Are Multiparty Elections in Nigeria Competitive or Confrontational? Interrogating the *Democraticness* of Political Parties in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

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Introduction

Political parties have significantly influenced the political process and development of the Nigeria as a political entity. Parties as institutions of democratic governance are recognised as one of the foremost in the country's struggles for self-government and independence. As a quasi representative institution under colonial government, political parties in Nigeria played leading role in the emergence of 'limited and controlled' representative government. Parties in colonial Nigeria were instrumental to the recognition of the Natives' right to participate in colonial government and to a large extent the introduction of electoral principle in the determination of how and who could truly represent the people in colonial government. As popular platforms that were actively involved in liberation struggles, political parties in colonial Nigeria, performed major functions of mass mobilization and enlightenment, agenda setting and political structuring through various constitutional and political conferences, which culminated to political independence and the enthronement of a West Minister model of democracy in the country. This is not however to suggest that the establishment and functioning political parties in colonial Nigeria was devoid of crisis and political tension within and between parties. Thus as parties competed for support and followership on different national, regional and local issues, there were confrontations and violence in the political system. Suffice to say that the nature of competition within and between parties in colonial Nigeria was not only confrontational but also somewhat violent.

Nigeria's democratic experiences, over the years, however, seem to suggest that political parties have not significantly contributed to the deepening of democratic governance in the country, particularly as it relates to confrontational nature of their activities. Most often, their activities, especially in the realm of electoral contests, overheats the polity in ways which greatly affect the sustenance of democracy in the country. A number of factors have been mentioned in the attempt to explain the undemocratic postures of parties in Nigeria. Suffice to say, however, that the apparent lack of institutionalization of parties in Nigeria has been severally held to account for the fragile nature of these institutions in the country's democratization drive overtime.

Perhaps it is correct to argue that, the philosophical foundations of most political parties in Nigeria have also added to the crisis of democratic governance in the country. In this regard, one notes that the structures and compositions of these political parties have not been rooted in some well defined national ideological standpoints. They are largely formed to appeal to some ethnic, tribal, religious and/ or regional groups, depending on

the prevailing circumstances. Even when such parties appeared nationalistic in their spread and support base, crisis often brews along regional, ethnic, tribal, religious and other primordial lines, which determined the nature of intraparty conflicts. This makes competition for political power very stiff and rancorous as to lead to the unhealthy pitting of varied interests against each other. This state of affairs was largely responsible for the collapse of the past democratic experiments in the country, leading to the subsequent seizure of political power by the military.

The intensity of inter and intra-party crises in the previous and current democratic dispensations, needless to argue, greatly undermines the basic principles of democratic governance, which is premised upon fairness, freedom and the rule of law. Thus, studies and discourses on the nature of party politics in Nigeria revealed how the anti-democratic nature activities of political parties instigated the truncation of democracy in the country. The paper, against this background, examined the trend in the country's party politics in the fourth republic. It focused on the level of institutionalization of the political parties in the present dispensation, their weaknesses and what can be done to reposition them as to help broaden the scope of democratic governance in the country. Its central thesis is that in spite of poignant role parties perform in the democratization, often times promoting or impeding democratic progress, this institution in contemporary Nigeria's context, has failed to exhibit the resilience and organization desirable in the task of democratic deepening. As an institution that symbolizes democracy in the context of participation, conflict and orderly competition, the paper argues that parties in Nigeria are inadequate in their democraticness to guarantee peaceful and orderly completion for power, influence and authority for the entrenchment of democratic order in the country.

Political Parties and Democratic Governance: A General Background

The existence of a well institutionalized political parties is a basic pre-condition for the installation and sustenance of a representativel form of democratic government. Evidence has shown that consolidated democracies, especially in the developed countries of the west, benefits from well focused, vibrant and institutionalized party system. Not unexpectedly, therefore, strong case has been made over the years, about the role of political parties in the installation and consolidation of democracy in different parts of the world. Notable scholars such as Robert Dahl, (1971), Alex Inkeles (1998) and Richard Vengrolf (1993) have all highlighted the role of institutionalized party system in the promotion of democratic form of governance. The latter (Vengrof, 1993:544-5) for example, asserted that:

> Whether or not a party system significantly contributes to the political process of a country is linked to the several factors, including the development and the maintenance of strong party organization with the depth and breath necessary for their operations, and the degree of the institutionalization of the party as indicated by its historical roots, longevity, and survival and continuing support. The ability to meet these conditions is indicative of their strength, their future survival and success and their potential contribution to the institutionalization of democratic government.

Indeed, the above submission suggests that, important as they are, the mere existence of political parties within a democratic dispensation, does not necessarily translate into sustainable democracy. In essence, the party system must evolve within strong and viable ideological foundation, capable of attracting and sustaining citizens' support for its continued survival.

For Oyeleye Oyediran and Adigun Agbaje (1997:216), the longevity and vitality of democracy owes much to the ability of the party system in place to aggregate freely, articulate, represent, organize and set limits in the quest for the use of political power. It is equally obvious, however, that for the party system to be capable of discharging these roles effectively and efficiently, certain criteria, including autonomy, complexity and coherence must be met, (Ragsdale, L. and John J. T. 1997). Indeed, party system provides the framework within which, the interests and demands of the citizens are aggregated, articulated and accomplished in a more transparent, participatory and credible manner. Understandably, therefore, political parties usually respond to the wishes and aspirations of the citizenry, by packaging them into party manifestoes, as instrument of mobilization during electioneering campaigns, and as policy guidelines if endorsed by the electorate to govern. This view point was emphasized by Jega (2005:13) when he wrote thus:

> Political parties are major institutions in democratic systems. Essentially, they are found and nurtured with a view to serve as platforms which aggregate interests in the political terrain and seek to mobilize and rally support for candidates they offer for election into public offices.

The role of political parties is, perhaps, best recognized when it is understood that the democratic political system, itself, is primarily premised upon citizens' participation in the governmental process. The political party is organized to provide the platform upon which the participation of individuals and groups is guaranteed. The active involvement of the people in the political process is facilitated by the existing political parties in a variety of ways, including securing membership of one political party or another, attending political rallies and meetings of same and, more importantly, contesting in an election or voting along party lines. Added to the above, is how appointments into various political offices are made on the basis of one's loyalty and commitment to the ruling party. The opposition parties on the other hand, provide the platform in which the views of the minority groups are echoed using different channels of communication. The opposition parties, too, are central in the deepening of democratic governance, in that, they offer constructive criticisms against the excesses of the ruling party, thus serving as potential checks on tyranny and abuse of power.

But effective citizen participation in the political processes of society is dependent on a number of favourable factors: free and fair elections, the flourishing of political rights and freedoms and institutional autonomy. (Parry G. and G.Moyser. 1994). Indeed, a number of scholars argued that the efficient participation of the people in any given political system is attributable to the prevailing character of the political institutions (Jackman, R.W. and Ross A.M. (1995). Thus, the tendency for both political actors,

whether aspirants or voters, to be fully engaged, is contingent on such institutional factors as the party system, registration procedures and electoral laws, among others. In particular, competitive party system, by engendering partisan mobilization, not only serves as a paramount determinant of the pattern of electoral participation, but also contributes to heightened interest generally and especially contribute to increase turn over at polls (Caldeira, G. A. *et al* (1998).

Undoubtedly, therefore, the activities of political parties, in a political system, arouse the political consciousness of the citizens, which make them active in the political process and development of their state. In addition to mobilizing and educating the general public, political parties also have the institutional capacity of influencing other factors that determines the level of political participation of the citizens, such as registration procedures, electoral laws and a vibrant legislature in which the citizens influence the enactment of laws and the formulation of public policies through their elected representatives.

It is, therefore, only axiomatic to hold that the vitality or vibrancy of the political system is fully enhanced where citizens enjoy the right to spontaneously form, join and autonomously administer political parties. Indeed, research evidence suggest that the stronger the party system, the greater the possibility for building and sustaining supportive partisan attributes across societies (Quaile, K. and Jan E. L. 1996). Essentially, political parties evolve to engender freedom and popular participation in the processes of governance. In the first place, party system, especially bi and/or multi-party system broadens the political space which ensures wider choice of platforms for participation by the citizens, depending on their ideological conviction. But the entrenchment of a viable and credible party system in a democratic set up cannot be achieved without institutional capacity. Therefore, the mere existence of political parties does not necessarily guarantee their autonomy to discharge their functions and carry out their activities effectively. Unlawful interference and restrictions in the activities of political parties impedes the institutionalization of party system, thereby affecting their capabilities to ensure popular participation and the entrenchment of good governance. Although, political parties are expected to operate within the state legal framework, such framework must be based on the principle of fairness, equity and rule of law. This is necessary in a bid to ensure institutional autonomy, which strengthen the capacity of the political parties to respond adequately to the challenges of democratic governance.

 Institutionalized political parties as suggested earlier provide essential link between the people and the government, as they are the representative agencies oriented to giving voice to their constituencies, present candidates at elections and through competitive elections, place candidates for various public offices. But, the manner in which the opposition parties are treated, especially in the distribution of political resources and incentives, as well as their capacity to unite in opposition constitutes major obstacles to effective institutionalization of party system. This is the conviction of Munck, G. (1994) who opined that:

> The disparity in access to political resources and
> material incentives, to distribute to each
> component of the coalition and to its members,
> between parties in power and in opposition,
> seems to be the main obstacle to the

> consolidation of parties and party systems. Besides being fragmented, oppositions lack material incentives to build sustainable coalitions as well as ideological harmonization. Coalitions are generally constructed ad-hoc to win elections but even then continue to be riddled by divisions.

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This exclusionary tendency of the ruling parties against the oppositions not only undermines democratic gains, but often overheats the polity, especially during electoral contests, which most often culminates into political violence. In the case of Africa and Nigeria in particular, the maltreatment of the opposition parties remain one of the major source of violent conflict in the political landscape. The experience of the Nigerian state in this regard has not been encouraging. At various times, events have shown how both the ruling and the opposition parties in the country influenced the military usurpation of political power. This was evident from the manner in which the previous democratic regimes were displaced by the military, particularly the first and the second republics. The confrontational nature intraparty and interparty politics in Nigeria has been seen as the major cause of electoral violence, particularly in emerging democracies such as Nigeria. The limited nature of competitiveness of parties in many democracies in Africa makes them confrontational and somewhat violent in their operation. The next section shows the theoretical nexus between political parties democratic governance.

Political Parties and Electoral Violence: Some Theoretical Insights
In order to explain political parties and violence, some theoretical perspectives are required. There are some theoretical frameworks that compete for attention in this regard. For instance, the phenomenal approach emphasizes the manifestations and functional viewpoints of violence, which interrogates the normative approach of emphasizing the causes and consequences of violence. This approach could be used to document the roles of political parties as performers, victims or observers of violence. But there are more appropriate frameworks that better contextualize the phenomenon at hand. Tilly and Tarrow's (2007) contentious politics model is seen as the most appropriate to examine the phenomenon of violence by political parties. They defined contentious politics as "interaction in which actors make claims bearing on someone else's interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs, in which government are involved as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties"(Tilly and Tarrow, 2007:4). This definition, which is the core to understanding the central thesis of contentious politics, provides the lenses through which political parties-related violence can be contextualised in Nigeria. Thus the basis for political parties' involvement or organization of violence stems primarily from power contestations within and between parties. Claims are usually made in terms office seeking (electoral and appointive) by individuals and groups, within the party and in government circles. Failure to actualize their claims often leads to collective action by and/or on behalf of the aggrieved persons and their sympathizers. In this case the government is involved directly or indirectly. The power contestations may be within the government (for ruling parties) or outside government (for opposition parties), yet in the quest for government position in the long run. As with the cases of most emerging democracies, particularly in Africa, where conflicts resolution mechanisms are weak, violence become the most widely used mechanism for collective action. For instance, protests or demonstration

may be seen as contentious performance but when used as repertoires, particularly in Africa's context it often culminates to violence.

In Nigeria, most violence relating to political parties occurs during demonstrations, protests and rallies. Thus people that lost out in power contestations often organise demonstrations, protests and rallies with the intent of causing violence as a way of making claims. According to Tilly and Tarrow (2007) repertoires vary from place to place, from time to time and pair to pair. Thus when people make claim they tend to invent repertoires within certain limits that already exists for their place, time and pair. In the case of political parties in Nigeria, violence has been an established tradition of claim making routines. Violence has been recurring from pre-independence to date as means of claim making both as performance and repertoire. As argued, all forms of contentions rest on performances, and performances range from direct assault on others to theatrical staged for nearby or distant audiences (Tarrow 1998; Taylor and Van Dyke 2004:271). Given this theoretical synopsis, the contentious politics model best contextualises the nature of violence by political parties in Nigeria. This model will tend to answer the major question of why political parties are involved in violent conflicts in Nigeria as well as other specific questions as the manifestations, discourse framing, mobilization platforms, incentives and consequences of political parties related violence area. This model rather undermines democracy as a better framework for peaceful resolution of conflicts. The contentious nature of politics as argued in this model makes democracy more violent than a mechanism for peaceful resolution of conflicts. However, Tilly's (1985) model of war making and state making as organized crime emphasized the centrality of state in the exercise of monopoly over the use of force. This according to Tilly (1985) in four different forms: Eliminating or neutralizing their own rivals outside the territories in which they have clear and continuous priority as wielders of force (war making); Eliminating or neutralizing their rivals inside those territories (state making); Eliminating or neutralizing the enemies of their clients (protection); Acquiring the means of carrying out the first three activities – war making, state making, and protection (extraction). The two last forms of the state use of force is somewhat related to the phenomenon of party violence in Nigeria, particularly. For instance, neutralizing the enemies of state clients means suppressing the opposition parties, which largely instigates party-related violence.

Similarly, Schlichte's (2009) model of armed groups identified three different mechanisms through which armed groups come into existence: The first being violent repression by government forces (mechanism of repression); the second represents frustration as a result of exclusion of certain individuals and groups from the neo-patrimonial settings (the ad-hoc mechanism); and the third being linked to open political violence (spin-off mechanism). In some instances, party violence can take the form of any of these mechanisms of armed groups. In Nigeria, for instance, violent suppression of the opposition parties by government forces, in times of elections instigates violent reactions from the opposition parties, which culminates into large scale violence. On the other hand, the exclusion of some of segments of the elite from the neo-patrimonial settings also degenerates into an open confrontation and violence in the state.

In addition to using the contentious model as framework of analysis, a discourse of political parties in Africa, particularly the interconnectedness of parties, elections and violence may not be well understood without making reference to the neopatrimonial

nature of politics in Africa. Parties as important institutions of democratization in Africa functions differently compared to what obtains in developed democracies. The absence of any serious bureaucratic structures by parties in Africa often make parties dependent on few financial patrons, leading to the emergence of patrimonial parties (Erdmann, et. al, 2007). The ways in which parties are funded in Africa raises serious questions regarding their viability and autonomy. Most parties in Africa cannot live on membership dues and have to rely extensively on private donations from businessmen and sometimes politicians in power. Some parties are funded by a single 'big man' others by group of 'big men' to fund elections and run bureaucratic organizations (offices, staff, vehicles and communication).

The overreliance of parties on private influential individuals ignites clientelism and patronage networks, which are directly connected to neopatrimonialism. Thus parties in Africa are mostly funded by patrons who also exploit the instrumentalities of parties to recoup their investments and exert influence and power within parties, particularly those in governments. Thus neopatrimonialism makes party life violent- prone as patrons are keen to imposing their will on parties and sometimes even on the electorate. The patron-client relations within parties in Africa make party politics laden with corruption, imposition of candidates, oppression and intimidation of political opponents, assassination and reckless disregard of the electoral laws and statutes, and the suppression of the opposition parties. Nigeria's party politics exemplifies this pattern. Thus patrons rely on various strategies of violent mobilization in electoral contestations as means of seeking power, sticking to power or abruptly exiting power (Roessler, 2011).

Parties, Electoral Competition and Nigeria's Confrontational Politics
The failure of African states to organize and conduct free, fair, transparent and credible elections not only undermines the sustainability of democracy but also plague the continent into large scale violent conflicts arising mainly from disputed elections rooted in intra and interparty conflicts. Kanyinga and Okello (2007) contend that in many instances where electoral process is truncated, violent conflicts followed. Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and Central African Republic succumbed to civil conflict in the 1990s because of election-related factors. Elections-induced conflicts have threatened the very survival of nation-states. Even where nation-states remains 'together' conflicts around elections tend to leave behind indelible marks as reference pointer to a society in an unending tension, as has been demonstrated in Cote d'Voire, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya and Zimbabwe in the last decade (Kanyinga and Okello, 2007:2). This is largely because of fragility of and even abysmal performance of democratic institutions, particularly the political parties, the drivers of electoral fraud and electoral violence. This accounted largely for the politicisation of ethnic and other cleavages, executive dominance, feeble electoral bodies and the existence of 'rubber stamp legislatures' (Baba, 2010).

However, weak and non-institutionalized party system remains the major source of instability and violent conflicts across democracies in Africa. Party platforms have become the arena of perpetual conflicts within, and a source of destabilization and violence in the wider democratic political system. In most democracies in Africa, party platforms are controlled and manipulated by incumbents, opportunistic moneybags,

godfathers who do not resort to peaceful and democratic means in their quest for power (Ogundiya, 2011). Thus democratic regimes in Africa are run by inchoate political parties. The characteristics of these undeveloped political parties include among other things weak organizational structures, high electoral volatility, weak party roots in society and are mostly organized around personalities without strong attachments of the citizens to the parties (Kuenzi and Lambright, 2001:441). Similarly, most political parties in Africa are ethnically based, which increases the risks of unhealthy competition for power and state resources among deeply divided ethnic societies in Africa. Salih and Nordlund (2007) posit that:

> In practice, due to the speed of political development, numerous ethnically-basedparties emerged in opposition to other ethnic parties. Once these political partieswere established, they began to assume the structures and functions of Westernstylepolitical parties. After the attainment of independence and the waning ofthe 'decolonization nationalism', the political elite abandoned the goal of nationalunity, the very goal that gave birth to their political ambitions, and fell back on subnationalistpolitics. In some countries (Sudan, Nigeria, Congo, Angola, Mozambiqueand Uganda, among others), sub-nationalism flared up in civil wars and secondliberation movements—for liberation from what some marginalized and minorityethnicity political elite conceived as a form of internal colonialism imposed by the'ruling ethnicity'(Salih and Nordlund, 2007:41).

In Nigeria, as had been the case with most modern African states, nationalist movements of various sorts were largely responsible for the emergence, growth and development of political parties. The political platforms and organizations that pressed for greater participation of the natives in colonial government later metamorphosed into political parties. They were also at the forefront and the driving force for independence struggles with the view to occupying the power vacuum to be created by the departure of the colonialists. The first political party in Nigeria, Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP), was formed following the promulgation of 1922 Clifford Constitution in 1922. Thereafter, subsequent constitutions broadened the political space with the creation of regional governments in the North, West and East, respectively. The establishment of regional Assemblies was particularly an important milestone for the growth and development of political parties in Nigeria.

Thus political parties such as the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC), Action Group (AG) and the National Council for Nigeria and Cameroun were registered. The NPC, for instance, was a transformation of a cultural organization in Northern Nigeria known as *Jam'iyarMutanenArewa*, constituting essentially people of northern extraction. A G on the other hand was formed by Chief Obafemi Awolowo from a cultural organization of the Yoruba people in western Nigeria known as *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*. However, NCNC was the only party that appeared to have a national outlook by its manifestations. But because of the tense nature of ethnic politics in the country, NCNC under the leadership of Dr NnamdiAzikwe was forced to have an ethnic base in the eastern Nigeria. Thus, these three major parties were central in the struggles for Nigeria's independence. They however, competed fiercely and some times violently in elections and other constitutional related matters. For instance, the motion for Independence by Anthony Enahoro, an AG Chieftain and supported by NCNC was opposed by NPC members in the House of Representatives, which led to the insult and jeering of

Northern delegates by a mob in Lagos. Consequently, the AG and NCNC campaign tour for independence was attacked in Kano and several people of southern extraction were killed. This set the stage for violent confrontations between and among regionally based parties in Nigeria's political transformation.

It is thus clear that political violence associated with political parties began at the eve of independence. The atmosphere was thus tense during the 1959 Federal elections, but the problem intensified during the 1964 General elections (Ogundiya and Baba, 2007:250). Even before the elections were held, it was clear from the extreme positions taken by the two major political alliances, Nigeria National Alliance (made up of NPC and NNDP) and United Progressive Grand Alliance (made up of AG, NCNC and UMBC) that no matter which one of the groups won, the results will be hotly contested (Nwosu, 1991:121 cfGodwolli, 2003:97).

The flagrant manipulation of electoral laws by the ruling NPC resulted in the boycott of the elections by the opposition. Therefore, as envisaged by many people including the proclaimed winners of the 1964 general elections, the result was not only rejected, but the opposition, especially in the western region resorted to violence to contest what they perceived as the reverse of their mandate by the ruling NPC. The situation gave birth to arson, looting killing, massive destruction of properties and total breakdown of law and order beyond the control of the central government. Consequent upon this, a state of emergency was imposed and the then Prime Minister declared the region as a 'wild wild west'. The intensity of the electoral violence recorded after the 1964 general election affected the legitimacy of the newly constituted civilian authority and subsequent military intervention in Nigerian politics on January 15, 1966 (Dudley, 1982:268)

The military intervention was not enough to save Nigeria from a brutal thirty month civil war, mainly instigated from the accumulated tensions of perceived marginalization of one ethnic group by another. After more than thirteen years of military rule, Nigeria was returned, yet to democratic rule in 1979. Five different political parties were registered, supposedly with national outlook, as required by the electoral law. This was however far from being realistic. The National Party of Nigeria (NPN), United Party of Nigeria (UPN), Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP), Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) and the Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP) took centre stage in the Nigeria's Second Republic under a Presidential Constitution. Like the previous parties, NPN was dominant in the core Northern Nigeria, UPN in the western Nigeria, NPP in the east with PRP and GNPP in some few states in the North. The electoral contests therefore were also somewhat ethnically based. The NPN won the 1979 presidential elections, which was challenged in the court by the UPN and the Supreme Court ruled in favour of the ruling NPN.

However, the situation was different in the 1983 elections. The 1983 general elections both at national and state levels were a replica of the 1964 general elections. All forms of electoral malpractices were employed to influence the outcome of the elections. The NPN manipulated political institutions and structures in its favour. This degenerated into chaos and mayhem in some parts of the country (Egwu, 2003). The scenario forms part of the problem that triggered military seizure of political power on 31st December, 1983. Another attempt to install a democratic government by the military in 1993 was undermined by the annulment of June 12, Presidential elections, which also sparked

unprecedented magnitude of violence in western Nigeria and some reprisal attacks in some parts of the North (Lewis, 1994). The military regime of Ibrahim Babangida was largely responsible for the violence as against political parties in the previous episodes. Perhaps, the two party system that was experimented in the aborted Third Republic was adjudged in some quotas as the better framework for peaceful intra and interparty relations in Nigeria. However, the return to democracy in Nigeria in 1999, which was first of its kind to survive civilian to civilian transitions in 2003, 2007 and 2011, 2015 and 2019 was itself characterized with unprecedented violence in which the recent 2011 post election violence is said to be the one with highest human casualty in the nation's history (Human Rights Watch, 2011).

Accordingly, party politics in Nigeria has been crisis laden and associated with violence and instability. The dysfunctional character of political parties in Nigeria has in the past and even in the present, frustrates the philosophical basis of democracy in the country. Ogundiya (2011:15) argues that "from the colonial era, party politics in Nigeria has been laden with corruption, imposition of candidates, oppression and intimidation of political opponents, assassination and reckless disregard of the electoral laws and statutes, suppression of the opposition parties and 'sit tight' syndrome of the incumbent". Thus in spite of breaking the jinx of civilian to civilian transitional elections, political parties in Nigeria's Fourth Republic are adjudged as the weakest and most fragile in the country's democratic history. Liebowwittz and Ibrahim (2013:18) described parties in Nigeria's Fourth Republic as follows: "parties are run by godfathers and barons rather than members, and they have clientelist networks that are used by the party barons to 'deliver' crowds for rallies and party congresses. Indeed, parties tend to treat their members with disdain and utter disrespect. Consequently, the political relationship within the parties is essentially one between patrons and clients and the clients are mobilised on pecuniary, ethnic or regional basis".

Since the installation of democratic government in Nigeria, in 1999, at the end of a prolonged military rule, a lot of attention has been focused on the character and forms which the political institutions of the society have taken. The political party institutions in particular, being a veritable element in the democratic project has been a subject of analysis by individuals and groups. Being at the core of democratic governance, concern about political party and its system in the fourth republic is understandable. Its key role in shaping of the character and contents of government policy and programmes in the different spheres of societal life is very obvious. The transition programme that ushered in the fourth republic registered three political parties, after the provisional registration of six other political parties was cancelled at the end of local government elections. These political parties include the Peoples Democratic Party (P.D.P.), All Peoples Party (A.P.P.) and Alliance for Democracy (A.D.). Much like the parties in the first and the second republics, which eventually led to the truncation of the country's first and second attempts at democratic form of governance, the existing political parties in the country seem also to be beset with several ailments whose consequences may be monumental.

 The three political parties mentioned above and which contested elections in 1999, did not to any great extent depart from the previous practice of regional and ethnic politics. The outcome of the 1999 elections, especially, at the state levels suggests that, the support base of the parties was mainly restricted in some regions. For instance, the A.D. won elections in the whole states of the south-west, while the A.P.P. won nine states in

the Northern Nigeria and the remaining states were won by the P.D.P. that clinched the presidency. This affects the capacity of the political parties to generate broad based support that is essential in the deepening of democratic process. Although the 1999 general elections were described as somewhat violent-free, they were not free and fair. The then military government was believed to have influenced the outcome of the elections through rigging and manipulations of various kinds. In analyzing the implications of electoral rigging in the 1999 elections, Fawole (2001:166) wrote thus:

> The circumstances surrounding the elections were such that the legitimacy of the elected government were rendered suspect. One inevitable consequence of this brazen insensitivity of the electoral process on the part of the military government and the government which it engendered is to encourage other political parties see electoral fraud as a normal means to acquire power. This portends great dangers to democracy because even its most elementary requirement i.e., free and fair elections, will be severely compromised. Political contestation may degenerate to the type of zero-sum game of the FirstRepublic when brazen fraud, violence, and thuggery were the order of the day. Under a scenario such as this, it is unlikely that extant state institutions and formal structures will become strong enough to withstand the pressure of a new democracy. Should this scenario be enacted, democracy risks degenerating into civilian dictatorship as all fundamental requirements for its effective operation would also come under assault.

The above assertion is to a large extent correct, especially given the nature of inter and intra party relations and the pattern of political contestations during the 2003 elections and the much awaited 2007 general elections. Regrettably, the parties in the fourth republic seem to lack clear manifestoes, and where it exists, the parties are not committed to the implementation of the party programmes for the general wellbeing of the electorate. The parties are merely seen by stalwarts as a means of acquiring political power, often for private interests, and not as institution of transformation in the various spheres of the society. This is evident from the internal crises that beset most of the political parties. The crises which arouse from personality clashes, has led to the break up of some parties and/or massive movement from one political party to another often for no plausible reasons. This trend is indicative of their weakness to function as a veritable political institution for democratic deepening.

Examples of these abound. For instance, Sola Saraki a leading cheitain of A.P.P cross carpeted to P.D.P. late Dr ChubaOkadibo former Senate president under P.D.P moved to A.P.P. The example of party break up can also be said to have occurred in P.D.P. where leading exponents and founding fathers including two former chairmen Solomon

Lar and AuduOgbeh, other chieftains like AbubakarRimi, GaliNa'abba and recently the ouster of the vice president AtikuAbubakar from P.D.P. and the consequent formation a new party Advanced Congress of Democrats that eventually metamorphosed into Action Alliance (A.C.) is a case in point. Another classical example was the ouster of former caretaker chairman of A.N.P.P. and the formation of a new party known as Democratic Peoples Party (D.P.P.) by the Sokoto state Governor Alh. AttahiruBafarawa. Furthermore,a one time chairman of the A.N.P.P. has also moved to P.D.P. after the expiration of his tenure as the chairman. This is in addition to some incumbent governors who decamped to other parties including SminuTuraki of Jigawa state, BoniHaruna of Adamawa state and Muhammad AdamuAleiru of Kebbi state. In the build up to 2011 and 2015 general elections, huge number of politicians changed party platforms, apparently to avoid being rigged out in party primaries or at best in order to enhance their chances of being involved in the decision making process of political parties. For instance, in less than a year to the 2015 general elections, seven serving governors of the ruling PDP and the secretary of the party rebelled against the party leadership for lack of transparency and respect for the party's rules and regulations. Eventually five out of the seven rebelling governors defected to the opposition party of the All Progressive Congress (APC).

Apparently, political parties in the Nigeria's Fourth Republic are besieged with the crisis of internal management. Parties are run by 'Big Men', *godfathers* or in most instances holders of executive power at both central and state levels. The parties, which are important instruments of democracy, are themselves undemocratic. The principles of fairness, transparency and internal democracy, which are core in the evolution and development of political parties are flagrantly undermined by party leaders and their collaborators. In particular, party conventions and candidate selection process are characterized with corruption, imposition and confrontations of various sorts. In essence, candidates for both party positions and general elections are not allowed to compete freely and fairly as provided for even in the constitutions of the parties. This trend makes parties in Nigeria a major source of confrontational politics. Party members, who are aspirants for positions within parties or at governmental level have to either play to the cards of party leaders, holders of executive powers and/or *godfathers* or engage in violent mobilization as a strategy for clinching party positions or being considered as party candidates for elections. In some instances, often during party conventions and primary elections, party members are pitted against each other fiercely either in support of democratic principles or in resistance to these principles for personal gains.

This trend, clearly, raises fundamental question about the potential role of political parties as institutions that deepens the process of democratic governance in Nigeria. Added to the above crisis is the wave of political assassinations across the country and across political parties, which also represent another dimension of the crisis of political party institutionalization. The politically motivated killings are believed to be manifestations of both intra and inter party crises, mainly arising from the urge to acquire political power by unpopular individuals and political parties in different parts of the country. This encouraged the political parties to breed political thugs and militias who unleash violence and intimidate political opponents in the quest to win elections. This is not unexpected since many politicians in Nigeria sees electoral contests as an investment opportunity, in which they stand to reap financial and other benefits if their candidates and parties win elections. The crisis in Anambra and Oyo states between the

governors and their godfathers in the first tenure of the forth republic shows the extent to which the political parties in the fourth republic are being manipulated for selfish interests.

The consequence of this scenario is that the dividends and /or gains of democracy are not delivered by the political parties. Their inability to organize, articulate and aggregate the demands of the electorate has exposed the weakness and fragility of political parties in the fourth republic. The parties failed to implement popular programmes that are not capable of uplifting the general wellbeing of the general public. They have not promoted peaceful co-existence either.

Thus as against parties in the previous democratic experiments, the crop of political parties in the Fourth Republic apparently lacks sound philosophical and ideological base, grounded manifestoes, grassroots support, discipline and some measure of internal democracy. This is evident from the intensity of intra and interparty conflicts and violence, multiplicity of court cases within and between parties, policy inconsistencies in governments of the same party and enormous crisis of governance that characterized Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Given these scenarios, conflicts are exacerbated and the polity remain constantly prone to violence. The wave of violence in different parts of the country from 1999 to date, manifesting in electoral, ethnic, tribal, religious and even communal unrests are most often related directly or indirectly to the hangover of unresolved intra and interparty crisis and conflicts. The Niger Delta militancy, the mayhem generated by the introduction of Shariah in some Northern States, the activities of OduduaPeoples Congress (OPC) in western Nigeria, the protracted ethnic and religious violence in Plateau state and recently the *Boko Haram* insurgency and banditry in northern Nigeria all have some traces in the activities of some political parties in the country.

Conclusions: Are Political Parties in Nigeria Democratic?
In the light of the foregoing discussion, it can be argued that political parties in Nigeria, particularly the crop of parties in the Fourth Republic are generally weak and highly unprincipled. It is clear from the way parties are organised and run that few privileged individuals (big men, godfathers, holders of executive powers) are manipulating the institution of political parties for their personal gains. Parties are thus seen only as an instrument through which desperate individuals clinch public office for self aggrandisement. As gatekeepers to public offices in both the legislative and executive branches of government, influential and wealthy individuals invest resources with the view to controlling party machineries. This is usually made possible by funding the election/selection of their favourites into important party positions who inturn receive directives from their sponsors on how the parties are to be run. The parties, thus in spite of having constitutions as well as rules and regulations, party leaders and their sponsors manipulate those rules and regulations to satisfy their personal political interests. This greatly undermines the *democraticness* of parties in Nigeria and make confrontation and violence as the major means of resolving conflicts within parties. The various court cases between members and their parties is indicative of the total lack of regard to the existing rules and regulations. There are instances in which party members win court cases against their parties for obviously flouting their own rules and regulations. The flagrant abuse of party rules and regulations, particularly during conventions and primary elections have at various occasions degenerated into confrontations and violence leading lost of lives and massive defection of members from one party to

another. It can also be argued that the tension that usually greets the general elections are usually the hangover of unresolved intraparty conflicts that spills over to electoral contestations. Multiparty elections in Nigeria are rather confrontational than competitive largely as a result of limited internal democracy within party organizations.

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