deficits include: (i) the personalization of politics, and the prevalence of the God-father syndrome; (ii) the negative influence of money; (iii) lack of internal democracy, especially the imposition of candidates; and (iv) election-related violent political conflict within and between political parties (Ibrahim, 2007; Ibrahim and Aturu, 2009: 34-46 cited in Jinadu, 2013: 5). The major parties in Nigeria have been near similar in composition, policy positions, manifestoes, ideological leanings and strategies (Omotola 2009:622-626). Consequently the parties are not organizational platforms for alternative views and programmes of governance and development but associations, factions, cliques, and networks for power and resource struggles, 'Bereft of clear ideological identity and commitment, and issue based politics (Omotola 2009:612).

The parties lacking in ideological content as a platform for action, identification, mobilization, legitimization and conflicts management (Nnoli 2003:181-183), the parties have turned to money, identity, patronage and violence. Beyond ideology and programmes, perhaps with a few exceptions, the performance of the parties in terms of organization, functions, operations and management has been dismally poor (Nwosu 2008:136). The parties are not democratic and popular organizations, as they have lacked basic liberal internal mechanisms, standardized rules and regulations for actual consultation and collective decision making. The parties being platforms for personal, sectional and patronage struggles and interests, have lacked a strong directive, controlling, disciplinary and unifying core that holds together (Omotola 2009:612).

Whilst political parties are at the core of de-democratisation in Nigeria, evidence suggests that elections have been the weakest link in our quest for democracy in Nigeria (TMG, 2003; Anifowose and Babawale ed, 2004 cited in ikelegbe, 2013). This primarily arises from the fact that the agencies and groups that are recognised to facilitate, moderate and participate in the elections have not taken the vocation with the best ethical and professional commitment (Adetula, 2008 quoted in ikelegbe, 2013). The political parties became vehicles for de-democratisation. They not only undermined and prejudiced the highly flawed party primaries but they also determined its outcome. Ever since, internal party democracy and the selection of candidates have become a highly vexed issue. These group of people all constituted one-third of delegates (Momoh, 2013:14).

What they tend to do is to create channels for adversary relationships and facilitate a permanent opposition mentality. The nearest they appear to get to their conventional roles is to represent the democratic forms but not substance of promoting resolution of contending options. The Elite make use of them as mechanisms for perpetuating division and cleavages, fighting among themselves, securing power and intimidating their opponents (Tukur, 2004:570). Local leaders use them to obtain public office or influence or get businesses or settle scores. As for the general populations, their main purpose of joining or working for political parties tends to be for commerce, for blackmail, or to satisfy immediate requirements for small sums of money. So at the end of the day, the working of the parties results in factions, disagreements, rancour and violence. The outcome could be break-up and further creation of room for opportunists, exhibitionists and time-savers (Tukur, 2004:570).

The three main political parties during the First republic (1960-66) were seriously afflicted by ethnicity and were regionally based, with Nigeria People's Congress (NPC), National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) and Action Group (AG) being more popular and obtaining their support and dispensing patronage to people of the North, East and West respectively. Politics then has been correctly described largely as one that was based on a tripod, which eventually constituted one of the major reasons for the collapse of that republic through the first Nigerian military coup of January 15, 1966 (Olagunju, 1992). It was in response to the problem of ethnicity as a major contributor to the collapse of the party system and the First republic, that the Murtala/Obasanjo regime decided to put policies in place that will re-position political parties for national integration during the Second republic (1979-1984) (Simbine, 2013:2).

Hence, in the electoral provisions contained in the transition programme of that period, the military attempted to solve the problem of ethnicity in their formation and management by requiring political parties to have "national spread" and to be national in outlook and programme, in order to be eligible for registration and subsequent participation in elections (Simbine, 2013:2). Thus, only five political parties out of fifty political associations that applied for registration were eventually registered. These parties were the Great Nigeria People's Party (GNPP), the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Nigerian People's Party (NPP), Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), and the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) (Simbine, 2013:2). Taking the argument further and offering explanation to the events that culminated in the termination of the third republic, Simbine (2013:2-3) affirmed that:

*During the aborted Third republic, two political parties were registered and allowed to operate namely, the National Republican Convention (NRC) and Social Democratic Party (SDP). Thereafter, under the Abacha transition programme, eighteen political associations applied for registration as political parties, out of which five were registered, viz: The Congress for National Consensus (CNC), the Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN), the Grassroots Democratic Movement (GDM), the National Centre*

*Party of Nigeria (NCPN) and the United Nigeria Congress Party (UNCP). The apparent bankruptcy and lack of distinctive ideology made former Attorney-General and Minister of Justice, Bola Ige, to describe the parties as “five fingers of a leprous hand”*

In Nigeria, the long-drawn struggle for the return of power to an electorate came to pass when the Fourth Republic came into existence in 1999 (Abutudu, 2013:3). Political parties in the current dispensation euphemistically called the Fourth Republic essentially have had the same party structure as in the past, in which there is a National Working Committee (NWC), the zones, the states, local governments and the wards levels of operation (Momoh, 2013:12). Two key points summarises the complicated existence and relations within and between political parties in the Fourth Republic. First is the proliferation of political parties in a manner that dwarfed those of previous republics. Second is the internal contradiction that has promoted factionalization which in itself tends to promote the creation of new parties by aggrieved or ambitious members (Momoh, 2013:12).

Commenting on the character of the political parties of the fourth republic Abutudu (2013:5) opined that:

*In general, the political parties that emerged in the fourth republic were hardly anchored on the forces that spearheaded the struggle against military rule. In fact, in most cases, the individuals who formed and dominated these parties constituted an integral part of the authoritarian political establishment, and participated in the so-called democratic transition programmes with little or no regard for any prior liberalization of political space as a prelude to electoral contest. They were always part of any transition programme that the military chose, with little or no inclination to question its motives, logic or form. The isolation of the civil society from the actual process of party formation largely promoted a transition to a civil regime with military, authoritarian mind-set.*

Nigeria's political parties emerged in the “historical-situation” or trajectory of disenchantment with military rule and militarism. However, the formation of the parties was so sudden and hurried. Similarly, Ware's typology of “weak penetration” by existing political parties is apt, but contrary to his claim that weak penetration will give ground to new political parties to win more voters or members, the evidence in Nigeria shows that new political parties are equally weak and have no convincing message to woo the electorate (Momoh, 2013:8). All the political parties, including the party in government at the centre, are weak. All the political parties need to be organised on the principle of all inclusiveness, rather than exclusion (NAILS, 2005:249).

Agbaje, Akande and Ojo (2007: 82) were expansive and extensive in advancing events that culminated in Fourth Republic. Vivid and critical as their argument is, they offered three reasons for the event not mincing words in their declarations arguing that: There are three factors that

need to be stressed in the struggle against authoritarian rule from the mid 1980s, and which have major implications for the nature of political parties and electoral processes that emerged in the Fourth Republic. First, the ideas and the forces that defined that struggle were not the ideas and forces that actually shaped the character of the transition and the Fourth Republic that emerged from it. Thus, those who shaped the rules of the Fourth Republic and who took over the reins of the state were not those who fought for democratic rule. Rather, those who shaped the rules, and inherited state powers in the Fourth Republic were in essence, always closely associated with, or aligned with military rule. Often, they were political products of military rule.

Second and closely associated with the above is the fact of regimentation of the political transition process. The military was quite sensitive to the pressure from civil society to democratize, but it kept a close tab on the elaboration of the rules that governed the transition process as well as the constitutional framework of the Fourth Republic. Nowhere was this more pronounced than on the process of political party formation. Since 1979, military rulers in Nigeria had sought to control the party formation process by insisting on having to give formal recognition for political parties before they could operate as such. The rationale for this approach has been to prevent the emergence of political parties with ethnic, regional or religious colouration. These were in fact the bane of the political parties under the First Republic (Bogaards, 2010: 730). Parties thus, failed in their responsibility of contributing to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria's First republic (Simbine, 2013:3).

In the third place, there is the prolonged political turmoil which arose from the annulment of the presidential elections of 1993 by the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida. The protests over this annulment forced General Babangida from Office in the same year, and brought in General Sani Abacha after barely six months of the interim contraption put in place by Babangida when he left office. The call for the validation of the 1993 elections won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola dogged Abacha for the five years he was in office although he did all he could to transcend that paradigm by coming up with his own transition programme and its full complement of five political parties. While these efforts of Abacha terminated with his demise in 1998, it has been argued that the origins of political parties in the Fourth Republic can be situated in the agitation for the validation of the June 12 (1993) presidential elections.

The controversial and sudden death of General Sanni Abacha (the then head of state) signals the commencement of the fourth republic. Upon his sudden death, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, as it was alleged, who was to have been retired by General Abacha, along with other senior military officers on June 8, 1998 (Iroanusi, 2000: 178), emerged as the new Head of State on June 9, 1998. He was essentially preoccupied with organising another transition to civil rule while attempting to re-enact a collaborative foreign policy with countries that had regarded Nigeria as a pariah state (Fawole, 1999 and Adebajo, 2006: 10-16).

In stating the premises upon which he arrived at a conclusion for dissolving all the five political parties, former Head of state, General Abdulsalami Abubakar stated that, ‘in particular, democratization was marred by manoeuvring and manipulation of political institutions, structures and actors. In the end, we have only succeeded in creating a defective foundation on which a solid democratic structure can neither be constructed nor sustained (Gen. Abubakar, 1998)’. Thus, he doubted that the parties could be the strong pillars and instruments through which democracy can be cultivated and entrenched, maintaining that these qualities were certainly lacking in the Nigerian political space (Simbine, 2013:3-4). Abdulsalami’s transition programme essentially threw up three major political parties: Alliance for Democracy (AD), All Peoples Party (APP) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) (Momoh2013:11).

In the march towards the Fourth republic, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) initially granted provisional registration to nine (9) political parties in 1998 (Simbine, 2013:4). The 1999 elections ushered in the Fourth Republic. Three political parties contested the elections. These were the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the All Peoples Party (APP) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD). The political parties that had sought to engage the emerging democratic order were 24 (Abdu, 2002: 94). However, only three were registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission to assume the status of political parties. This was with the condition that after the local government elections of that year, those that had 10% votes and above in at least 24 states of the Federation would qualify to contest the subsequent State and Federal elections (Simbine, 2013:4).

This was after supposedly surmounting the constitutional huddles of showing that they were not sectional, ethnic, or religious party and that their membership and support bases were sufficiently reflective of the diversity of the country. The empirical test of this national spread requirement was the nationwide local council elections conducted in 1998. Actually, the AD did not exactly pass the test “but was nevertheless registered. The government felt this was the only way that the South West which had sustained the pro-democracy agitation since 1993, would participate in the transition programme, thereby lending it credibility” (Agbaje, et al 2007: 84)

A major feature of the Fourth Republic is the proliferation of political parties, that primarily do not seek to contest elections, but which are in more ways limited and self serving in roles and interests. Though the number of political parties was 30 in 2002, 33 in early 2006 and 50 in 2007, only 16 fielded candidates in the 2003 General Elections while only 26 contested the 2007 General Elections. Even the parties that contested the elections were merely “temporal machines for electoral contests” (TMG, 2003:18).

Thus the major parties, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Alliance for Democracy (AD), Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), and All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) have been plagued by deep internal crises, disorder, recurring tensions and turmoil manifested in factional fighting, expulsions and counter-expulsions, multiple executives and dual offices. There is a high level of

money politics, political vagrancy, indiscipline and in-cohesion (Omotola 2009:612). Some months into the Fourth republic, with Obasanjo as President, politicians began to clamour for the registration of more parties. The federal government initially refused to register more political parties, a development that forced the unregistered associations to seek redress in court (Simbine, 2013:4).

With Court judgment in their favour, it appeared that a floodgate was opened for parties to seek and get registered. Thus, while about 30 political parties contested during the 2003 elections, the number grew to 63 as the 2011 elections drew near. As of April 2013, only 25 political parties are recognized by the election management body (Simbine, 2013:4). With the registration of the new political parties; All Progressives' Congress (APC) which is a product of a Merger from the three main opposition parties: Action Congress of Nigeria, All Nigerian people's party, Congress for progressive Change and factions of two other parties) People's Democratic Movement (PDM), Independent Democrat (ID) the number of the political parties still stand at 25.

What became the three dominant parties in 1998 viz Alliance for Democracy (AD), Peoples Democratic party (PDP) and All Peoples Party (APP) later (ANPP) had huge military presence both in their formation and membership, particularly the latter two parties. As such, from the outset the behaviour of the political parties was heavily influenced by a culture of militarism while some of the parties were preponderantly constituted by *militicians*. In addition, they lacked ideological rooting. However, the Fourth Republic has been characterised by numerous internal crises, godfather politics and factionalisation within political parties (Momoh, 2013:13).

At the 1999 Presidential election, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo of PDP had contested against a coalition of two other parties (APP and AD) which had brought forward Chief Olu Falae as presidential candidate (Momoh, 2013:13). The election was however not free and fair while traces of ethnic politics still manifested in the creation of political parties as AD had its main followership in the south west. But while the 1999 elections were not free nor fair, the 2003 General Elections were characterised by fraud, miscounting, rigging, and malfeasance. In addition, the election was not issue-oriented, the political parties lacked well-thought out programmes and manifestos, the executive lord over the other two arms through actual disrespect of ruling or threat of impeachment and blackmail, (Momoh, 2006: 71-73).

The 2007 General elections could best be described as *electoral Tsunami* or what have been euphemistically referred to as Direct Capture (DC), within the overall strategic framework of Primitive Accumulation of Votes (PAV). In early stages of PAV political parties rigged elections and although the state was generally not neutral, its institutions were used (instrumentalised) for the purpose of achieving PAV "In other words, state institutions were first captured by private interests, particularly political parties, and then deployed for PAV" (Ibeanu, 2009: 15).

Political parties in Nigeria are not keen about deepening democracy; rather they are more preoccupied with the crude capture of power. They have abandoned their traditional role of membership recruitment and mobilisation, and political education (Momoh, 2013:27). With the emergence of godfathers, owners and joiners, political nomads and the use of uncivil means to win elections, Nigerian political parties have continued to contribute to de-democratisation. The central challenge of party system dwells on party processes, inter-party relationship, violence, and other ecological factors (Momoh, 2013:27).

In contra- distinction, Jinadu (2013:6) rising to the defence of political parties in Nigeria especially in the fourth republic contend that:

*This is not to say that all has been bad or that all has not been well since May 1999. It is only to point to creeping and indeed deepening contradictions, which require urgent policy action. The action is urgent, if the considerable and obvious progress the country has made towards deepening democratic transition since 1999 in the following areas is not to turn into a fleeting mirage: (i) continuing commitment to federalism; (ii) the political succession, in line with constitutional fixed term limits and/or through democratic elections, at the federal and state level, even if still problematic and controversial in several respects; (iii) the ebb and flow in the watchdog role of the legislature and judiciary especially at the federal level, under the separation of powers; (iv) the apparent subordination of the military to civilian control; (v) the vibrancy of the civil society as democratic sentinel; and (vi) the limited, though not inconsequential, success of democracy-promoting institutions, such as the independent national electoral commission, the national human rights commission and the economic and financial crimes commission*

## **DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION AND POLITICAL PARTIES: CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

### **Democratic Consolidation**

Scholars have used different definitions of democratic consolidation. These definitions are based on two conceptions of democracy. One is a “minimalist conception,” emphasizing procedural or formal democracy. The other is a “maximalist conception,” focusing on the outcomes of politics, such as institutionalization of political institutions, social justice, and economic equality (Lee, 2007: 103). Schmitter defines the minimalist conception of a consolidated democratic regime as “the process of transforming the accidental arrangements, prudential norms, and contingent solutions that have emerged during the transition into relations of cooperation and competition that are reliably known, regularly practiced, and voluntarily accepted by those persons or collectives that participate in democratic governance (Schmitter, 1992: 424).”

In his own contribution Linz (1978: 158) asserts that: a consolidated democracy is one in which “none of the major political actors, parties, or organized interests, forces, or institutions consider (s) that there is any alternative to the democratic process to gain power and that no political institutions or groups has a claim to veto the action of democratically elected decision makers. To put it simply democracy must be seen as ‘the only game in town.’ Democratic consolidation is about regime maintenance and about regarding the key political institutions as the only legitimate framework for political contestation and adherence to the democratic rules of the game (Ogundiya, 2009).

More explicitly, Gunther, Diamandourous, and Puhle (1995) contend that the democratization process has three phases: the fall of the authoritarian regime, consolidation, and enduring democracy. Democratic consolidation should therefore connote a consistent and sustained practice of democratic princip (Yagboaju, 2013: 101). The building of a consolidated democracy involves in part an affirmation and strengthening of certain institutions, such as the electoral system, revitalized or newly created parties, judicial independence and respect for human rights, which have been created or recreated during the course of the transition (Valenzuela, 1990:4).

Diamond (1995:171) was poignant in his analysis. He contends that: democratic consolidation means the quality, depth, and authenticity of democracy in its various dimensions has been improved: “political competition becomes fairer, freer, more vigorous and executive; participation and representation broader, more autonomous, and inclusive; civil liberties more comprehensively and rigorously protected; accountability more systematic and transparent.” Several of the newly emerging democratic regimes are far from consolidated. They are merely surviving without consolidating. In particular, in the less developed regions of the world, these fragile democratic regimes have experienced significant uncertainty over the rules of the game, due to their terrible economic conditions and other social problems. Although many Third-World countries (which Nigeria belongs) have experienced transitions to procedural democracy, such as free elections with few barriers to mass participation and meaningful party competition, this democratic change definitely does not guarantee democratic stability (Lee, 2007: 103). Democracy can be said to be consolidated when it can avoid democratic breakdown and erosion by ‘eliminating, neutralizing, or converting disloyal players’ (Schedler, 1998), and moving a step further towards completing and deepening democracy, measured by high ‘expectations of regime continuity’ (Schedler, 1998).

For Diamond (1996:7).

*Democratic consolidation is obstructed by or destroyed causally by the effects of institutional shallowness and decay. If they are to become consolidated, therefore, electoral democracies must become deeper and more liberal. This will require greater executive (and military) accountability to both the law and the scrutiny of other branches of government, as well as the public, the reduction of barriers to political*

*participation and mobilization by marginalized groups; and more effective protection for the political and civil right of all citizens*

With consolidation, democracy becomes regularized and deeply internalized in social institutional and even psychological life as well as in political calculations for achieving goals (Babatope, 2012: 14). Democratic consolidation “implies the internationalization of democratic culture and the institutionalization of democratic “best practices” by a polity that has successfully embarked on a democratic transition” (Asiwaju 2000).

### **Political Parties**

A political party is much more than an organization for seeking and controlling political power. More critically, it is an organization for expressing and harmonizing interests, and that intermediates between the citizens and political society, government and state (Ikelegbe, 2013:7). There are numerous types of political parties such as elite-based parties, mass-based parties, ethnic-based parties, electoralist parties and movement parties (Gunther and Diamond, 2003).

Political parties have been defined in different ways. Nnoli (2003) defines a political party as a group of people who share a common conception of how and why state power should be organized and used. Political parties have also been conceived as an instrument for contesting elections for the purpose of selecting candidates and parties to exercise political power (Yaqub 2002:122). A political party is simply a body of organised individuals whose ultimate aim and goal is to contest for governmental power through the instrumentalities of elections. While it should not be mistaken that the mere existence of political parties presupposes that a society is democratic or otherwise, however, competitive and periodic elections have come to at least define the character of liberal democracy (Momoh, 2013:).

When we consider popular attitudes on political parties around the world, many of them reflect strongly negative views held by the general public. Popular views on parties range from identifying parties as: power-hungry; corrupt; either excessively partisan or, on the other extreme, lacking in ideology; male-dominated; elite-dominated; lacking internal democracy; lacking meaningful connection to the grassroots; responsible for gridlock and obstructing the smooth functioning of government; and in some cases violent and dangerous (Carothers, 2006 cited in Deme, 2013:2).

A number of these views have not only been held by the general public but also such widely respected leaders as George Washington, who once said, “[political parties]...are likely in the course of time and things, to become potent engines, by which cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the power of the people and to usurp for themselves the reins of government, destroying afterwards the very engines which have lifted them to unjust dominion” (Deme, 2013:2). Political parties, despite all these drawbacks, however, fulfill a number of vital functions that help a multi-party democratic system function. Parties serve

essential functions including aggregating citizen interests, forming governments, developing and promoting policy positions and programmes, and grooming and selecting political leadership (Carothers, 2006).

political parties perform other functions that include mediating between citizens and state institutions; recruiting and preparing individuals for political leadership; organizing election campaigns; aggregating societal interests, and providing a participatory, responsive relationship with the people; political recruitment and training; education, socialization, breeding consensus, providing alternative world views and political communication among others (Pogoso, 2013:4).

### **POLITICAL PARTIES AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION: THE NEXUS**

Political parties are seen as inevitable in establishing the necessary link(s) between the state, civil society and democratic consolidation. They are the gatekeepers and the measuring political barometer for indicating the degree and effectiveness of the practice of democracy. Being the heart of democracy, they make and/or mar a stable political system (Kura, 2011:270). Some of the functions/role of political parties include: governance, representation, policy making and execution, interest aggregation and articulation, peaceful change of government, making government effective and responsive (opposition parties function also as pressure group), accountability, social and integration functions. In sum, wherever a political party exists, it tends to perform common functions at different stages of economic, social, political and judicial development (Kura, 2011:270).

In Nigeria's contemporary politics however, parties that should promote democracy are themselves the most undemocratic entities (Simbine, 2013: 8). "The political parties of the Fourth Republic were bred to be agents of democratic erosion and collapse, rather than strong ramparts for the construction and consolidation of democracy." (Agbaje, 2010:69). Concerns persist over the role of Nigerian political parties in democratic consolidation. The Uwais Committee (Election Reform Committee) cited in Ibeanu, 2013:5) had this to say about political parties:

*One of the most crucial and yet least developed democratic institutions in the country is the political party system. There are currently 50(which rose to over 63 but now scaled down to 25 in 2013) registered political parties in the country, most of which are an assemblage of people who share the same level of determination to use the party platform to get to power. As such, it is usually difficult to identify any party programmes or ideologies. The structure of the political parties is such that internal democracy is virtually absent. The political parties are weak and unable to effectively carry out political mobilization, political education and discipline.*

Diamond, Kirk-Greene, and Oyediran, (1997) stresses that: 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. The authoritarian character of state actors, the clobbered nature of the political parties, the beggar-thy-neighbour mentality of elected party executives, in the face of the rapacious and abrasive role of leaders of party, have made them not to be ineffective and have equally led to internal contradictions within political parties (Momoh, 2010).

In this milieu, political parties hold, perhaps, the highest recruitment and mobilisation potential in Nigeria's democracy, yet they have squandered it on the platter of opportunism and narrow-minded and self-seeking interests. Rather than give direction to membership, political parties are being hijacked and manipulated by a few members who bifurcate the party by differentiating between "owners" and "joiners". In some cases, some political parties are subcontracted to those characterized as *Candidate-members* (Momoh, 2010).

In a democracy, political parties perform a number of functions, topical among which are two, namely (i) being principal instruments for contesting elections, the election being staged to select candidates as well as parties to exercise political power (authority) (Yaqub, 2002), and (ii) being instruments of political education, interest aggregation, political socialization, and political recruitment. Either in government or in opposition, political parties are expected to perform these two crucial functions in addition to others, depending on the character of the political system in which they operate.

In particular, opposition parties are expected to help in educating, articulating and aggregating issues that they contend that the public is not well informed about or about which they want to make their own positions clear. In the words of Yaqub (2002) 'It is on the basis of competently performing these roles that an opposing political party can stand a good chance of displacing and, thereby, taking power from a political party currently in the saddle'. In the course of preparing to capture state power and exercise authority in the future, the party must devote its attention to recruiting and training people to occupy political positions in the state. They thus, articulate alternative policies, while serving as legal opposition to the party in power. In his own argument Jinadu (2013:2-3) affirmed that:

*Competitive party and electoral politics is expected to deepen and consolidate the democratic transition, which the country embarked upon in May 1999. The transition is anchored on the following: (a) federalism; and (b) constitutional or limited government, which is anchored on the following principles: (i) rule of law; (ii) separation of powers, moderated by a system of checks and balance or diffusion of powers; (iii) presidential and gubernatorial term limits; (iv) accountability and transparency in government, with special powers and functions assigned to horizontal institutions of governance or democracy-promotion institutions, such as the independent national electoral*

*commission, as a virtual fourth branch of government, to monitor and ensure it; (v) social pluralism or social inclusion, in the form of a charter or bill of rights, such as in the fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy, specifying the duty of the state to provide cultural, economic and social rights, and fundamental human rights provisions, which are basically civil and political rights.*

These anchors of democratic consolidation are expected to create material and psychological conditions, and institutional processes to serve as powerful bulwarks against a reversal or regression to the sad historical experience with the practice of competitive party and electoral politics in the country's First and Second Republics. In this respect the significance of political parties for sustainable democracy and elections is that, under conditions of competitive party and electoral politics, and the conduct of free and fair elections, whose outcome is expectedly *ex ante* indeterminate (Przeworski, 1991), political parties (i) present the electorate with a choice of candidates and programmes from which to choose, and in doing so (ii) help to decide which party or coalition of parties should govern for a fixed number of years. The requirement of competitiveness and the *ex ante* indeterminacy of the substantive outcome of elections is what distinguishes the party in a liberal democratic political system, from the concept of the party in an authoritarian or one-party political system (Jinadu, 2013: 3).

In a liberal democratic system, political parties should provide the medium through which the accountability of the executive and the legislature to the electorate is exercised in the form of periodic competitive elections under a two-party, dominant two-party or multiparty party systems. By providing such a medium, political parties under a liberal democratic system, are expected to help deepen democracy and development by pursuing public policy measures and programmes to advance the public welfare, in line with their manifestos and ideologies. This is of course in theory. The reality is and can be much different, as various critics of the party and the theory of liberal politics from which this concept of the party derives have argued. Such critics, in advancing their arguments, point to the vitiating effect on the choice of the electorate of: (i) oligarchic and undemocratic tendencies, including the unwholesome effect of money, in political party organization; and (ii) market imperfections and structural distortions in the economic organization of the liberal democratic state, which make nonsense of the notion of possessive individualism and the analogized competitive political market place, on both of which the theory of competitive electoral politics is based (Jinadu, 2013: 4-5).

The periodic electoral accountability that should come with free and fair elections remains gravely lacking in Nigeria, because of the subversion of the rules of electoral governance and its processes by the country's political parties. Elections in the country are typically not about people-oriented programmes, during which political parties and their candidates for public political office offer the electorate issues-based competing options on advancing the people's welfare. Nor are elections in the country typically referenda on the performance of governing parties at federal, state and local government levels in office. The elections are "choiceless,"

reminding us of Herbert Marcuse's dictum that so-called "free elections" under liberal democracy remove neither the masters nor the slaves (Jinadu, 2013: 5-6).

The relationship between a viable political party system and democratic consolidation is evident. Political parties are the heart of democracy and without which, democracy cannot function (Adele 2001:35). Political parties are an essential component of democracy and central to an understanding of how politics works. Political parties are also the crucial link between the citizens and the government in a democracy. There can be no meaningful democracy without a properly functioning party system (Agbaje, 1999; 192). While democracy rests on the informed and active participation of the people, political parties are viable tools in this regard. Democracy exists where the foremost leaders of a political system are selected by competitive elections in which the bulk of the population has the opportunity to participate. Evidently, the condition of the parties, in a political system, is the best possible evidence of the nature of any democratic regime (Anifowoshe, 2004:59).

In fact, in a democracy, the personnel selected through the electoral process are expected to embody specific norms and policy platforms which command the support of the electorate. Elections then are "an expression of the peoples' sovereign will" (Agbaje and Adejumbi: 2006: 26). If elections express the sovereign will, political parties provide the platform for articulating that will and selecting the personnel who must embody it in government. A critical core of liberal democracy is predicated on competition for political power with the governed, as free agents, exercising their free and unfettered choice among competing platforms which are provided under different political parties. Political parties seek to capture political power but they do this by seeking popular support through elections. By contesting and winning elections, political parties become the effective agents for choosing those who exercise governmental power. In effect, political parties act as channel of expression between government and the governed, set and implement agenda for the society while acting as agents of socialization and elite recruitment (Hague and Harrop: 1987: 139-141).

The claim to govern by a political party is anchored on its ability to get the support of a majority of voters in free and fair elections. However, there are differing perspectives as to how political parties align themselves with the voters. While some assume that this process is largely driven by the voters themselves, with the 'rational' political party simply aligning itself with the preferences of majority of the voters (Downs, 1957), others consider the political party as the creator of the vision behind which it mobilizes the voters. The first perspective advocates that political parties are pragmatic entities whose overriding need for power compels them to adopt electoral platforms that mirror the positions of most voters. For Alan Ware, this is the populist conception of democracy.

Elections under such a democracy express a relationship between the voter and the elected official with the former controlling the latter (Ware, 1979: 6). On the other hand, the conception

of parties as essentially instruments through which like-minded people organizes to enthrone their interests as the basis of government action. Duverger (1959), view the party as the architect of the platform, the vision, behind which it then mobilizes the voters. Political parties under this liberal variant of democracy influence voters' choice "through the alternative views of political reality they present to the electorate. In effect, they interpret the political universe for the electorate and invite them to chose among such competing interpretations" (Ware, 1979:32-3). Ultimately, in contemporary democratic systems political parties govern and they must do so by acquiring the mandate of the people in periodic elections. Through this, the electorate can expect government to be responsive, responsible and accountable. There is also recognition that for the popular will to be truly manifested in governance, the electoral process must be shown in all ramifications to be free and fair. The failure to meet these basic conditions robs elections of the quality of anchoring government policies, programmes and actions on the will of the people (Abutudu, 2013:3).

### **CHALLENGES OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION OF NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC**

Political parties are vital organizations in a democracy, and democracy is stronger when citizens become active members of political parties. Certain characteristics of political parties such as high level of institutionalization, a localized level of candidate nomination, high level of women working at internal party offices and the presence of formal rules designed to increase the number of women in elected offices are vital for the deepening and sustenance of democracy (Pogoso, 2013: 21-22). Nigeria's democratic culture is characterized by factors such as: assassinations, lawlessness, illegalities, rigging, oppression, manipulation, marginalization and violence. Other factors include: male dominated party politics, labeling, money politics, and numerous social, cultural and religious issues.

Party discipline, inter-party relations, internal party democracy and processes, violence, political ecology, party ownership, membership defection and lack of party political education are challenges confronting democratic consolidation in Nigeria's fourth republic (Abutudu, 2013:11). Consequently, parties have found it extremely difficult to emphasize politics of issues. Lately, the situation has remained unchanged as parties rarely discuss topical matters that closely match those of the people (Simbine, 2013:16).

Jinadu (2013:14-15) in his observation contend that; Competitive party and electoral politics under the military-brokered democratic transitions were intended to (a) facilitate internal democracy within the political parties, through requirements like party conventions and party nomination primaries, and the establishment of a party bureaucracy, involving a distinction between career politicians and party technocrats; (b) engender a new democratic political culture through encouraging and nurturing the emergence of a "new-breed" of politicians, with a more positive and system-supporting orientation to politics; (c) emphasize issue-based or ideological *differentiae*, to distinguish one party from the other, and to de-emphasize the personalization of

party politics; and (d) bring about accountability and transparency in the sourcing and spending of party financing. In spite of that party politics in Nigeria's fourth republic has been fraught with a lot of challenges. It is proper to situate these challenges in their appropriate perspective. They are:

### **Lack of Institutionalization and Personalization of Political Parties**

Parties in Nigeria have not been able to attain the expected degree of institutionalization especially in the areas of internal cohesion and discipline. This deficiency has also contributed to the decline of their conflict management capacities at both intra and inter-party relations levels. The level of crisis at both levels of party relations is worrisome. It is such that none of the parties have been able to hold together without severe conflict that most times threaten their very hearts (Simbine, 2013:18). Party and party system institutionalization is measured by the internal and external activities of parties. Internal refers to all those factors that are only internal to party organization, such as internal democracy, complexities, finance, adaptability, etc, and external refers to the relationship of parties with their external environment (Kura, 2011:270).

The internal characteristics and power configurations of the political parties have manifested in huge organizational weaknesses and internal conflicts. The parties have particularly been plagued by suspensions and expulsions of party members, cross carpeting particularly prior to elections and deep divisions and factions that have manifested sometimes in violent clashes (Ikelegbe, 2013: 18). Intra-party violent conflicts have been particularly heightened during election periods because of the imposition of favoured and dubious consensus candidates, and the swapping of nominated candidates by party chieftains. The absence of equalitarian platforms and the subversion of the will of ordinary party members and delegates in party primaries, have grieved several party leaders and members and underlined numerous defections and cross-carpeting (Ikelegbe, 2013: 18-19). More empirically, whether parties in a particular polity are able to effectively perform these functions is a matter of the degree of party and party system institutionalization (Kura, 2008).

Smaller parties often exist alongside their founders, funders or some public figure; hence they are built around personalities. For instance, the personality of Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu is central to the formation and sustenance of All Peoples Grand Alliance (APGA), Bola Ahmed Tinubu to Action Congress (AC), as well as its successor Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), Orji Uzor Kalu to Progressive Peoples Party (PPA), and Muhammadu Buhari to Congress for Progressive Change (CPC). Even the PDP for a long time was woven around the personality of Obasanjo who determined and controlled a lot of activities in the party (Manning, 2005). With Tinubu and Buhari as the characters on board the All Progressives Congress (APC) (One of the newly registered political parties), it is feared that there will be lack of internal democracy and cohesion as these leaders will prefer to dictate the tune, compelling other members to dance along or get out of the Union (Onabanjo, 2013:23)

The parties are led, manned and peopled by persons to whom politics is a job, a means of livelihood, accumulation and a means to further their business interests (Jibrin 2006). In fact the party elite are “greedy, opportunistic, self serving and deceitful” and are actually to some extent, “coalitions of various factions of regional and economic rent seekers” (Ojo 2008:6). The struggle for or power tussle has been defined in terms of “owners” of the party, “moneybags”, “godfathers” and leaders of the party”. Quite often all of these attributes are contained in a single politician, but where they are not, power tussle ensues, and the party leaders are either made bystanders or aligned to one or the other tendency that best serves their interest. The outcome is often factionalisation or fragmentation of the party, leading to splinter groups or defections or...*political nomadism* (Momoh, 2013:9).

Another problem associated with lack of institutionalization is the fact that a few prominent, powerful and influential individuals have completely hijacked the party machinery. While Obasanjo has total control of the PDP, it is well known that *Asiwaju* Bola Ahmed Tinubu determines what happens in the ACN. Similarly, Rtd General Buhari is *alfa and omega* in Congress for Positive Change (CPC), and the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) is controlled by the duo of Kano State Governor Shekarau and Ali Modu Sherrif (Simbine, 2013:18). In Allied Congress Party of Nigeria (ACPN), the only authority that mattered was *Oloye* Olusola Saraki (now late), while Chief Odumegwu Ojukwu (also now late) and Governor Peter Obi of Anambra state control the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) (Simbine, 2013:18). The dominant figures in APC are Buhari and Tinubu. There is something common to the two of them; they are both dictators and ideologically they two poles apart.

Un-institutionalized parties will always find it difficult to develop deep roots in the society in which they exist and operate. This factor has led to a low rate of party identification among voters, which also leads to high electoral volatility (Simbine, 2013:18). When parties generally lack strong institutionalization, they showcase a low level of organization and become even more available to be hijacked by a few party leaders who dictate to the majority. According to Omotola (2009: 612), it is incontrovertible that the mere adoption of party pluralism will not automatically advance the cause of democracy without the institutionalization of concrete parameters to promote and sustain strong political culture and due process in theory and practice. The frequent changes being experienced in the leadership of the PDP is a pointer to serious and unmanageable disagreements and crisis of leadership and legitimacy and a fault line in institutionalization. For example, between May 1999 and 2012, the PDP changed its national chairman eight (8) times! It has been led by Solomon Lar, Barnabas Gemade, Audu Ogbu, Ahmadu Ali, Vincent Ogbulafor, Okwesilieze Nwodo, Haliru Muhammed Bello as acting national Chairman, and presently by Bamanga Mahmud Tukur (See Emmanuel Oladesu and Augustine Avwode in *The Nation*, April 30, 2013: 45). An obvious fact is that none of these changes was succession orderly, open, free, independent and reflective of the actual wishes of the majority of the party faithful. Rather, each (with the exception probably of the pioneer

Chair), was predicated upon the endorsement, whims and caprices of a given section of the party elite led oftentimes by the (incumbent) President (Adejumobi, 2002: 36-53).

### **Godfatherism**

Godfatherism has become a dominant feature of the party system in Nigeria today. Ayoade states that godfather is "... a benign political accretion of the position of either political notables or dreaded political rascals who are recalcitrant to the deterrence of the legal regime" (2008: 85). Godfatherism has been described as "an ideology which is constructed on the belief that certain individuals possess considerable means to unilaterally determine who gets party ticket to run for an election and who wins in an electoral contest" (Ogundiya, 2009: 286). To Ayoade (2006), Godfatherism is not philanthropy, it is often marked by devious and undemocratic acts such as violence, bribery and corruption all for the sake of perpetuating the wishes of the Godfather. There is a symbiotic relationship between the Godfather and the Godson: the Godfather "invests" his resources in the Godson and the Godson must, or at least should, on getting into office reciprocate by reimbursing his Godfather in kind and keeping absolute loyalty to the Godfather in all respects, including decision making whilst in public office. The key goal of all Godfathers is rule by proxy or rule through protégés (Ojo and Lawal, 2013: 187).

Godfather politics typically ensures that results are declared even when there is no evidence that voting actually took place. It typically plays electoral politics with little or no respect for the established rules of conduct governing the process, and does not display any sense of moral restraint in its appreciation of what constitutes appropriate behavior in a democratic political order. It is not surprising therefore that elections results, whether at the intra-party level or at the level of general elections are always disputed by those who are declared losers. In fact, all three presidential elections since 1999 have been the subject of judicial intervention (Abutudu, 2013:10-11).

Ayoade (2006) makes a distinction of the variant of Godfathers. He identifies two types of Godfathers, those who wield influence within the party and those who wield influence in their constituencies. The key attribute of both types of Godfathers is that they are sought after because their position can "sway political support" in nominating candidates or winning votes, during elections. Hence Ayoade differentiates between good and bad Godfathers, the former is subject to party discipline and rules of the game, and merely uses his/her reputation and good will to sway votes and support, whilst the latter violates all known rules to secure votes or political office for their candidate(s). The core claim of Ayoade is that many of the current political parties are unable to curtail, contain and punish "aberrant behaviour" of members, including godfathers and all this have had negative impact on party system.

The hijack of political parties by Godfathers has virtually choked off the party system as channel for the aggregation of local or constituency interests. The preferences expressed by the party typically turn out to be the personal interests of the Godfather. The sustainability of the control

of the political niche by the Godfather cannot be left to the uncertainty of being subjected to the preferences of the voters in a free and fair election. This desperation has typically led to the explicit, crude criminalization of the electoral process (Abutudu, 2013:12). Therefore, because Godfathers have significant influence on the internal workings of political parties, they are inadvertently or deliberately involved in the stability or otherwise of these parties. In other words, because they are the modulators and epicentre of political in-fighting and struggle for power and perquisites of office, they are one causative factor in understanding political Nomadism (Momoh, 2013:17).

Political Nomadism represents the defection(s) or arbitrary movement of politicians from one political party to another, or their formation of completely new party, after dumping their original party of membership. What makes the defection nomadic? This is because first they turn political parties into grazing grounds and second because the rate of defections is so high, arbitrary and sometimes inexplicable. These defections are often on grounds of lack of internal democracy in the party, Godfatherism, highhandedness and usurpation of power and abuse of position (Momoh, 2013:22).

The phenomenon of political niche creation is not only choking and blocking the political parties as platforms of representation. It is also turning national institutions located within the geographical spaces of particular political niches as zones of Godfather influence and control (Abutudu, 2013:14). The influence and power of Godfathers have continued to shape and reshape the nature of internal democracy within political parties and this continues to play a significant role in understanding the crises in political parties in Nigeria (Momoh, 2013:16).

### **Absence of Internal Democracy within the Political Parties**

Most political parties do not practice internal democracy because their leaders hardly emerged democratically hence the rising culture of political violence and assassinations especially in some sections of the country. Internal (party) democracy could be defined as a democratic process which involves accountability and transparency in all party affairs more especially in selecting party leaders, flag bearer, executives and other party officials in a political party (Ukaje, 2011:19). Internal democracy thus connotes political parties giving full expression and unfettered access to their members to participate in the decision making process. It also means running affairs transparently, in accordance with agreed rules, and in a manner that is fair and just. Internal party democracy in political parties also refer to the levels and methods of including party members in the decision making and deliberation within party structure (Kari and Uchenna, 2011:35-36).

Among the most elementary yet significant aspects of political development in a democracy are the convention of party congresses and the conduct of transparent and successful party primaries to elect leaders and candidates (i.e. flag-bearers) respectively. Since 1999, the trend has been that party primaries among virtually all political parties in Nigeria are usually pre-determined with

party “God-fathers” having the final say in the selection of both party leaders and candidates (Simbine, 2013:15). There is lack of internal democracy and poor governance systems in the political parties as indicated by non inclusive systems of participation and decision making, lack of opportunities for broad input, absence of well defined structures, rules and processes, denial of individual and group rights, and weak mechanisms for redressing grievances (Ikelegbe, 2013:3). Obviously, political Godfathers are always unwilling to allow internal party democracy, a circumstance that leads to frequent conflicts and constrains the development of parties as popular organizations. Expectedly, this leads to internal party crisis and frequent decamping of aggrieved politicians to other political parties where their aspirations can be accommodated (Simbine, 2013:15-16). Party leaderships have lacked popular bases and legitimacy and have tended to act with impunity, recklessness and insensitivity. The existence and dominance of party patrons and political machines have become the covert and clandestine platform for warfare like struggles to access and retain political power (Ikelegbe, 2013:3).

The activities of political parties in Nigeria is rather a paradox because the principles expected of a political party, like internal coherence and discipline are all lacking in all. Indeed, these principles eluded political parties in Nigeria instead what is obtainable is the total opposite of what should be obtained; the absence of internal party democracy which today stands as one major stumbling blocks to nurturing a functional and participatory democracy in Nigeria (Ukaje, 2011:26). The flagrant abuse of internal party democracy has been identified as the primogeniture of party wrangling or crisis either because of the wrangling it brings in the party affairs or the crisis it causes. Much of the internal party conflicts witnessed among political parties in Nigeria are either directly or indirectly linked to the problem of intraparty democracy, a development which has bedeviled the development of political parties and therefore a major impediment to the development of sustainable democratic governance (and consolidation) in our country (Ukaje, 2011:23).

Nigerian parties have neither risen above ethnic considerations nor exhibited internal democracy in their structure, organization and practice of politics. Rather, they have not only been ridden with internal crises but also turned out to be vehicles of corruption in material and ethical terms in the country, turning politics into a vocation not designed for the public interest but for primitive accumulation and the collection of rents (Jinadu, 2013:17). Unlike what existed in the First and Second republics, virtually all the political parties since the Fourth republic commenced lack internal democracy, absence of which,... breeds monetization of politics and the tendency of political vagrancy, institutionalized bitterness and violence in the attempt to gain and retain political power at all cost (Simbine, 2007: 207-232).

### **Incessant Party / Political Violence**

Perhaps the most damning record of political parties on clean politics is the persistence of violence in our political system (Ibeanu, 2013:13). Apart from elections conducted by the colonial government and the military, others particularly the 1964, 1983, 2003 and 2007

elections were plagued by violence and crises. Elections in Nigeria since 2003 have been plagued with irregularities and violence (Nweke 2005:386). Prior to the 2007 elections, the spate of assassinations that hit politicians was simply unprecedented, including a Minister of Justice and a National Vice Chairman of the ruling People's Democratic Party (Ibeanu, 2013:13).

The 2007 elections was particularly plagued by incidents of violence that included theft and snatching of election materials, killings, arson, abductions, assault, intimidation, destruction of properties and election materials, rioting, looting, violent clashes and protests, mayhem and chaos. More specifically incidents of electoral violence have included assault on electoral officials and voters, hijack and seizure of election materials, attacks on security officials and violent clashes between rival thugs and sympathizers of political parties (Nweke 2005:386).

The major parties in Nigeria are to varying degrees involved in the formation, mobilization and deployment of armed groups during party registrations, primaries and general elections. Some parties have loyal armed groups that are fairly known in some States and communities, that are deployed to protect their interests (Ikelegbe, 2013:20). During the Fourth Republic the breeding and use of thugs has assumed a new dimension. In the contemporary scenario, it has assumed a multiple-layered dimension because both the opposition and the ruling parties now breed thugs. Also, within the parties, leading figures and aspirants now maintain hordes of people mostly male who perform sundry acts such as errands, guards and harassment of political opponents (Abdul-Jelil, 2009: 11). Individual thugs, cult groups and armed gangs hire out their services to party leaders, who arm and pay them for specific violent roles during primaries and elections. One of the violent methods engaged by these chieftains is assassinations. Politically motivated assassinations have been a major feature of the struggles for power and resources within and between political parties. Other forms of violence are violent attacks on the properties, campaign and party offices and supporters of opponents (Ikelegbe, 2013:20).

Taking the argument further in a more concise and vivid fashion, Ikelegbe (2013: 23-24) maintained that:

*Party linked electoral violence can occur under four scenarios. The first is related to the nature of campaigns such as campaigns of calumny against opponents; ethnic, religious and regional rancor, mudslinging, bitterness and incitements that can provoke violence. The second is engagement in acts that provoke violence during elections such as imposition of candidates, annulment of party primaries, refusal to count ballot papers from opposition strongholds, changing of results, declaration of false results and delays and manipulation of results. The third is when parties procure, fund, support, facilitate and deploy organized violence by armed agents, bands and thugs to subvert the electoral process. The fourth occurs when parties facilitate, support, arm and deploy groups, thugs and youth to resist, thwart and stop the subversion of the electoral process*

Party politics is always being characterized by assassination, arson, intra and inter-party clashes and monumental political violence (Babatope, 2012:12). Rather than being a platform for reconciling and mediating conflicts and preventing violent eruptions through democratic procedures, the political parties in Nigeria have become a major institutional formation for the brewing and accentuation of conflicts. Party involvements in violence and violent conflicts have inflamed existing identity and communal conflicts over land, chieftaincy and community leadership. The involvement of party chieftains in the arming and funding of armed groups have led to the proliferation of arms, armed groups, cultists and militias (Ikelegbe, 2013:31). Fraud and violence have traditionally been used by political parties to gain electoral victories in Nigeria. Electoral violence and even fraud have been committed by most parties and both ruling and opposition parties at federal and state levels. What is however noteworthy is that electoral violence depends on party capacity, resources and access to state powers which means that ruling parties at different governmental levels are the major culprits (Ikelegbe, 2013:24). A typical Nigerian political party (ies) has adorned the toga of notoriety to the extent that its defining characteristics have been intrigues, bickering, backbiting, schisms and violence (Olaniyan 2009:51).

In fact, many political parties mobilize violent groups to guarantee security to candidates, party officials, campaign meetings and related activities during election periods. Most post election violence is linked to political parties in terms of mobilization, engineering and heightening. Incidents of violent protests and arson tend to be instigated, organized and backed by associates and supporters of opposition or losing parties, party leaders and candidates against alleged electoral irregularities and stolen victories (Ikelegbe, 2013:24). The character of the leadership of the parties, weak cohesion and the suffusion with divisions, factions, conflicts and defections have constructed the parties as institutions with high propensity and proclivity to violent conflicts (Ikelegbe 2013: 35). Right from the colonial period to the current dispensation, party politics has been bedeviled by crises in varying proportions, and among the players (Babatope, 2012:13).

The political parties' violence linkage has constructed a regime of public distrust, disgust, apathy and antipathy concerning the political process and political elite. Nigerians have become disillusioned and alienated from the political process. A culture of political violence has been constructed. This has meant that not only is confidence being lost in the electoral process, but a growing political cynicism may be emerging. There has been de-legitimation of governments that acquired power through dubious elections pervaded by violence (Ikelegbe, 2013:33). Party politics is characterized by intimidation, victimization, violence, acid attacks and political assassination, forcing many Nigerians to withdraw from party politics (Babatope, 2012:13). Party linked political violence has constituted a major threat to democratic consolidation and survival. Our nascent democracy has become plagued by insecurity and fear. There have been

assaults on civil rights, democratic values and procedures and our collective psyche and sensibilities (Ikelegbe, 2013:32).

Encapsulating the state of party politics and the democratic consolidation in the Nigeria's fourth republic Okoye (2009) clearly enunciated that:

*The general view is clearly that: (i) competitive party and electoral politics in the country falls far short of promoting democracy; (ii) there is deep mistrust within and between the political parties, resulting in antipathy and sense of helplessness among the generality of their members, and inducing heightened political tension in the country; and (iii) the marginalization of women, youth and vulnerable groups (physically and visually challenged) remains a major deficit as well as a major challenge for the country's party system. There is also a general sentiment that through their legendary failure to run their internal affairs in line with their constitutions and the electoral law, and to resolve intra-party disputes arising there from, the political parties have progressively brought the judiciary into the political thicket.*

Nigerian political parties have failed to provide leadership in consolidating federalism and democracy in the country and in diminishing the centrifugal salience of ethno-regionalism, reviving now and again since the democratic transition of 1979, the ghost of the politics of brinkmanship that created the political and constitutional impasse of October 1965-January 1966 (Jinadu, 2013:17).

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Since the beginning of the fourth Republic, the academics and the civil societies have paid serious attention to the practice of democracy in Nigeria and are much more concerned about its consolidation. It is observed in this paper that Nigeria's democracy is shallow and has failed to take deep roots because political parties are deficient and have been unable to play their expected role in strengthening the foundation of democratic consolidation. Political parties in the Fourth Republic are functionally weak and institutionally frail owing to incessant party violence, lack of clearly articulated manifestoes, coherent and consistent programmes that reflect the overall expectations, desires, preferences and aspirations of the masses, which in turn have become listless, lethargic and apathetic. The party system in Nigeria is weak and vulnerable, its future remains precarious and endangered by politicians who through their whims and caprices have become greedy, selfish, dubious, thoughtless and irrational. Nigerian political parties have proven themselves to be undemocratic and anti democratic institutions.

The political parties in Nigeria's fourth republic are un-institutionalized as they revolve around some prominent and influential individuals instead of establishing themselves as strong institutions driven by values and ideologies. They are known for exclusion and non- inclusion,

the political parties do not observe internal democracy as required. Decision making in almost all the political parties is bereft of transparency, accountability, consensus and consultation. All the political parties need to be re-organized on the principle of all inclusiveness rather than exclusion, Party officials' needs to be trained to carry out their functions.

Critical attention needs to be paid to the political parties as institutions that play diverse but central roles in democratic consolidation. The parties need to be re-engineered from mere institutions for acquiring political power to effective institutions that are capable of structuring, mediating and reconciling societal interests and conflicts. This means that issues of organizational capacity, effective leadership, internal democracy, discipline, institutionalization and personalization, ideological platforms of mobilization and linkage to civil society and the masses have to be tackled. All political parties should practice internal democracy to make them strong, effective and efficient through consistent observance of principles of transparency, accountability, consultation and consensus building in policies and decision making.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

**Akubo, A. Aduku** is a Research Assistant and the Programme Officer, Centre for Inter- African and Human Development Studies (CIDES) Jos, Nigeria.

**Yakubu Adejo:** School of General Studies, Federal Polytechnic, Kaura Namoda, Yobe State, Nigeria