

Democratizing Political Party Institutions as Key to Consolidating Nigeria National Development

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Abstract: Political party institution stands as the bedrock of democracy in the consolidation of modern state system. Democracy finds expression in functioning political party system. The contention and squabbles within political institutions result largely due to impulsive, dysfunctional, undemocratic institutional practices, conflict of interests, power contestation or usurpation, manipulation of political machinery, compromised and endangered processes that gnaw and crucify party democracy and politics, above all, the impact of ethnicity over and against national loyalty. Historically, from colonial period to the contemporary Nigeria, party conflicts encumber the formation, process, consolidation and delivery of political goods. Consequently, political parties rather than nurture and promote national unity and party democratization, breed acrimony, rancour and political apathy among the elite, members and society at large. Hence, the primacy of democratizing political party institutions as the essence of sustainable national democracy and democratization in Nigeria. The objective of the paper is to investigate and analyze the underlying factors responsible for undemocratic party politics with a view to ingeniously developing and firming the process of democratizing political institutions as meaningful contribution to national unity in Nigeria. The paper further examines the critical, intertwining factors that trigger and sustain intra and inter party conflicts and conflagrations. Findings (as in the case of Nigeria) indicate that personal rule, corruption, lack of financial probity, rentierism, high-handedness, abuse of constitutionality, court processes, rulings and executions, unbridled conflict of interests especially among political elites and party big wigs inter alia precipitate violence and trigger internecine party conflicts, which undermine national democratic processes. The paper therefore recommends party transparency, due diligence and process, right thinking and equal rights of members to decision making processes within the party structures and institutions; with effective institutional legal mechanisms to check deviant electoral behaviours and spurious interests in party politics.

Key words: Democratization • Political party • Institution • National Democracy • Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Historical Background of Political Party Institution: The prominence of political processes and institutions existed right from the cradle of civilization (if not creation) but the emergence of political parties defined the politics of the modern state formation and institution in the 19th century over and above other ancient political practices of the times. Undoubtedly, party politics and institutionalization became the natural consequences of the emergence of democratic processes, electioneering and democratization spreading around the world. Although party system was a European concept and ideology, it quickly spread

across the globe via westernization, imperialism and globalisation. Despite scores of resistance and cultural redefinitions, partisan politics and institutionalization carried with them the seemingly irresistible current of western democratic ideology wielded across the vulnerable Third World political landscape in the 21st century. In Nigeria, the process suffices one of the gallant political modules of both the colonial administration and Nigeria's politico-economic interface with Britain.

Historically, the emergence of political party system of government in Nigeria began with the formation of the first indigenous party in 1922 prior to Nigeria's independence in the 1960- the Nigeria National

Democratic Party (NNDP) led by Herbert Macaulay in Lagos [1]. The NNDP was mainly interested in metropolitan politics, particularly political issues concerning the Lagos. The thrust was capturing and winning Lagos politics than elsewhere [2]. As a system of government though foisted by the imperialists, the NNDP in 1923-33 consequently won all the elections in Lagos. However, the formation of the Lagos Youth Movement in 1933 and its transformation in 1936 to Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), changed the electoral politics in Lagos. There was massive, intense and well coordinated effort by NYM to wrestle and take over Lagos from NNDP. Between 1938 and 1941 the NYM defeated NNDP in all the elections conducted [3]. Observably, the continued brewing and scheming of political affairs across regions gradually amassed to intense, implosive intra and inter party political chauvinism and rivalry which necessarily degenerated to ethnic political cleavages. Party politics, on the basis of ethnic fissiparous tendencies and regionalisation, led to the split of the NYM and parochialism of NNDP. The parties that emerged like the Action Group (AG), National Council of Nigerian Citizen (NCNC) and the Northern People's Congress (NPC) were not only ethno-centric but essentially regionalized with all paraphernalia and sentiment to protect and defend the interests of their groups or region [4].

The trending of ethnicity in mainland politics continued despite the structural reforms introduced by the Lytleton Constitution of 1954 which restructured and changed the electoral laws and criteria for elective positions and offices. The new electoral laws were considered restrictive and unpopular and consequently triggered pockets of internecine political violence and conflicts. Parties realigned and restructured in line with the new electoral mandate [5]. The results of the 1959 general no doubt reflected the dominant role of ethnicity in Nigerian democratic and partisan politics and the struggle for political power. While the NCNC and AG won elections outside their home base, it should be noted that they won only in the minority ethnic enclaves due to the encouragement of the ethnic agitations in the struggle for political representation and power. With the breakdown of the NPC/NCNC coalition government, the 1964 general elections witnessed the emergence of new political alliances, strategic realignments and formation of new parties including the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP). Niger Delta

Congress (NDC) and the United National Independent Party (UNIP). While NPC and NNDP- a faction of AG led by S L Akintola aligned to form the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA), NCNC, the AG and the Northern Progressive Front (NPF, which itself was an amalgam of the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) and the United Middle Belt Congress (UBMC) aligned to form United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) [6]. In spite of these unholy political alliances, the 1964 general elections were characterized by intense and massive pre and post electoral violence, normlessness and bloodshed which threatened the survival the new republic [7, 8, 9]. Many scholars agree that political parties of the First Republic performed very poorly, especially when one considers the impact of electoral vices, violence and outrageous electoral rigging of 1964 and 1965. Expectedly, the First Republic was ousted by what is described as the bloodiest coup d'état of January 15, 1966 in Nigeria [10].

The collapse of the First Republic ushered in the military interregnum between the 1966 and the 1979. In preparation to conduct election that brought in the Second Republic, the military lifted the ban on formation of political associations. In December 1978, five political parties were formed in line with the reformed electoral laws and regulations. The new political parties include the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), the Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP), the Great Nigerian Peoples Party (GNPP) and the Peoples Redemption (PRP). The NPN dominated the politics of the 2nd Republic. Apart from its control of the federal government, the party also controlled most of the state governments in the federation from 1979 to 1983, when the NPN controlled federal government was toppled by another military coup d'état [11]. Like 1964 general elections, the 1983 elections were ethno-biased, marred by massive electoral vices, widespread irregularities across federal and state elections and nationwide post electoral violence. In the botched 3rd Republic 1992-93, the pendulum changed as the country witnessed a paradigm shift from multi party politics to two party system, disbanding all previously registered political parties in the country. The Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida military government imposed two-party system- the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC) backed by option A4 which required voters to queue behind the photograph of the candidates and be physically counted before the voting public and results declared instantly. The Elections were successfully conducted from ward to presidential levels and adjudged transparent, free and fair.

Unfortunately, the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election adjudged to be most free and fair resulted in unprecedented post election violence in Nigeria [12]. The 3rd Republic was truncated and the country once again relapsed into military despotism of General Sanni Abacha in November 1993-1998. At the demise of Abacha, General Abdulsalami Abubakar articulated a national transition programme which provided for multiparty system. Three out of the nine political associations that contested the local government elections in December, 1998 were finally registered as new political parties. These were the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), All Peoples Party (APP) and the Alliance for Democracy. These three political parties contested the Gubernatorial, State and National Assembly and the Presidential elections that ushered the 4th Republic (Akinboye and Anifowose, 2005). Unlike his predecessors, General Abdulsalami Abubakar effectively and successfully returned the country to democratic Fourth Republic on May 29, 1999 to President Olusegun Aremu Obasanjo which has continued successively till date [13] despite obvious interarching national challenges.

The Notion of Political Party and Democratic Consolidation: In the recent time political parties have been defined as organised groups primarily concerned with winning elections and thereby controlling those positions in government where important decisions are made. As agents of political change, parties are really loose coalitions of many districts, groups, interests, group leaders and elites. Amidst this conglomeration and diversity, the parties are semi-public conglomerates, that is, organisations that are neither private nor governmental but which serve as integrating units between individuals and the state [14]. A political party is a group of people and/or registered organisation designed to facilitate elections and control of political power or governance of a country [15]. After the party comes to power by winning elections, it is incumbent on the party to carry out the basic functions of political party.

The primary function of the political parties in democracies is to influence, control and direct the struggle for power and as well as perform supportive functions for effective political governance (Elekwa, 2001). In a bid to secure political power through elections, political parties play certain primary roles in a democratic society which include representation, elite formation and recruitment, interest articulation and aggregation,

socialisation and mobilisation as well as organisation of government [16]. [17] went further to elaborate the basic functions of political parties in a democratic state to include:

- Educate the electorate and spread political awareness about important public issues;
- Mobilise the electorate and stimulate their interest in elections;
- Observe electoral rules and regulations as well constitutional provision guiding the electoral process and actively participate in elections and ensure that electorates do the same;
- Provide the citizens with opportunity of participating in the management of their nations affairs;
- Serve as agencies for the recruitment of political leadership and attracting people, screening and nominating them for elections;
- Serve as agencies of national integration and unity by pulling together nationals of diverse origins to work for national interest as opposed to regional or parochial aspirations;
- Serve as agencies for aggregating and articulating public interest;
- Serve as agencies for discovering, mobilising and utilising available national resources for the rapid development of the society;
- Provide alternative public policies for national progress to the people in order to enable the electorate choose their policies and;
- Provide the most peaceful or constitutional means of changing governments in order to promote stability through democratic elections.

Additionally, democratic consolidation is the process by which a new democracy primes, strengthens and matures, such that it is unlikely to revert or relapse to authoritarianism [18]. In other terms, democratic consolidation involves all nuances, forms and processes of democratization of nations of peoples. [19] assert that features such as polity characterised by periodic election, security of life and property, fundamental human rights and freedom, constitutional stability as fulcrum of society and governmental stability, opportunities for equality, justice and fair play mark democratic consolidation. Consolidation of democracy as advanced by [20] is a political regime in which democracy as a complex system of institutions, rules and patterned incentives and disincentives has become the only game behaviourally,

attitudinally and constitutionally. [21] averred that behaviourally, a democracy becomes consolidated when no significant political group seriously attempts to overthrow the democratic regime. He asserted further that attitudinally, a consolidated democracy enjoys the support of the majority of the people when faced with severe political and economic crises. From the foregoing, it is obvious that countries with identity crises and multiple nation building challenges and insecurity are not only subverting legitimacy but far from consolidating democratic rule as well.

In the view of [22] democratic consolidation is the process of achieving broad and deep legitimization such that all significant political actors, at both the elite and mass levels, believe that the democratic regime is better for their society than any other realistic alternative they can imagine. Democratic consolidation therefore reform and transform democratization processes. Consolidation of the democratic regime is the second transition which should begin after the election [23]. Importantly, political parties are vital in consolidating and democratizing political dividends, creating and building sustainable relationship between government and the citizenry. The relationship is fostered by the support given to the parties by the people in exchange for information from the parties about government. In other words, a vital stage in the process of democratic consolidation is the involvement of the masses through socialisation and the recruitment of capable hands into the political system anchored on a systematic procedures and policies for not only selecting political representatives but in relishing the entire political goods of partisan politics [24]. In the main, democratic consolidation and/or democratization is geared ultimately towards good governance and national development.

Theoretical Foundation: In scientific research, theories are the trunk, the nexus and the fulcrum of many valences. Put succinctly, it is the logic of intelligibility. The theoretical foundation and/or framework of any scientific activity clearly underscores the scientific definitions, approach, perspectives and *raison d'être* of literary works. Broadly, theoretical perspectives, wittingly or unwittingly as Gerry Stoker argues: helps us to see the wood for the trees. Good theories select out certain factors as the most important or relevant if one is interested in providing an explanation of an event. Without such a sifting process no effective observation can take place. Theories are of value precisely because they structure and largely define all observations [25, 26]. As such, theorizing

intellectualizes. [5] strongly argues “that to ‘do’ social science properly, researchers need to conduct their inquiries under the auspices of particular theoretical perspectives, that it is impossible to make *any* statement about social phenomena in a theoretical vacuum.” Axford further collaborates the science Rosamond asserting that “we are all informed by theoretical perspectives, even if we adopt an avowedly non-theoretical posture.” [18] Therefore, the study attempts to identify the theoretical base of the changing character, diversity and interactivity of Nigeria’s political party system as a means of understanding the multifarious challenges confronting the consolidation of national democracy. In this direction, group theory is arguably used to examine and understand over one hundred years of Nigeria’s political concoction defined as amalgamation in 1914.

The intellectual roots of the contemporary group theory lie in the work of Arthur Bentley 1953 and David Trauma, 1960. Bentley argues that society itself is nothing other than the complex of groups that compose it –the social system being a sort mosaic groups. Through the social system that the various groups and nationalities seek to realise or maximise their political interest. [14] averred that single universe of groups combine, break, federate and form coalitions and constellation of power in a flux of restless alterations and is kept going by the push and resistance between groups. The examination of Nigeria’s centenary history reveals the whimsical nature of the political amalgamation of nations of peoples of disparate languages, feelings, cultural affiliations, traditions and geographical linings. It defines and determines interarching and foremost interplay of ethnicity in national politics. Nigeria is defined from its ethnic nationality than otherwise (Igbo-Nigerian, Yoruba-Nigerian, Tiv-Nigerian, Hausa-Nigeria etc). National loyalty begins from tribal orientation and in some regions ends there. There is seldom any structured, will-powered, programmed course of nationalism focused on integrating the multivariate overarching ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. As such, the formation of political parties also deducible to ethnic cleavages. Such is the bane of Nigeria’s political party system in the 21st century world.

Given the preponderant nature of ethnicity in Nigeria, national integration becomes a problem due to the fact the formation and alignment of political parties are done on ethnic basis. It will recalled that Nigeria Youth Movement (NYM) was bogged down by fissiparous fractionalisation [15]. Since the colonial time to the contemporary Nigeria, no single political party has been formed, patronised and

aligned on national basis. Individuals pay allegiance to the ethnic groups rather than national integration. In examining party politics in the fourth republic, party politics is not free from ethnic manipulation and alignment. Parties tend to pursue ethnic agenda rather than national cohesion. The emergence of APC was hinged on the desire of the North to wrestle power from the Southern block under PDP. Defining, maintaining and sustaining Group interest becomes the character and policy of all the political regimes of the fourth republic and more auspicious and expeditious with the current political dispensation. Therefore, it is plausible to assert that political structure and the philosophical chiasm of Nigeria's democratic consolidation is resolutely bogged by its overarching regionalism.

Methodology: Methodology defines the approach, system, or ways of conducting scientific investigation about a subject matter or research question. As the science of presentation and/or inquiry, it streamlines the approach and arranges scientific variables to be deployed in the conduct of an investigation, scientific discourse or research analysis.

The study on democratizing political party institutions as key to consolidating Nigeria national democracy adopts qualitative research approach which begins with an historical examination of the emergence of party system in Nigeria, critical examination of the factors that militate against efficient party system and popular democratization and evaluation of the indicators measuring democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The essence is to establish the literary and historical foundation of the subject matter, defining its substantive theoretical character, argumentations historiography and logical sequence. The approach includes critical evaluation of primary and secondary sources via study of relevant texts including periodicals, scientific articles, journals, informatics, relevant books, official reports, Elite publications, relevant Nigerian government publications, gazettes and websites, Summit communiqués, international conference reports, magazines, newspapers, and relevant online data (internet reports). Library approach is schemed to analyze textual reports from political analysts, scientific theorists, historians, regional, national and international records and policy documents. The aim of the approach is to obtain sufficient materials necessary for adequation of facts and data, measuring of theoretical variables and general evaluation of fact files.

Factors that Impede Efficient Party Politics, Democratization and Consolidation: In Nigeria as in many South Saharan African countries, party system of governance has not sufficiently buttressed the reason for its creation. In some cases it has rather than promote formidable electoral process and advance democracy, become the tool of its undoing; while in others it has largely evolved to become a sine qua non in the conduct and pursuit of credible democratic consolidation, continually reforming, transforming and advancing legitimate republics. Since the inception of party system of governance in Nigeria nearly a century ago, it has become increasingly difficult for political parties to fulfil and carry out their primary functions as obtained in advanced democracies. The parties from the First Republic to the Fourth have failed to perform as a result of poor institutionalisation, conflicting political ideologies (if any) of parties and/or the continued rise and perpetration of totalitarian regimes. The elections of 1964 and 1965, the 1979, 1983 and 1999 subsequently resulted in various electoral malpractices such as rigging, mudslinging, political assassination, extrajudicial killings and electoral vices of variable magnitude. It is critical to examine the underlying factors that have continually impeded the advancement and institutionalization of party politics and democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Lack of Political Ideology: From the First to the Fourth Republic, there is arguably no decipherable, intergenerational, well-articulated national political ideology bequeathed and legitimized by any political party in Nigeria since inception. What is obtainable is somewhat verbose, discordant, non committal, theatrical odes called manifestoes that are bereft of any structured positive ideology, commitment or national direction. How then can Nigeria be defined in terms of posterity, ideogenesis, national sustainability, survivability, political science? This goes a long way to determine, logically define and delineate the future in the now and the dogging and clogging past in the present dispensation-described as visionless, missionless and perhaps mindless. The fact is that a people, country, nationalities without credible, reliable, committed, sustainable political culture, political psychology, principle, belief system and above all intelligent ideology is groping in the dark.

Obviously, Nigeria's development, growth and sustainability is resolutely tied to its political psychology. How can there be institutionalization of our public enterprise without positive, congruent national ideology?

Political parties can only cope effectively with their responsibilities to the extent of their institutionalisation in terms of structure, internal democracy, cohesion and discipline as much as their autonomy from and/or cooperation with the apparatus of the government [16].

Politics of Adversariality: The natural consequence of the dearth of implementable ideology-based manifesto is adversariality. Adversariality induces political ‘cold war’ between the ruling and opposition parties, political bitterness, ‘do or die’ attitude, the winner take all syndrome, divisiveness, bloated nationalism, political apathy, selfishness among political elites and politicians. Rather than drive the mission and vision of the Nigeria project, adversarial politics imbues acrimony, rancour, criminality, subversion, subordination, illegality, impunity and all sorts of apolitical behaviours among the political elites and government. Political parties rather transmute to vestiges, vendors, and the products of adversarial elite politics taken to the point of irreconcilability [7]. The outcome of such cantankerous political situation is fuming, raging, soaring, implosive intra and inter-party rivalries, subversion of political goods, democratic rights and dividends.

Lack of Internal Party Democracy: In the same vein, lack of internal party democracy finds expression in lack of control from below and decentralisation [20]. Nigerian political parties have not been able to attain a reasonable degree of institutionalisation especially in the area of internal democracy and discipline. This often results in arbitrariness, political impunity and imposition of candidates than due process and diligence in line with extant rules on internal party elections. This deficiency has also contributed to the decline of the conflict management capacities of the parties at both intra and inter-party relations level [20].

Impact of Ethnicity: Right from the colonial days of the 1920s, ethnic politics dominated and subsumed the central or national politics of Nigeria. National politics beyond party consideration was often based on sub national loyalty, including the sharing of political positions. For instance, Nigeria was a federation of four regions divided along the lines of ethnicity- Western/Mid-western region (Yoruba), Eastern region (Igbo) Northern region (Hausa), even the current dispensation of six geopolitical regions of South-south, Southeast, Southwest regions, North,

Northeast and North-central regions. The effort is toward national unity amidst burgeoning ethnic diversity. Such considerations also impacted the formation of political parties even in the fourth republic. For instance, despite the registration of multiple parties, the fourth republic witness the eventual coalition and merging of parties along ethnic consideration to form three mega parties – Alliance for Democracy (AD)- Western region (Yoruba), All Peoples Party (APP/APC) – (Hausa) Northern region and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) was a cornucopia of the Fulanis, Igbos and fractions of groups of inter-ethnic affinity. Observably, party formation since 1999 has largely toed the trajectory of ethnic alignment without due recourse to national integration. Multiple examples in this regard include, Action Congress (AC), All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) and Progressive People’s Alliance (PPA) all manifested ethnic or intertribal affiliations.

Funding of Political Parties: The funding of political parties across the country has become increasingly inadequate, inconsistent and sometimes injudicious. This led to sporadic invasion of most political parties in the country by ‘money bag’ billionaire politicians for spurious selfish interests. It is common saying that whoever blows the pipe dictates the tune. This is the pitiable state of most political parties in the country that are leached and exploited beyond common sense. The effect of godfatherism in Nigeria’s party system is incredibly heinous. These billionaire party financiers often have unfettered and untrammelled control of party politics and party machineries. They whimsically dictate what goes where and who becomes what in the party often unchallenged. In some instances, party machinery and hierarchy are personalized and brazenly usurped creating unruly situation of political party dictatorship. They assume the absolute positions of kingmakers in the party at all times and circumstances. In some instances they sponsor political internecine violence and conflicts to protect and defend political interest even when such interest is unpopular, antiparty, retrogressive and condemnable. They wield enormous politico-economic power across the body politic. This paper considers money politics as counterproductive, serial threat to national sovereignty and should be severely curtailed to minimize impunity, corruption and arbitrariness. It is over and against the rules of democratic consolidation and should be expunged from national politics entirely.

Indicators for Measuring Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

Political History: West African Imperialism: Democratic consolidation is conceptually considered in this paper especially from the Nigerian experience as involving all processes of acquiring, maintaining, sustaining, popularizing democratic rule that is based on good and legitimate governance in Nigeria. The experience of Nigeria is unique. It began beyond the 1900s with the European invasion of African polities for politico-economic reasons. The harrowing experience of western imperialism in West Africa which lasted for over three centuries formed the foundation and crucible of Nigeria's modern state formation as West African essentially. Wooten argues that:

Direct European contact in West Africa dates back at least as far as the fifteenth century AD when Portuguese traders made their first links with West African coastal peoples. Previously, Europeans has been aware of and had participated to varying degrees with West African peoples through the trans-Saharan trade. Throughout the latter part of the fifteenth century the Spanish, Dutch, British and French all began to establish their presence in the West African context. The timing of these early contacts is linked closely to the growth of maritime capabilities, increasing interest in trade activity with Africa and the Far East, religious expansion and the Age of Exploration. Africa and West Africa in particular, came to represent important possibilities for the expansionist policies of the European powers over the next five centuries.

The 1914 political amalgamation was also product of the whimsical doctrine of necessity in pursuit of Western imperialism in West Africa. Far from being a political programme structured toward modern state formation, the amalgamation is totally disruptive, unpopular, selfish and apolitical in several ramifications. It was essentially product of the scramble and partition of West African peoples and territories for European expansionist economic policy in Africa. There were no significant indices for state formation or foundation of democratic values in West Africa at the time. Rather, the period was marked for usurpation, dilapidation, subjugation and colonization of African commonwealth by titans of Europeans powers. The sanctity of Africinity which was essentially dynamic and democratic to a large extent was totally pulverized and configured to sufficiently respond to the dictates of the imperial masters. Although various

constitutional advancement policies of the colonialists in Nigeria impacted significantly on the Nigeria political experience, they were considerably bereft of popular democratization or critical ideology for political consolidation. Such constituted largely the historical legacy of the contemporary Nigerian polity.

Military Era: Nigeria was engrossed in military dictatorship for over thirty years following her independence in October 1, 1960. The critical reality is that Nigeria in her forties was still grappling with the foundation of her political sovereignty. The implication is that there was virtually neither political nor democratic consolidation in Nigeria at 40s. This also implicates the nearly one hundred years of imperialism and political tutelage or colonization in Nigeria. Expectedly, the military that is not trained to rule than defend the sovereignty bastardized it almost irredeemably. In fact, the paper strongly argues that the process of political reconstruction and democratization earnestly began in 1999 A.D of the Fourth republic. The Fourth Republic came with myriad expectations that Nigeria has finally arrived at democracy with a view to consolidating it. The military eventually caved in and democracy was restored with much fanfare that perhaps party politics and electoral participation shall anchor and consolidate democracy. In essence, we cannot deny element of consolidation of democracy, but the question remains to what extent has democracy been consolidated in Nigeria? Therefore, defining democratic consolidation in terms of popular participation in politics especially in the post military Nigeria is interesting. There was visible and increased political participation of Nigerians in national politics in the first and second political regimes of the Fourth republic. Nigerians rose en masse to define and defend the Fourth republic despite the burning political problems at the time. By the third and fourth dispensations, democratization and political consolidation were apparently taking shape. Recognizably, there is positive shift from long-held popular political apathy to increasing popular participation in politics- political socialisation increased daily in community circles, town hall meetings; registration in party meetings and convocations at both local government and state levels incredibly increased; religious conscientization, street and bar politics on critical national issues including regime profile discussions dramatically soared. There was overwhelming positive shift from erstwhile political apathy of the military

era to a new era of vibrant, active and popular participation in national politics. No doubt, the Fourth republic of the past seventeen years of uninterrupted democratic rule in Nigeria is unprecedented in the country's political history.

Electoral Process: Nigeria's electoral profile has changed significantly and positively. Electoral process is one the strategic hallmarks of democratic and political consolidation in the recent times. In the history of Nigeria, it has become difficult for the citizens to see elections as a process of genuinely electing their leaders. Election period is taken as opportunity to carry out all manner of electoral malfeasance. The masses in turn see election as period to extract their own share of the state largesse from politicians who are usually negligent and non responsive to the masses once elected into offices [19]. This is why rigging and all manner of electoral malfeasance continue to characterise the electoral system in Nigeria. Politicians buy votes at election. However, Nigeria transited from period of national selection in the first, second and third republic to an admirable, responsible and popular electoral process in the fourth and fifth political dispensation. Nigeria is really reforming and transforming its electoral process despite its monumental challenges. At the least, the Fourth republic has witnessed successful transfer of power for the fifth time. The is a giant stride in our national democratic consolidation. Sustaining democratic process through the ballot papers for the fifth time, even to the defeat of an incumbent president and acceptance of defeat is historic and unprecedented. This national feat ushered in a total new era in Nigeria's political history with active participation of the registered political parties and peoples of Nigeria in all levels of election.

The Challenge of Good Governance and Legitimacy: Another factor in assessing the degree of democratic consolidation is the popular legitimisation of democracy. Democracy as a system of governance has to be legitimated by the citizens. Legitimacy is an attribute of government and the political system, indicating their general acceptability or correspondence with the popular model or ideal, which is often determined by the government's source of authority [23]. In the same vein, [25] averred that legitimacy is an attribute of authority based on the perception or belief by the citizens of a state that the governing authority is rightly constituted and therefore, worthy of popular obedience.

Supremacy of the Rule of Law: Constitutionalism is simply the strict adherence to the principle and letters of the constitution as the governing and supreme rule of the land. [17] insists that constitutionalism entails the organisation and working of the state according to a constitution so that no organ or office holder of the state is allowed to use arbitrary power. There has been reckless abuse of the constitution in the Fourth Republic. For instance, President Obasanjo withheld the allocation of Lagos State on the ground that it conducted election into the state own created local governments even when the supreme court ruled in favour of Lagos State. To this extent, it should be stated that despite the several instances of the abuse of rule of law and the reign of political impunity, so much has been achieved also in the observance of the rule of law. This supports the clarion call and laudable efforts of the national assembly towards constitutional reform in Nigeria. All these factors summarily indicate that political and democratic consolidation is en route Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

In sum, the course of democratizing political party institutions in Nigeria is undoubtedly central to national efforts and policy initiatives towards consolidating overall national development. This will also go a long way in promoting good governance and transparency in national politics which will inevitably translate to public good and the overall development of the country. All efforts should be geared towards the sustenance of a democratic Nigeria where rule law is perceived and legitimized as national political culture and way of life.

Finally, to sustain and maintain the current Fourth republic, there is urgent need for increased political awareness, public enlightenment and priming of Nigeria's electoral laws. Political elites and the citizenry should be well informed on the strength of Nigeria's corporate existence, belief in Nigeria and the need to defend Nigeria's sovereign integrity. The role of safeguarding and strengthening Nigeria's democracy which is constantly evolving and priming is incumbent on all Nigerians and international community since a failed Nigeria has untold consequences not only regionally but internationally. While prosperous Nigeria optimized the dividends of democracy and political good for our commonwealth and prosperity. Nigerian is not only a regional but continental hegemony and should be

regarded as such. What is required is concerted and collegial efforts of all regional and international stakeholders in building a secured and democratic Nigeria for African and the world.

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