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Political Parties and Inter-Party Conflicts In Nigeria: Implications for Democratic Consolidation

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Since the return of multi-party democracy in the fourth republic, Nigeria had continued to grapple with the problem of national unity associated deficient partisan politics thereby signaling dangers for its fledgling democracy. While inter-party conflicts are commonly inevitable in democratic set up with different party formations, the nature of such relationships that exist between or among them, play crucial role in democratic sustenance. The article examined party politics and inter-party conflicts/relations and its consequences on the nature of democratic consolidation in Nigeria since the dawn of fourth republic (1999-2015).Through both analytical and historical analysis of secondary data, this study showed that party politics and inter-party conflicts/relations is characterised by acrimony which have plunged the country into deep-seated embers of ethnicity, religion and region with consequences on its nascent democracy. The article suggested that, in order to promote smooth inter-party relations, atmosphere of tolerance, and mutual trust among political parties' major players must be encouraged. Such crisis of identity, social and economic inequality, party indiscipline, poor party ideology, money bag politics, use of foul languages at political functions, should be a thing of the past if the Nigerian democracy must be stable and consolidated upon.

Keywords: Political Party, Inter-Party Conflict/ Relation, Democracy, Democratic Consolidation, Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

Opinions converged among political theorists about strong and inextricable connections between political parties and the viability of democratic consolidation (Maiyo, 2008, Jinadu, 2011, Babatope, 2012). In other words, democracy and party politics are not just connected but inseparable as there can be no democracy in the contemporary period that can be exalted without a viable political party system (Maiyo, 2008, Aleyomi, 2014). Thus, functioning of democratic system whether in advanced or developing democracies largely depends to some extent on the nature, composition, organization, ideals and institutionalization of political parties which in turn begets democratic consolidation (Maiyo, 2008, Ogundiya, 2011).

Lipset (2000) have underscored the indispensability of party propositions which have been used to underscore the various process of democratic consolidation in third world especially Latin America, Asia and the African continents. For instance, in the case of Latin American nations, Mainwaring (1999) shows that well

institutionalised political parties remain a significant factor towards achieving democratic consolidation prospects. Such similar situation applies to Southern European nations where Diamonduoros and Gunther (2001) in their study show that institutional factors such as party's membership, identification, roots and organisation in the political system are identified as main anchors of democratic consolidation. Based on similar experiences of Asian countries, Wang (2014) also emphasis the importance of political parties on democratic consolidation.

Manning (2005:718) describes political parties in Africa as not being "organically linked to any particular organised social group, and so have often resorted to mobilising people along the issues that are ready to hand - ethnicity, opposition to structural economic reforms-without regard to long-term consequences." Similarly, in an East African studies consisting of Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, Maiyo (2008) also found that "a combination of increased internal democracy coupled with low institutionalisation, lack of effective and independent conflict resolution mechanisms as well as a chaotic political culture in a highly heterogeneous society could be a recipe for open conflict and threaten social cohesion (p3)." This similar situation thus portends danger to inter-party relations across the continent.

In most developing nations, political parties therefore face number of distinctive challenges towards achieving their specific roles and functions (Manning, 2005, Maiyo, 2008). In most fledgling democracies, NDI (2014) have particularly identified lack of clear ideologies, failure to initiate coherent policy objectives, weak party structures that remains dormant apart from electioneering period, shallow and narrow support base usually defined by personal, ethnic or regional inclinations. NDI (2014) further show that, as a result of this party developmental process, through which political parties seek to formulate and implement its activities is considered key to the healthy nature of representative democracy. Though, sustainable party system is built over generations, which is a byproduct of different political processes, Omotola (2009) show that democratic experiments in Nigeria over the first decade of its re-democratization is unfortunately regressing towards authoritarian regime or what some scholars termed democratic reversal.

With the return of fourth republic in 1999, the democratic process indicated some unusual features in the country (Abbas, 2013). Most prominently, Jega (2007) and Omotola (2009) show that Nigeria was under military rule for about three decades of its post-independence which practically stunted its democratic ethos and values. Omotola (2009) further shows that, the high level of political instability witnessed in the country characterised by series of coup against coups cannot be divorced away from the present garrisoned nature of party politics with implications for democratization. With introduction of multi-party democracy, the expectation is that, the principles of democracy which signifies sovereignty of people, freedom, fairness, and justice, equality which demands nationhood, patriotism, unity, rationality, progress and dignity should ease tension and attract peaceful coexistence.

However, since the return of multi-party democratic governance in 1999, Nigeria has continued to grapple with the problem of national unity, such that she can be described as nation with tripod stand, made up of three blocks, the North, the West and the East that are in a perpetual state of wobble (Ogundiya, 2011). While inter-party conflicts are inevitable in democratic set up, due either to different political ideologies and principles, numbers of such political parties and the nature of such relationships that exist within, between or among them, the functions that political parties play are crucial to democratic sustenance (Tyoden, 2013). This further means, since political parties are avenues of articulation and aggregation of diverse interests which forms an important part of the working of a political system, conflicts are bound to happen.

Unfortunately, while such political parties can maturely and peacefully handle such democratic conflicts, the Nigerian political parties since 1999 do not seem to guarantee peace amongst the people (Aristotle, 2012, Tyoden, 2013). This idea reflects the view of Maiyo (2008) where he posits that, instead of fostering healthy political competition in Africa, political parties have often helped to fan the embers of conflicts and violence through divisive and explosive forces. This fact is not farfetched from what Aleyomi (2014) described as Nigeria's modern political parties which exhibits three fundamental characters. First, most political parties in Nigeria are mostly centralised institutions with structures heavily relying on figure personalities. Second, party leaders are not necessarily working towards national but local, religious, regional, or economic interests. Third, parties are usually organised as electoral machinery to capture power for personal gains.

It is therefore not surprising that, the democratic regression that Nigeria has been entangled since the return of democracy are largely attributable to undeveloped and fractionalized party system (Omotola, 2009). Thus, one of the main deficiencies to democratic consolidation process in Nigeria today is lack of proper identification, management and resolution of inter-party conflicts that continue to result into sporadic outburst of violence with direct consequences on national cohesion and political stability (Abbas, 2013, Tyoden, Babatope, 2012). In view of the above deficiencies, there lies the need to review the role political parties' play in inter-party conflict in Nigeria since the dawn of fourth republic with a view to determine how these issues can be better addressed to enhance democratic consolidation in Nigeria's political system.

This article examined party politics and inter-party conflicts/relations and its consequences in the context of democratic consolidation in Nigeria since the dawn of fourth republic (1999-2015). Specific objectives of the article are:

- To examine the nature of party relations/conflicts over the years;
- To identify reasons for such nature of relations/conflicts; and
- To suggest best ways to enhance mutual inter-party conflict/relations towards achieving democratic consolidation.

Through descriptive and historical methods of analysis, this article is largely based on secondary data. Major findings in the field and area were critically examined to give insight on political parties and inter-party conflicts with implications on democratic consolidation (1999-2015). While as at 2011, there were 64parties in Nigeria, however due to deregistration or merger, in 2013 there only existed 26 registered parties (Simbine, 2013). However, despite the large number, only 6 parties seriously engaged in inter-party conflicts/relations across Nigeria as rest of the parties were mostly silent or inactive over the years. For the purpose of this article, only the major political parties were considered which included; the People's Democratic Party (PDP);the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN); the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA); the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) and the All Progressive Change (APC).
Media and election reports, scholarly works and personal observations are used as empirical cases in the article. The whole idea generated through political events and studies were gleaned based on substance, relevance and comparative quality to give more insight. The entire article is divided in to six sections with first part containing introductory aspects. Section two dealt with conceptual and theoretical underpinnings devoted to democracy, democratic consolidation, political party and inter-party conflicts applied within Nigerian context. Section three reviewed the nexus between political party and inter-party conflicts within the context of Nigeria. Section four focused on the impact of inter-party conflict in democratic consolidation process in Nigeria. Section five concludes, and section six finally provides the way forward for better inter-party relation in Nigeria.

SOME CONCEPTUAL AND THEORITICAL FOUNDATIONS

Given the focus of this article, which critically examined political parties and inter-party conflicts with implications on democratic consolidation process in Nigeria, a review?

on democracy, democratic consolidation, political party and inter-party conflict was undertaken.

On Democracy: the conception of traditional and modern democracy has been subtly explored in the works of Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Mills, etc. Aristotle for instance made important distinction among three types of lawful governments which he identified as; monarchy, aristocracy and what he called polity or moderate democracy. Aristotle believes that democracy is a form of government where few people rule in the interest of all the citizens. From this classical perspective, Aristotle's conception of democracy is thus seen to be based on and derived from the Athenian city states' mode of democracy. This Greek word, democracy means 'people's rule' or ruled by the people. In this sense, democracy is therefore primarily concerned with who should rule and decide who rules.

The views of Aristotle as captured above shows that democracy is by and large the best form of government especially when contrasted with other alternative political arrangements (monarchy, tyranny, autocracy, oligarchy, etc). However, as many scholars have shown over the years, democracy as a concept has become very complex which is quite difficult to relate with simple meaning or conception that capture all its meaning. It is pertinent to say that, right from the evolution of organised political societies and later development of modern governments, political analyst have been concerned about how government should be formed, what are its basic powers and functions, how it should be removed or maintained, and what kind of relationship should exist between the leaders and the led in the society.

Lincoln's perception of democracy entails that, it is really the people that are being governed; it should also serve the interest of the people; and it is the people that really governs their society thus deciding their own destiny. In this case, democracy therefore means that, both men and women of qualified adult age have equal opportunity to decide their own destiny by being responsible in matters that affects who rules them in their society (Ogundiya, 2011). In what appears to be a search for its meaning, Lincoln's conception of democracy is thus popularly regarded as having laid the foundation for modern day democracy as it promotes popular participation in governance, equality of all citizens in the state, and its usefulness to achieve political stability and best form of protection from injustice, tyranny and abuse of power in a given political system.

Dicey viewed democracy as a form of government where citizen's majority opinion determines legislations (Gauba, 2005). Dicey's perception of democracy therefore centered on the role of citizens in the political system due to their political relevance in elections and policy decisions. Dicey thus observes it will be unwise to enforce law in a democratic society without the approval

of people who the law is expected to serve. Dicey's understanding of democracy is also in line with Aristotle's earlier conception of democracy where he shows political leaders remain as representatives of people. The leaders must according to this thinking rule in the interest of citizens within the context of their privileges, duties and responsibilities. This definition also implies that in a democracy whatever the government does or chooses to do must be in conformity with the wishes and aspirations of the people.

In the same line with the above thinking, Jega (2007) indicates that every democratic government derived their powers from the people who are sovereign and a such the political leaders must always remain transparent, open and accountable to the people on whose mandate they are serving. This understanding also share semblance with Oloruntoba (2008) where he view democracy as popular power which connotes a solemn recognition that power belongs to people. Similarly, democracy thus represents a form of political power and a model of politics that in narrow terms confer on citizens the right to either directly or indirectly take political decisions by the majority rule in a given society (Oloruntoba, 2008).It is also within this context that, democracy today is associated with universal principles of participation in governance, competition in electoral contest, respect for equality and liberty of all citizens which signifies the basic tenants of true democracy.

On Democratic Consolidation: While democracy is regarded "as a regime in which those who govern are elected by the population through meaningful election" (Przeworski, 2000:15), democratic consolidation is about deepening, institutionalisation of political system as well as regime performance (Diamond, 1999).However, while, democratic consolidation is built over generations, which is a byproduct of many democratic processes, the first transition according to O'Donnell (1996) begins with an installation of democratic government after an authoritarian regime while the second transition matters on consolidation where the functioning of such installed democratic regime performs in governance. Every democratic system thus depends on its character, composition, organization and institutionalization of democratic process which in turn begets its consolidation (Omotola, 2009).

However, despite the relative development in the field, Schedler (2001) is of the opinion that there no is generally agreed definition of the term due to contestations by different scholars of democratic consolidation. However despite differences among the major scholars, some influential definitions are outstanding. For instance, a minimalist conception of democratic consolidation is provided by Przeworski et al. According to this scholar:

"Democracy is consolidated when under given political and economic condition a particular system of institutions becomes the only game in town, when no one can imagine acting outside the democratic institutions, when all the losers want to do is to try again within the same institutions under which they have lost" (Przeworski et al, 1996:26).

The above definition by Przeworski however remains minimalist as it emphasised electoral system alone. The definition has only taken in to account the attitudes and behaviours of the main political and democratic actors without given due consideration to norms and other important interdependence between actors and their political institutions. O'Donnell (1996) also shares this political culture sentiment where he defines democratic consolidation as gradual process where democracy matures in a way that is unlikely to reverse or breakdown. By properly managing democratic structures and political institutions as a means of achieving democratic success, according to this thinking, democratic consolidation can be said to have been achieved. O'Donnell (1996) also emphasised important issues such as constitutionalism, social conduct and political attitude as three important aspects; before democratic consolidation could to be attained.

Huntington (1996) show that the level of adherence to democracy depends on factors that include democratic institutions; political consensus; and citizen's participation where collective will and interest of citizens must be respected. Huntington (1991) also adds that, in order to achieve democratic consolidation, democratic institutions of government must remain strong, stable and dependable for effective governance through responsiveness and accountability to the citizens on whose mandate the leaders are serving. In this view, democratic consolidation is considered advancement over the very basics of democracy (Huntington, 1991). To achieve such important aspect of consolidation, right democratisation process which aggregate interests in the political terrain and seek to mobilize and rally support in the public space must therefore be attained for its consolidation.

A maximalist conception of democratic consolidation is provided by Linz and Stepan. According to these scholars "consolidation occurs in a democracy when a complex system of institutions, rules, and patterned incentives and disincentives has become the only game in town" (Linz and Stepan, 1996:15).These scholars further identified three issues (state, completion of democratic transition and the ability of political leaders to govern democratically) as necessary conditions before any discussion on democratic consolidation in the political system. They were however quick to show, these three important factors are defined only when foundational

objectives of democracy are achieved behaviourally, attitudinally and constitutionally for the sustainability of its five arenas; political society; economic society, civil society; state apparatus and rule of law.

It is the view of Linz and Stepan (1996) considered within the only game in town that behaviorally, democracy is consolidated when no major national, institutional, social or political actor or groups strives to utilise any form of non-democratic forces to form or overthrow a government through the promotion of violence to break away from the state territory. Democracy is attitudinally consolidated where majority of the citizens even at the times of socio-economic crisis popularly believe in democratic procedures and its institutions such as the conduct of periodic election considered as the most appropriate means of administrating their collective will. Constitutionally, democracy is consolidated if important stakeholders recognised democratic systems, structures and institutions as "the only game in town" (Linz & Stepan, 1996).

The relies the significance of political institution such as political parties which cannot be relegated. This becomes relevant as democracy consists of mechanisms and procedures for exercising and limiting the exercise of power (Jega & Wakili, 2005). In the case of Nigeria, the democratic regression that the nation has been entangled with is also attributable to undeveloped and fractionalized party system (Omotola, 2009). The emphasis according to Jega (2007) and Aristotle (2012) is that political parties usually aggregate various local and national interests together in the political system thereby mobilizing people and resources in supporting the candidates they offer. This further suggest that by the electoral power of the people through the roles and function of the party, government can legitimately be changed and may therefore have an impact on the process of its democratic consolidation.

On Political Party: Umar and Kura (2004) defined political party as an organized body of people with a clearly or roughly defined policy agenda whose primary aim is to win or retain power through the aggregation and articulation of diverse views of nation's population for further political programmes and actions. In other words, political parties will mean an organised formal avenue of interest aggregation which gives candidates the political and ideological labels that introduced them to the electorates through setting of policy goals and agenda with the sole intend of capturing or maintaining legal power to control government for a particular period of time. The above understanding of political party thus shows the inextricable link between how citizens put their popular demand on the political system through political parties and how the government in return also respond to such demands as democratic outputs.

Shale and Maltosa (2008:3) defined political party as "an organised group of people with at least roughly similar political aims and opinions that seek to influence public policy by getting its candidates elected to public office". This definition have for instance captured the very essence of many political parties unlike other interest groups in countries like Nigeria where the primary aim is to capture political power and therefore in position of authority to steer and manage policy decision making process defined within the arm bit of law and constitution of the country. Also closely related is the definition provided by (Lemay, 2001) where he defined political party as "any group of politically active persons outside a government who organize to capture government by nominating and electing officials who thereby control the operations of government and determine its policies".

Although, the most prominent feature of defining political party remains the capturing of political power and the control of policy decision process, the functions that political parties play in the political system are broader and sometimes even complex (Shale & Maltosa, 2008). This goes to show that, political parties in contemporary period are the lifelines of modern day democracy considering their significant roles in the present day political system (Maiyo, 2008). The major roles of political parties therefore include:

-    linking people with the government through aggregation of diverse interest;
-    recruitment and selection of political leaders/candidates to fill various elective/appointive positions;
-    articulating and implementing different policy alternatives;
-    national policy agenda setting;
-    participation in electoral competition; and
-    Facilitating governance either as ruling or opposition members, etc (Shale & Maltosa, 2008; Maiyo, 2009; Jinadu, 2011; Aristotle, 2013; Aleyomi, 2014).

However, while most political parties in western democracies like in USA and European nations are designed more functionally than structurally based on best electoral choices (Jinadu, 2011), in Africa and other developing democracies the situation is not the same, as the nature, character, composition and functions of political parties evolved over the years as a result of challenging socio-economic and political realities. Maiyo (2008), Omotola (2009) and Babatope (2012) show that elements of political struggle to take over power and control governments usually remain the central concern of most political parties in recent times in most developing democracies. Nigeria is not an exception in this case. Given the political reality of the nature of Nigeria's political parties which basically centers on

struggle for power coupled with primordial sentiments, conflict becomes nothing but inevitable (Babatope, 2012; Tyoden, 2013).

On Conflict

Inspite of the differing views, a number of themes underline most of definitions of conflict mostly involves two or more parties in opposition to interests, principles, practices towards achieving particular goal. Conflict thus reflects a class of interest between different parties, which may involve individuals, groups, ethnic groups, communities, political entities, or states. Conflicts may reflect a determined action or struggle over a goal, which may be overt or subtle; manifest or imaginary. Put together, according to Akpuru-Aja (1997), in conflict parties perceive or treat each other as stumbling block which may result in frustrating others in attaining set of goals, or furthering one's interest through their attitudes, behaviours or actions. Conflict therefore arises if one party perceives that one or more goals or means of achieving a goal is been threatened or existence of injustice and lack of freedom (Akpuru-Aja, 1997).

Nigeria being a plural society is mostly divided along fragmentations. These cleavages are linguistic, religious, cultural, regional, or sometimes ethnic in nature; which are usually promoted or advanced in their crude forms to achieve certain goals (Abbas, 2013). While it may not be easy to classify conflicts in a categorical way, not all conflicts in Nigeria are of the same kind, form or nature. However, political competition mostly remains significant aspect of Nigeria's political system over the years (Babatope, 2012). As a result, Tyoden (2013) observes that, in the political system with multi-party systems, each of the political party treat other parties in the democratic space as rival and therefore, an enemy towards the struggle to assume and control governmental powers thereby leading to conflicts in the process.

Banking much on the pluralist theory, Tyoden (2013) has aptly provides a useful theoretical framework that underpins the nature and character of party relation and conflicts in contemporary period suitable to scenarios in developing democracies like Nigeria. Tyoden (2013) postulates there are three fundamental explanations to party relations and conflict which centers around; quest to capture power, nature of the society and the origin of the parties. The first assumption indicates that, the quest to assume and control power is majorly the main drive of most political parties in Nigeria. Similarly, Maiyo (2008) and Omotola (2009) are of the view that, the nature, character, composition and functions of most political parties in Africa that evolved over the years are as a result of stiff socio-economic and political problems. This invariably reflects the parties' strong elements of political struggle to assume power and control governments.

The second assumption dwells on two nature of the society; structural alignment of the society and the level of its socio-economic advancements. On structural alignment, the extent of heterogeneity or homogeneity of the country usually defines such levels of stability or crisis (Tyoden, 2013). The assumption is that, developing democracies with plural or segmented cleavages, political parties tend to reflect such cleavages in both numbers and the nature of their relationships thus leading to conflicts and vice versa (Tyoden, 2013). In current Nigeria's case, its realities reflect this thinking, with over 250 tribes and ethnic groupings mostly guided or misguided by different religions and regions in the country. The relevance of *Afenifere, Ohaneze N'digbo*, Arewa Consultative Forum, Southern Leaders Forum, and *Ijaw* National Congress etc- each representing sectoral cleavages said it all. Second in this aspect is the nature of the society in terms of the level of its socio-economic advancements. It implication is that, the more heterogeneous the society is, the fiercer the struggle as the state remains the major source of capital accumulation in most developing nations.

The third assumption relies on party origin, its nature of relationships with other parties and interest groups, and party's ideological cohesiveness. It posits that when parties emerge as a result of natural democratic process, its composition tends to reflect general interest of society thereby moulding mutual relations (Tyoden, 2013). On the other side, when parties are forced to emerge, they tend to reflect such prevailing circumstances with no clear identity (Scanning, 2005; Maiyo, 2008; Tyoden, 2013). Secondly, the circumstance of the emergence will mostly depend on the main objective of winning power thereby laying a political culture foundation. Thirdly, parties with national ideas which show greater sense of ideology, consensus and accommodation in its dealings are likely to be in harmonious relations than with primitive and personal agenda. Using above lenses, an examination of the real situation in Nigeria is therefore undertaken here through exploring party structures, compositions, functions and their relations.

POLITICAL PARTIES AND INTER-PARTY CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

The Nigeria's experience with political parties dates back to colonial period, and the current occurrences of inter-party conflicts in the country is nothing but throwback in to the past replete with rigging, schisms, thuggery, bribery, corruption, arson and violence (Babatope, 2012; Tyoden, 2013). In order to understand the workings of political parties, Epstein as cited in Jinadu (2011) provide useful framework for analyzing historical sociology of Nigerian political parties described as "developmental circumstances". The circumstances include; experience

of the colonial rule associated with struggles for independence and early quest for suffrage. Also included are the influence of educated elites who challenged the traditional ruling class, and the emergence of military as new political ruling class. Finally, the unfinished crisis for federalism is also considered a party developmental process in Nigeria.

While conflict can manifest in many forms and dimensions, inter-party conflicts in Africa are mostly occasional especially around electioneering period (Shale & Maltosa, 2008). This also remain the same in Nigeria as political competition remains an important aspect of Nigeria's political party system (Babatope, 2012). Shale and Maltosa (2008:13) have however opened up the argument and show that such competition could also be for space for political meetings and gatherings, occasioned mostly by lack of clear rules and regulations governing the process. The scholars further identified the; use of state's institutions and resources by incumbent governments, misuse of social cleavages (ethnicity, religion, and region) by parties to appease electorates, unfair access to mass media, assassination of character, and illegal constitutional amendments, etc.

Since political parties remain an institution of representation for struggle for power (Oyadiran & Toyin, 2016), the struggle by political parties to capture power in Nigeria remain their main driving factor (Babatope, 2012; Tyoden, 2013). As with return to democratic rule in 1999, "the most glaring influence on the nature of inter-party conflicts in the current dispensation has been the mode of emergence of the first3 registered parties; PDP, APP and AD" (Tyoden, 2013). These first registered parties in 1998/1999 were said to be a child of necessity which were formed within the shortest transition programme in the history of Nigeria (Ogundiya 2011). Though, extreme as it may sound, the rush hour party formation to fulfill certain structural criteria simply points that, such quest in a plural democracy like Nigeria remain an uphill task which makes inter-party relations more problematic.

The rush hour formation of the early political parties goes further to affirm that when parties were forced to emerge, they usually tend to reflect such prevailing circumstances with no clear character or identity than just to win power and control government (Scanning, 2005; Tyoden, 2013).This haphazard approach also show that, the early political parties were thus lacking what Scanning (2005) identified as the required foundations that political parties must follow natural democratic process. As a result of that deficiency, Oyadiran and Toyin (2016) thus observe that, since the return of fourth republic in 1999, series of inter-party relations have regrettably ended up heating the polity thereby creating political uncertainties and discontents.

Consequently, these early registered parties; PDP, APP and AD were thus nothing beyond electoral machineries, put together by groups of interested individuals to contest election (Abbas et al, 2015). Banking on its nature of formation and given the social differences in ethnicity, religion, region in Nigeria, the emergence of and relationship between such political parties largely depend on such sectoral groups they may represent (Babatope, 2012; Aleyomi, 2014; Oyadiran & Toyin, 2016). This shaky foundation also indicates that political structures and functions usually follow such pre-existing fault lines which invariably influence the nature, composition, structure and functions of the current political parties (Aleyomi, 2014). Oyadiran and Toyin (2016) further show that, in plural setting like Nigeria, its political parties tend to reflect the sectoral cleavages in the nation. The degree of conflict therefore corresponds to the extent of diverse groups and interests in its political system.

The above evidence and indicator is not farfetched from how Nigeria's political centre stage is toady mostly influenced by sectional associations; *Afenifere, Ohaneze N'digbo*, Arewa Consultative Forum, Southern Leaders Forum, clique of top retired military brass, *Ijaw* National Congress etc with each interest group articulating its own agenda. Bereft of any fundamental ideological differences, Aristotle (2012), Babatope (2012) and Tyoden (2013) opines that, it is mostly the anarchy of selfish ambitions and sectional interest of the political leadership that are usually reflected in conflicting personal interests that have been at the core and periphery center of such party formations and their operation in the current political system.

For instance, after the early parties' formations in 1998, voting behaviour patterns in 1999 elections clearly manifest themselves on ethnic or regional sentiments (Lamidi & Bello; 2012, Abbas, 2013). It became obvious for instance, that AD became an ethnically inclined political party (Lamidi & Bello, 2012), because not only were the founding fathers of the party from South West region, but also the prevalence and dominance of Afenifere (a tribal association) and Southern Leaders Forum (a regional forum) in the formation of the party (Abbas et al, 2015).This indicator signified that AD was indeed an ethnic and regional party especially with an agenda to return power to the south west region (Lamidi & Bello, 2012). No wonder, the 1999 general elections results showed AD dominated only six *Yoruba* speaking states: Lagos, Ekiti, Osun, Ogun, Ondo and Oyo.

Again, even though, All People's Party (later ANPP in 2002) in its early days had national outlook, it became a party for the pursuance of what many perceived as northern political ambitions (Tyoden, 2013). This impression is not unconnected with the 1999 election results where the party only won elections in 9 northern states; Sokoto, Zamfara, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Yobe, Kebbi, Kwara, and Kogi (Abbas et al, 2015). The scholars also show, even though, PDP itself enjoyed geographical coverage, its parameters for political interaction were

largely defined by regional, ethnic and sectional agenda. Tyoden (2013)also argue that, "its identity and ideology does not go beyond what is articulated by the promoters of the ethnic group first before the nation." This nature of relations and interactions according Oyadiran and Toyin (2016) had only succeeded in ethnicisation of party politics in the fourth republic as it encouraged North versus South ticket and the likes.

Since the inauguration of fourth Republic in 1999, a pattern also emerged which indicates Nigerian political class did not learn from their previous mistakes, as heading to 2003 elections added impetus to the nation's party conflicts (Omotola, 2009). For instance, ANPP, a major opposition party with General Buhari as its new leader, witnessed series of clashes among party supporters with PDP especially across northern region (HRW, 2004). The nation also witnessed conflicts among party supporters of PDP and AD in South West as both were trying to either maintain or take over power position (HRW, 2004).Consequently, Babatope (2012) assert that the activities of selfish politicians ended up heating the polity that resulted to thuggery, rigging and other forms of political malpractices. He thus concludes, desperate politicians who wish to win elections (even if they are not qualified to win) mobilised unemployed youths to perpetrate various electoral crimes because to them the end justified the means.

Another major stumbling block to Nigeria's fourth republic is how both ruling and opposition parties sought to maneuver institutional leverages in their favour to win elections (Oyadiran & Toyin, 2016). The crisis was exemplified under ex-President Obasanjo's tenure (1999-2007) that abused power of incumbency and aggressively expanded his party's base. The ruling PDP took over all the South Western states from AD in 2003 election with the exception of Lagos (Osuntokun, 2014). In the same vein, the 9 states initially controlled by ANPP in 1999 were also in 2003 election slimed to 7 having lost 2to the ruling party; PDP (Abbas et al, 2015). Such utter disregard for rule of law and constitutionality by PDP led government to criminally take over power from the opposition parties have according Omotola (2009) saw immediate rejection of the election results by the opposition parties and civil societies. Expectedly, this crisis led to violent protest against perceived 'selection' instead of election in the democratic process thereby undermining its legitimacy in the public domain.

The above nature of conflict between what people wants and what the government provides through the elections conducted according to Maiyo (2008), are usually major source of concern to party politics and democratic consolidation. However, with the rise and fall of the illegal third term presidential agenda of ex-President Obasanjo and the growing unpopularity of the ruling PDP's government over the years towards the 2007 elections, expectations of change of government

among the citizenry were very high (Omotola, 2009). However, with the elections conducted the election result which was generally perceived as questionable seemed a step backwards in Nigeria's early search for democratic consolidation (Omotola, 2009) given the rise of one party dominant state and the imminent decay of opposition politics.

Subsequently, in the run up to 2011 election, ex-President Jonathan who later became the national leader of PDP as a result of the demise of his boss, ex-president Yar'Aduwa declared to contest in the 2011 election. Ex-President Jonathan promised to complete what his boss started since according to him, they were both elected under a joint ticket in 2007 (Ajani, 2010). However, Abbas et al (2015) show that, Jonathan's declaration and eventual contest did not go down well with many politicians from the North, especially as there was an early agreement in the party to rotate power between Northern and Southern parts of the country within a stipulated period of time. With his declaration to contest as PDP flag bearer, Jonathan (from South) instead of a candidate from North was thus an abridgment of the party's constitution and local arrangement (Abbas et al, 2015).

Interestingly, Jonathan's men especially from the Niger Delta and South Eastern region also felt, it was once in a life time opportunity that one of their own will have the opportunity to serve as the president of the nation for more years again. However, after two years of Jonathan's regime, 12 years of PDP's leadership at the center and preparations to yet another 2011 election, party relations in Nigeria turned into a veritable battle-field in the country. As Tyoden (2013:5) posits "with the governing party using all sorts of devises to keep itself in power, and the opposition party using everything in its political arsenal to dislodge the incumbent and enthrone itself", inter-party relations and conflicts became a dangerous struggle for dominance.

This nature of competition have witnessed failed relations among party men and women through fierce struggle over state powers in preparation to 2011 election thereby raising phenomenon of dismissals, carpet crossing and decampments by Governors, National Assembly members, and other top party loyalists across the country. To Oyadiran and Toyin (2016), the main interest for such politicians is only to win elections, be appointed in government's key positions and thus enjoy political patronage. As the 2011 election draws closer and the political situation tensed and polluted, retired General Buhari from the North abandoned his initial party of ANPP due to perceived internal wrangling and presented himself to Nigerian electorates for the third time under his new formed party, CPC (Ajani, 2011).

The election season which remain the most visible moments for parties in Nigeria also saw the 2011 election

period in the country, not seem to appear any way different. Sources posits that, while it is election time across the country, different political conflicts usually assume different forms such as fractionalization, breakaway, verbal attack, character defamation, spurious allegation and physical violence thereby threating political stability and order (Omotola, 2009; Babatope, 2012;Ikpe, 2015;Oyadiran & Toyin, 2016).With the 2011 presidential election contested between Jonathan and Buhari, the election results clearly demarcated Nigeria in to two divided geo-political boundaries with mostly Southern states for incumbent President Jonathan of the ruling PDP and Northern states mostly for General Buhari of the opposition, CPC (sahararepoters.com, 2011).

Due to alleged rigging of the 2011 election, the north especially recorded number of violent conflicts leading to loss of lives and properties. Similarly, reports of 2011 elections observers were unanimous in their condemnation of the general electoral process and inter-party conflicts characterised by flagrant and official rigging of election results (International Crisis Group, 2011). As with the case of many election periods in the country, there were also evidences of endemic abductions, assassinations, violence, looting and the wanton violation of human rights of innocent citizens (Aduku & Umoru, 2014; Ikpe, 2015). Unfortunately, this effects of such desire to win election at all cost in Nigeria over the years have continued to generate inter-party conflict as each party and their supporters attempts to squeeze perceived rival party out of government business.

While most election periods are almost similar in Nigeria, the recent 2015 election is however unique and significant to party politics and electoral democracy in Nigeria (Abbas et al, 2015).These scholars further show, with growing unpopularity of PDP's government (1999-2015) which failed to live up to its promises saw the merger of major opposition parties ahead of the 2015 elections. Despite their differences, ACN, ANPP, CPC and factions of some few opposition parties merged and came up with; APC. Similarly, despite all the pessimism, APC, an opposition party took over power from an incumbent government through free, fair and credible election. This development is significant as Abbas (2016) observes, "it is only when electoral outcomes are uncertain as they are unpredictable, i.e. when today's winners are tomorrow's losers only then can we begin to talk about democratic consolidation in any society."

Considering the above indicator, it thus instructive that 2015 election and the change of national government at the center shows that, Nigerians have come of age politically both attitudinally and behaviorally (Diamond, 1999). This remains imperative as Nigerians are no longer cynical to political statements intended by government but without any tangible result. By ousting the government in power, the 2015 election also show a reflection of generic poor performance of the ousted party (Abbas, 2016). Again, the peaceful handing over of power by 29th May, 2015 from an incumbent government to an opposition party, the first time in political history of Nigeria (Abbas, 2016) also show that, when people participate freely and actively in politics especially with the temerity to hold their political leaders accountable for their actions and or inactions, democracy can safely be said to be on the verge of being consolidated (Oloruntoba, 2008).

However, despite all the achievements and deficiencies that came with the2015 election, the contest once again between ex-President Jonathan of PDP and Buhari of APC, the democratic process and party politics have shown some level of maturity and stability (Abbas, 2016). This is especially more important, as all the major political and democratic players in the political system have respected rules of the game especially at the national level. However, despite such achievement, in most fledgling democracies like Nigeria, NDI (2014) have particularly identified lack of clear ideologies, failure to initiate coherent policy objectives by party, weak party structures that remains dormant apart from electioneering period, shallow and narrow support base defined by either personal, ethnic, religious or regional inclinations.

IMPLICATIONS ON NIGERIA'S DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION

The functioning of democratic system largely depends to some extent on the nature, composition, character and institutionalization of political parties which in turn begets democratic consolidation (Maiyo, 2008, Ogundiya, 2011). However, political parties in most developing nations like in the case of Nigeria face some challenges towards achieving their specific roles and functions (Manning, 2005; Maiyo, 2008). Such attributes as indicated above especially through developmental process, the context and nature of how political parties operate and relate in its activities, is considered key to healthy nature of democratic consolidation in a given political system. The main question thus remained what impact could these features have on the nature of Nigeria's democratic consolidation process?

Political parties as Child of Necessity

Since the return to democracy on 29th May, 1999, there were evidences of democratic regression (Omotola, 2009) that Nigeria has been entangled largely attributable to undeveloped and fractionalized party system not structured to meet peculiar democratic exigencies of the nation. The fault line according to Ogundiya (2011) ultimately lies with the shaky foundation of early

registered political parties in 1998 believed to be child of necessity as they were hurriedly formed within the shortest transition programme. Consequently, these early parties in the fourth republic; PDP, APP and AD were thus nothing more than electoral machineries (Babatope, 2012), put together by interested groups and individuals to contest election thereby filling the power vacuum that would be available with the then impending departure of the military rulers (Tyoden, 2012).

It is in the same vein that Omotola (2009) maintained that such political parties were mere democratic instruments towards achieving transition from military to democratic government. Its implication is that, the political parties were lacking the required social and political foundations of normal political parties that must follow natural democratic process (Scanning, 2005). Though, extreme as it may seem, the rush hour approach to fulfill certain democratic criteria simply points, when political parties were forced to emerge, they tends to reflect prevailing circumstances (Tyoden, 2013). Lamidi and Bello (2012) thus concludes that such political parties were nothing but a composition of individuals with differing interest and identity. It further shows that the founding fathers of the political parties and their followers are nothing but strange bedfellows whose aim was simply to just form a group and capture power.

Aduku and Umoru (2014) also indicated that since most political parties in the fourth republic are not able to achieve the level of institutionalisation, what remain to be seeing in the polity are poor inter-party relations mostly among major players. As a result, power tussle among the founding fathers or the so called owners of the parties is imminent in the polity (Lamidi & Bello, 2012) thus leading to cross carpeting, suspensions, expulsions, fractionalizations, breakaways, among others (Babatope, 2012, Aduku & Umoru, 2014). Unfortunately, such occurrences most of the time are during election periods that results in to violent conflicts. Its implication mostly led to emergence and proliferation of smaller or weak parties centered mostly on public figures (Aduku & Umoru, 2014). These facts are obvious from the centrality of Chief Odumegwu Ojukwu as the main figure of APGA since its formation until his death when Peter Obi took over such role.

Similarly, Senator Tinubu also remains significant in the functions and operations of Action Congress (AC) and later ACN. It is the same tradition with Orji Uzor Kalu with Progressive Peoples Assembly (PPA) and Gen. Muhammadu Buhari with CPC (Aduku & Umoru, 2014:95).In the case of PDP which served as the ruling party (1999-2015), the party is just a mixed bag of individuals and groups having separate missions, ideologies and identities (Lamidi & Bello, 2012). While ex-President Obasanjo remained in total control of the party (1999-2007), it later days were full squabbles and conflicts. The break way of former Vice President, Atiku

Abubakar and five other sitting Governors from PDP who later joined in the formation of new APC is also indicative of such conflict. Simbine (2013) thus show none of the major parties in the fourth republic live in peace within itself or among themselves without resorting to severe conflicts.

The trend is not only worrisome according to Aduku and Umoru (2014) but also portend danger to inter-party relations and sustainable democratic consolidation in Nigeria. This poor level of party identification by electorates leads to higher level of electoral volatility and uncertainties (Simbine, 2013) as political parties find it difficult to be well established in their bases in the society (Aduku & Umoru, 2014).This kind of trend which preclude crisis of different magnitude among major political parties since 1999 show also that parties in Nigeria spends lots of time in inter-party conflicts rather than designing and implementing positive programmes that will benefit the electorates (Lamidi & Bello, 2012). Such failure by the political parties and the major political players in the country to embrace peaceful resolution of conflicts through dialogue have also continue to plunged the nation in to violent conflicts (Abbas et al, 2015, Ikpe, 2015) with negative consequences on the nature of its democratic consolidation.

Poor Party Ideology

With most political parties forced to emerge due to complex prevailing socio-economic circumstances in the country, having no clear ideology and party principle, other than just to win political power and control government resources (Aristotle, 2012; Babatope, 2012; Tyoden, 2013; Aleyomi, 2014), the situation over time possess danger to party stability and political order in Nigeria. Unlike in developed democracies, where political parties play both functional and structural roles with emphasis on identity such as clear ideology and principles, strangely enough, the situation in Nigeria over time is not the same as the issue of ideology counted for little in any party formation, composition, function or relations during this period (Tyoden, 2013).

For instance, with the return to democratic rule in 1999, only 3 political parties contested the election; AD, APP and PDP. But as result of factions and breakaways within the early parties, more parties were later registered to contest for the 2003 elections bringing the total to 29. As at January 2011, there were 64 political parties in Nigeria but some of the parties were later deregistered or merged in 2013 which presently makes the total to 27 (Simbine, 2013).AD was particularly a party that represents ethnic and regional agenda without clear ideology than to return power to the south west region (Lamidi & Bello, 2012). No wonder, AD dominated only six *Yoruba* speaking states of Lagos, Ekiti, Osun, Ogun, Ondo and Oyo

(Abbas et al, 2015). It is the same fate with ANPP as the party could only won elections in 9 northern states in 1999 and seven in 2003 (Abbas et al, 2015).

In the case of ruling party,PDP (1999-2015), Lamidi and Bello (2012) also show that, it could not be clearly understood whether PDP is indeed a conservative, progressive or a radical party. Tyoden (2013) further argue its ideology does not go beyond what is articulated by the promoters of "the ethnic group first before the nation". The nature of such party interactions and relations as observe by Oyadiran and Toyin (2016) had only succeeded in ethnicisation of party politics in the fourth republic as it also encouraged North versus South ticket and the likes. Bereft of any fundamental ideological differences, Aristotle (2012), Babatope (2012) and Tyoden (2013) opines that, it is mostly the anarchy of selfish ambitions and sectional cleavages of the political leadership that reflects the core of party relations, formations and their operation in the political system.

In the same vein, with growing unpopularity of PDP's government over the last 16 years (1999-2015) to fulfill its campaign promises, saw the merger of major opposition parties; ACN, ANPP, CPC and factions of some few opposition parties to come up with; new APC. By considering timing of the formation of the "progressive" alliances just before 2015 elections, it is may be out of question to argue that, the whole political process is just yet another attempt of winning political power that is at the base of such alliances, rather than any ideological compatibility *per se* (Abbas et al., 2015). This fact according to Aduku and Umoru (2014:94) is evident as the two most dominant figures in APC are Buhari and Tinubu whose ideologies are two poles apart. However, despite its challenging emergence, the new APC represents the first opposition party in the political history of Nigeria to take over power from a sitting government in the 2015 national election.

Political Parties as Embers of Divisions

The federation of Nigeria being a plural society is mostly divided along fragmentations and cleavages. These cleavages are linguistic, religious, cultural, regional, or sometimes ethnic in nature; which are unfortunately promoted or advanced in their crude forms to achieve certain goals (Abbas, 2013).Given the marked social differences, the emergence of political parties in Nigeria largely depends on the nature of relationships between or among the sectoral groups they represent (Babatope, 2012; Tyoden, 2013, Aleyomi, 2014). The evidence is not far from how political centre stage in the country is mostly influenced by such sectional associations like the; Afenifere, Ohaneze N'digbo, Arewa Consultative Forum, Southern Leaders Forum, clique of top retired military brass, Ijaw National Congress, etc as each interest group

is making efforts to articulate its own agenda for the party and the nation.

Abbas (2013) show that, such cleavages have unfortunately continued to installed political structures and processes inimical to acceptable civil and democratic regimes. These legacies which predated in the military era according to Jega (2007) left the crisis of "us versus them". Even beyond, the military era, important matters of governance; allocation of resources, choice of political leadership, and public employment became excessively ethnicized with the citizens becoming increasingly conscious of these negative polarizations. This further confirmed the view that ethnic thinking had political origin in Nigeria as these cleavages were deeply rooted and promoted further through well consciously crafted ideological tradition even in democratic governance (Abbas, 2013). In pursuit of their selfish agenda, Nigerian political parties and politicians over the years have therefore discarded merit and embraced ethnic balancing.

This idea of ethnic and regional balancing have therefore only succeeded in imposing nepotism and mediocrity at the expense of desired merit in the democratic process (Oyadiran & Toyin, 2016).For instance, it is the view of Bako (2001) that even the transition that brought ex-President Obasanjo into power in 1999 was undemocratically zoned to the south-west due to June 12, phenomenon. It goes further to show that, with each political party trying to balance certain interests, the nature of party interaction over the years had only succeeded in ethnicisation of party politics as it encouraged North versus South ticket, Muslim versus Christian ticket and the likes (Oyadiran & Toyin, 2016). Consequently, the conduct of politicians and electorates with regard to party formation, operation and functions thus indicates that Nigeria still has long way from realizing mutual inter-party party relations which is the of most advanced democracies.

Winning Power through Rigged Elections

The continuing incidences of inter-party conflicts and violence especially among dominant parties over the years have rekindled uncertainties about the prospects of democratic consolidation in Nigeria (Omotola, 2009). Despite many years of uninterrupted party politics, reports from both domestic as well as international election monitoring groups from 1999 to 2015, continued to reflect the lack of a level playing ground between the opposition and ruling and parties at all levels of democratic governance structure (Abbas et al, 2015).This further indicates that inter-party relations did not improve in any significant or fundamental sense. While commenting on similar situation Babatope (2012) posits:

"For everyone, in the political arena, security lay only in the accumulation of power. The result has always been an unprecedented drive for power that hardly encourages moderation and accommodation. In this regard, the chances that Nigerian's democracy will flourish are undoubtedly becoming slimmer and slimmer each passing day (p.17)".

Abbas et al (2015) thus observes, unfortunately, the whole democratic process, is challenged as electoral malpractices is the order of the day, as testified by many politicians, electorates, civil society organisation, and national and international election observers. Aleyomi (2014) and Abbas et al (2015) have also further identified the most common strategies to rig elections which takes the form of using political militias to intimidate opposition party loyalists and voters, snatching and stuffing of designated ballot box, buying of party and security agents to do bidding of the highest paid political party, concoction and false declaration of election results, and all sorts of crude related anti-conventional means of electoral order. This electoral grandeur perpetrated in a bid to take over or maintain political power, portrays the overzealous desire of Nigerian party and their main actors to rule at all cost.

Banking on the above situation, desperate politicians who wish to win elections at all cost even if they are not qualified to win such elections (Babatope, 2012) would mobilize unemployed youths to perpetrate various electoral crimes (Oloruntoba, 2008). As Omotola (2009) argues, those who are interested in retaining power or win by hook or crook (Jega, 2007), especially political actors in control of state resources and instrument of power simply "fixed" the election result they wanted thus leading protests and violent conflicts. The reasons for such do or die approach to politics is not farfetched from the fact, since the state remains the major means of capital accumulation in Nigeria in recent times and considering the over dependence on government in the country, it is not surprising according to Tyoden (2013) that the struggle for control of the state's institution and its resources, assumes a fierce struggle which tends to be more intense and ferocious.

Political Violence and the Proliferation of Ethnic Militias

With the nature, composition and dimension of political party delinquency in Nigeria, it is not surprising that, over period of time, has been marked by outbreak of political violence prompted by periodic elections (Omotola, 2009; Ikpe, 2015). This electoral and party violence particularly between 1999 and 2015 have on several occasions plunged the country into a phenomenal and deep-seated crisis of pre and post-election conflicts fuelled by the embers of ethnicity, religion and region (Ikpe, 2015). These forms of violence, in its garrisoned nature as Omotola (2009) described it led to what Jega (2007) called the privatization of group violence through ethnic jingoist and militia. Jega (2007) further claims, the political system is dramatically transformed into state violence with ruling party militias across the country holding to power by hook or crook through; MASSOB and *Bakassi* Boys in the South, *Yan Kalare* and ECOMOG or *Yan Tauri* in the North, and Area Boys in the West.

The nature of these conflicts largely associated with deficiencies in the political parties consequently fosters the development of political thuggery, armed banditry, arson and assassination in their desperate bid to win political power at all cost, (Abbas et al, 2015) which continue to signal dangers to peaceful democratic process. The effects and consequences of such desire by the party and its political class to hold on to power have continued to generate inter-party conflicts as several attempts were made to squeeze opposition parties out of government business no matter the cost (Tyoden, 2013). The consequences of the conflicts over time remain the serial cases of political assassinations including most prominently that of Chief Bola Ige, Chief Dr. Harry Marshall, Chief Dr. Chuba Okadigbo, Chief Ogbonnaya Uche, Hajjiya Sa'adatu Rimi, Chief Funsho Williams, Chief Lambert Dogogo, Hon. Aminasoari Dikibo, Chief Ayo Daramola, Hon. Modu Fannami, Hon. Dipo Dina, among several others.

Winner Takes all Syndrome

Unfortunately, the do-or-die approach (Tyoden, 2013) and by hook or crook (Jega, 2007) approach to political competition and contest among political actors in the country has aided the prevalence of a political culture that emphasized what Aristotle (2012) termed a winner-takes-all concept in the nation's body polity. Given the Machiavellian tactics, it is therefore natural according to Babatope (2012) that, politicians adopt extreme measures and strategies in the quest for political power between or among the major political parties in the country. According to this thinking, all means is fair as the end to most of parties justified the means to acquire power (Abbas et al., 2015) which in turn instigate hostility and mistrust among parties. Given the over dependence on state and its institution for capital accumulation, it is not surprising according to Tyoden (2013) that the struggle for control of state's institution and its resources, assumes a fierce struggle.

Abbas (2013) further show that, once in the control of state powers and its institutions, politicians used treasury, mass media and security forces, to serve the interest of the dominant party (government in power)in order to

guarantee its dominance. This culture of dominance and "winner takes all" which largely sterns from reckless spending, authoritarian rule, exclusion of minority from governance, deprivations, inequity and injustice continue to ignite endemic inter-party conflicts and violence. This conflict most a times escalates to violent dimension as according to Shale and Maltosa (2008) the states are usually unable to effectively manage social and political conflicts. According to Babatope (2012), the failure or inability to manage such conflicts has continued to become serious hindrance to development of democracy and its eventual consolidation. This nature of inter-party conflicts thus suggests violations of peaceful democratic process.

CONCLUSION

Party politics in Nigeria, right from the return of democracy in 1999 to 2015, has been bedeviled by rampant conflicts with debilitating effects in its democratic consolidation. Inter-party relations have also retrogressed to autocracy partly due to perceived elimination of competitors through state sponsored assassinations, incumbency factor, thereby turning election contests as a matter of life and death. The consequences have produced fierce political struggle and violence which have continued to pose serious challenges to Nigeria's democratic survival and its consolidation. Party politics and inter-party conflicts encouraged regional political leadership, religious divides, lack of clear cut party ideologies, party indiscipline and intolerance among others. Also, lacks of mutual inter- party democracy encouraged politics of irrationality and intolerance, which abhors maturity of debate, negotiations, dialogue, and mutual compromises based on win-win scenario. These factors, no doubt, have persistently threatened current survival of Nigeria's emerging democracy which must be addressed.

THE WAYS FORWARD

While national unity through political parties since the return of multi-party democracy in 1999 have continued to elude efforts that have been made to achieve it, such political unity is urgently considered necessary for sustainable democratic consolidation that could yield expected democratic gains. The argument is that without a viable and stable political party system structured to meet the peculiar democratic exigencies of Nigeria, the wind of democratic reversal may bring an abrupt end to the country's nascent and fledgling democracy. In proffering solutions to the lingering party politics and inter-party conflicts in Nigeria, the following are hereby recommended:

That, all registered political parties in Nigeria must not be allowed to serve as vehicles for articulation and execution of regional, ethnic, or religious agenda and that they remain nationalistic in orientation, scope and coverage. In the course of forming political parties, parties' membership and leadership should cut across all the geopolitical zones of the country. While serving as vehicle for contest for elective positions, parties must articulate and organise its intended programmes towards achieving societal and democratic objectives. This can be achieved, if patriotic visionary people with durable popular support join party politics as this will serve as prelude for patriotic nation building and efficient mobilization in a plural ethnic society like Nigeria.

The police and indeed other security agencies must be seeing to be discharging their duties in curtailing the excesses of party militias like MASSOB, *Yan Kalare*, ECOMOG, and *Yan Tauri* or Area Boys, so that, the incessant political killings and assassinations in the country would be stopped. This will in turn, reduce the unprecedented level of violence and conflict, rigging and fraud, and total collapse of law and order thereby enhancing political stability. Again, politicians and party loyalists should avoid unguarded statements that could ignite violence in the body polity which failure to do so shall be sanctioned by the law authorities. This means, politicians should play according to the universal norms and values of peaceful democratic process.

INEC must be well-funded and politically independent to serve as unbiased electoral umpire capable of conducting free, fair and credible elections. The electoral body should also be forceful especially in the areas that pertains laws on campaign financing, funding and regulation, electoral violence and overall security. The academia, civil society organisations, party leaders and other important democratic stakeholders should continuously engage and educate parties on the dangers of winner-takes-all approach as mutual political cultures like government of national unity, consensus, compromise and accommodation should be stressed; towards encouraging greater harmony and cooperation between the major parties.

Finally, there is need on the part of all the citizens including the political, religious and traditional leaders of the country to preach and imbibe on the spirit of oneness and good governance, which will in turn enhance the development of plural democracy in Nigeria. If that is achieved, it will in turn encourage politics of ideologies and issues based, effective representative government, respect for principles of rule of law, separation of powers and checks and balances which are favourable ingredients of democratic consolidation.

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