

The Nigerian State, Democratization and Political Parties: A Counter-Elites Interpretation

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Abstract

The paper examines the implications of Nigeria's multiparty/electoral democracy subsumed under democratization on the state and popular empowerment. With regular elections since 1999 that slightly improved in conduct in 2011, the paper avers that the end result is at best an electoral authoritarianism. Though with some positives leading some observers to make a case for democratic optimism in the country, the paper from a counter-elites perspective contends that multiparty/electoral in Nigeria is deeply defective as it is manipulated by the political elites who see it mainly as a strategy or means to capture and consolidate their hold onto state power and to serve their narrow interests. It is characterized by lack of an independent and effective electoral management body, internal democracy, ideology and a viable opposition among others. It is a system with a democratic exterior but lacking genuine change in its internal working and behavior of the political elites. On the whole, the paper argues that multiparty/electoral democracy has neither changed the authoritarian character of the state nor provided the expected 'dividends of democracy' or improved welfare of majority of Nigerians. The paper adopts the qualitative methods in generating data- depending on both primary and secondary sources. The qualitative methods align with the interpretative epistemology, which contextualizes knowledge and relies on the experiences and realities of a given people and environment.

Keywords: Democratization, the Nigerian state, elections, political parties, internal democracy, godfatherism, popular empowerment.

1.1 Introduction

Nigeria like most Africa countries has been caught in the wave of democratization (Adebanwi and Obadare, 2011:311; Flanary, 1998:179-180; Haynes, 2002, Huntington, 1991; Lehoucq, 2012:273-274; Olayode, 2005:33-34; Tar, 2009, 2010; Thomson, 2010:278). According to van de Walle, "A wave of democratization spread through Africa in the early 1990s, representing the most significant political change in the continent since the independence period three decades before" (van de Walle, 2001:5). Democratization is spreading across the world and is becoming fashionable and the best way of conducting politics (Haynes, 2012:2).

Whilst democratization in Nigeria has resulted to some positives, it has correspondingly engendered some negatives that leave much to be desired. Some of the positives include; regular conduct of elections in 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011, general acceptance of democracy as a better way to conduct politics, and increased opening of the political space and scope of civil liberties. Lewis reminds us that with respect to Nigeria, "Since independence, no civilian government has successfully completed the passage from one administration to another" (Lewis, 2003:131). Some scholars are of the opinion that regular elections and the associated political rights and civil liberties currently prevalent in third wave democracies like Nigeria are signs of democratic progress and optimism (Bratton, 2004; Lindberg, 2009, 2006a, 2006b, 2004; Lynch and Crawford, 2011). In Nigeria as in much of Africa "electoral competition is becoming more common" (Weghorst and Lindberg, 2011:1208). Regular conduct of elections is not only "central to democratization" but also "contributes to the maturation of nascent democratic cultures" (Bratton, 2004:155). For as Lindberg avers, "an uninterrupted series of competitive elections imbues society with certain democratic qualities" (Lindberg, 2006b:139).

Indeed, this seemed unlikely at the beginning for African countries given the penchant for the military to intervene and/or interfere in politics (Haynes, 2002:85). Besides, multiparty elections provide the people with the opportunity and weapon to change a non-performing elected government or public officials (Berger, 1993:5; Huntington, 1991:174; Weghorst and Lindberg, 2011:1193). On the negative side however, Zuern reminds us that, "elections provide an easy indicator of the very basic requirement for democracy, but they neither signal democratic governance nor create it" (Zuern, 2012:64). And as cogently pointed out by Lindberg, "Multiparty elections alone do not make a democracy" (Lindberg, 2004:61). Despite regular elections and increased political space, Nigeria's democracy like in most developing countries raises concerns (Carother, 2002:10; Le Van and Ukata, 2012:1; Lewis, 2003:131-133). It is characterized among others by an administratively weak election management body, vote buying, lack of ideology and internal democracy among the political parties, 'big man' politics, defection of politicians from one party to another, and the absence of a viable opposition political party (Bratton, 2008; Campbell, 2010; Joseph, 2008:99-102; Lindberg, 2003:123-124; Posner and Young, 2007:126-127; Rakner, 2011; Suberu, 2007; Thomson, 2010:277; Uddhammar, 2011:1169). These, some observers argue, are some of the features of semi-authoritarianism prevalent in new democracies (Diamond, 2002; Levitsky and Way, 2002; Lynch and Crawford, 2011; Schedler, 2002; van de Walle, 2003:298; Weghorst and Lindberg, 2011:1194-1195). It is suggested that the overall outcome of all these is that democratization though 'the only game in town' (Obi, 2008:8), has not significantly altered or changed the character of the Nigerian state. This much is aptly encapsulated by Obi when he observed that multiparty-electoral competition the shape which democratization has taken has resulted to a situation where majority of the people "are neither able to exercise power over the political process, or participate beyond voting during periodic elections. Even at that, the state, its institutions, and the ruling party exert a lot of influence on the electoral process, so in most cases, elections actually offer people no real choice" (Obi, 2008:10). The overall outcome is "democratization of disempowerment" (Ake, 1994).

The paper interrogates the current democratization process in Nigeria (between 1999 and 2014) and its implications on the Nigerian state and popular empowerment. It is argued that the 1999 transitional elections may have marked the formal end of military authoritarianism in the country's political history, but this democratic opening, after two bitterly contested and flawed elections in 2003 and 2007, suggests that very little has changed in terms of the behaviour of the political elites (Obi, 2011:367). This, according to Haynes (2012:3, 2002:83), is a general trend in developing countries where despite elections the power of the elites is not often diminished as they manage to acquire at least some democratic legitimacy but without substantially changing their mode of operation. It is assumed that state power as before the elections remains authoritarian. This has left Nigeria's democracy tainted with questions about its substance (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997; Carothers, 2002; Schedler, 2002). It is yet to go beyond mere regular elections (that are largely flawed), to promote popular empowerment associated with the welfare needs of majority of the people.

Literature Review

It is important to stress from the onset that the discourse on democratization in developing countries of Africa including Nigeria is polarized along two generic perspectives- liberal democracy (multiparty/electoral democracy) and popular democracy (Saul, 1997a, 1997b; Shivji, 1991; Rakner, 2011, Rakner et al, 2007). Liberal democracy according to its proponents is simply the rule of the people; as a system for choosing government through free and fair electoral competition at regular intervals (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997; Dahl, 2000; Diamond, 2002:22-23; Haynes, 2002:81; Lindberg, 2009; Weghorst and Lindberg, 2011:1193). It is usually understood in terms of the rule of the majority, as expressed via free and fair elections (Plattner, 2010:83-84). Liberal democracy among other important institutions including the rule of law and the fundamental rights of the citizens, emphasises the significance of the 'ballot box' as an institutional mechanism by which individuals through mainly political parties acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's votes (Haynes, 2005:21, 2002:81). Conversely, popular democracy is broader as it emphasizes that political and policy decisions should be more inclusive and produce better socio-economic outcome in the interests of the welfare condition of the majority of the people (Adebanwi and Obadare, 2011:314-316; Ake, 2000, 1996, 1994; Lynch and Crawford, 2011; Nnoli, 2011a, 2011b; 2008; Obi, 2011; 2008; Obianyo, 2008; Rakner, 2011; Rakner et al, 2007; Saul, 1997a, 1997b; Shivji, 1991; Zuern, 2012).

It is a process that allows popular participation in political and policy making processes and, that policy choices should not only reflect the broader interests of the majority of the people but also promote social welfare and empower poor and vulnerable people in society (Amuwo, 2010; Keating, 2011; Lynch and Crawford, 2011; Obi, 2008, 2004; Saul, 1997a, 1997b; Shivji, 1991). The paper draws inspiration from the second generic perspective in the democratization debate, focusing on the counter-elites interpretation of Nigeria's democratization espousing 'popular empowerment'. Popular empowerment addresses the socio-economic sphere as well as the political and, offers the people welfare (Ake, 1996, 1994, 2000; Keating, 2011; Lynch and Crawford, 2011; Nnoli, 2008; Obi, 2008; Olukoshi, 2011; Zuern, 2012). It transcends mere participation in elections but entails 'a social process aimed at changing the deteriorating condition of the people and expanding the political space to promote the basic rights to life, economic and social well-being' (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2001:20).

The framing of the paper's arguments in keeping faith with popular democracy is to demonstrate that Nigeria's multiparty/electoral democracy is heavily deficient or flawed as it is manipulated by the political elites to serve their narrow interest for state power (Agbaje and Adejumobi, 2006; Obi, 2011, 2008). The resultant effect(s) as the counter-elites interpretation underlines is a democracy with regular conduct elections and expanded civil and political liberties, but one that has failed to change the authoritarian character of the state and promote substantive issues of popular empowerment.

Research Methods

In examining the issues the paper adopted the qualitative methods- relying on primary materials including communiqués, press statements, newsletters, official documents and reports and blended with secondary sources. According to Devine, "Qualitative methods have been aligned with an interpretative epistemology that stresses the dynamic, constructed and evolving nature of social reality. In this view, there is no objective science that can establish universal truths or can exist independent of the beliefs, values and concepts created to understand the world" (Devine, 2002:201). These methods contextualizes knowledge, making it subjective to the experiences and realities of people (Devine, 2002:199; Tar, 2009:225-226).

The remaining part of the paper is structured as follows: transition to multiparty/electoral democracy, Political Parties, and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC); internal democracy, ideology and opposition political parties in Nigeria's multiparty/electoral democracy; Dominant party state, political power alternation, and opposition Political Parties in Nigeria; Implications of Nigeria's Multiparty/Electoral Democracy; and Conclusion.

2.1 Transition to Multiparty/Electoral Democracy, Political Parties, and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)

The present democratic process is a product of the 1998-1999 transition programme. The programme was spearheaded by General Abdulsalam Abubakar who became Nigeria's military head of state on the 8th of June 1998 following the sudden and mysterious death of the then military leader, General Sani Abacha (Obi 2004:2-3; Momoh and Thovoethin 2001). The transition to democracy in Nigeria was a result of domestic and global factors- the economic and political crises following military rule and the end of the Cold War that heralded contemporary globalization (Haynes, 2012:3, Okafor, 2008a; Okonjo-Iweala and Osafo-Kwaako, 2007; Olayode, 2007; Olukoshi, 2011; Oyovbaire, 2007; Thomson, 2010). These factors spurred and encouraged local demands by civil society and pro-democracy organizations for democratization, which culminated to the abdication of political power by the military in 1999 (Abimbola, 2002; Animashaun, 2009; Bradley, 2005; Ihonvbere, 1996; Kew, 2004; LeVan, 2014; Obi, 2008; Olayode, 2007; Olorode, 2006).

The transition was anchored on the conduct of elections. Elections are central to competitive politics of the modern era (Obianyo, 2008:42). And during transitional period "elections will be not just a foundation stone but a key generator overtime of further democratic reforms" (Carothers, 2002:8). They are at the minimum level important in measuring the progress towards democratic consolidation. And the model of democracy on which Nigeria's current democratization lies and for which the political elites espouse is liberal multiparty/electoral democracy (Ake, 1996:23-24; Huntington, 1991; Jinadu, 1997:1; Lindberg, 2004:61-62, 2009; Rakner and van de Walle, 2009; National Democratic Institute (NDI), 2008:9; Obi, 2011; Odukoya, 2007; Omotola, 2010; Zuern, 2012). In this context, the Federal Government states that under Nigeria's democracy there will be the institutionalization of multiparty elections as a way of promoting citizens' participation in politics, building trust between the governed and the government, and ensuring accountability in our governance processes.

Elections will also help in eliminating decades of personalized rule that undermined the processes of governance and the integrity of their operators (Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN), 2014:31-34). A major landmark event that signalled the beginning of the transition to democracy was the registration of political parties in 1998. Political parties are central in liberal multiparty democracies (Alapiki, 2004:90-92; Rakner, 2011:1109-1110). The transition programme spanned a period of eleven months and was the shortest in the annals of the history of the country. The political parties were hurriedly created given the urgency of Nigerians to remove the military as soon as possible (Aina, 2004; Muhammad, 2008:45-46). Also, set-up under the transition programme was the electoral management body- the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which was charged with the onerous responsibility of registering political parties, registration of voters and the conduct of elections (Agbaje and Adejumobi, 2006; INEC, 2011; Omotola, 2010). The political parties in Nigeria's fourth republic emerged through a phased process. This was because shortly after the ban on politics was lifted by the military, 26 political associations filed papers for registration with INEC as required by INEC's guidelines (FGN, Electoral Act, 1999a). Of these, only 9 were giving provisional registration after the local government elections in December 1998 (Momoh and Thovoethin, 2001).

The formal and final registration of any association among the nine political associations was based on their electoral performance. Following INEC's guidelines for an association to be finally registered, it was expected by INEC to score at least 10% of total votes cast in not less than 24 states of the federation (Momoh and Thovoethin, 2001). Consequently, after the election of December 5 1998 organised at the local government level, only three political parties namely: Alliance for Democracy (AD), All Peoples' Party (APP) now All Nigerian Peoples' Party (ANPP), and Peoples Democratic Party were able to secure INEC's registration and participated subsequent general elections in 1999 (Lewis, 2003:132; Muhammad, 2008:46).

The transition culminated in the official swearing-in of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo as President of Nigeria on the 29th of May 1999 after winning the general election (Emeagwali, 2008:13; Momoh and Thovoethin, 2001; Okafor, 2008b:2). The election was contested by just three political parties namely; Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), All Peoples Party (APP), and Alliance for Democracy (AD). Apart from winning the Presidency and more seats in the 469-member National Assembly- made of the Senate of 109 members and House of Representatives of 360, the result of the January 1999 gubernatorial election showed that out of 36 states the PDP won more of the governorship positions. Table 6.1.1 shows that the PDP won 21 governorship positions representing 58.3% of the positions, while APP and AD won 9 (25%) and 6 (16.7%) respectively (INEC, 1999).

Table 2.1.1: Distribution of Governorship positions after the 1999 General Elections

	PDP States	APP States	AD States
1.	Abia	Bornu	Lagos
2.	Akwa-Ibom	Gombe	Osun
3.	Adamawa	Jigawa	Ondo
4.	Bauchi	Kogi	Oyo
5.	Bayelsa	Kwara	Ogun
6.	Benue	Sokoto	Ekiti
7.	Cross-River	Yobe	
8.	Delta	Zamfara	
9.	Anambra	Kebbi	
10.	Ebonyi		
11.	Edo		
12.	Enugu		
13.	Imo		
14.	Kano		
15.	Kaduna		
16.	Katsina		
17.	Nasarawa		
18.	Niger		
19.	Plateau		
20.	Rivers		
21.	Taraba		

Source: Tell Magazine 1999:27; Aina 2004

The results of the transition elections of 1999 attracted less controversy because of the urgency and eagerness of the people and the political elites to remove the military from the governance of the country (Bratton, 2004:147; Obianyo, 2008:43). They were ‘founding’ elections (Lindberg, 2006b:140; van de Walle, 2003:299-302). It is observed in transitional democracies that, “the first competitive election following the withdrawal of the non-democratic rulers... symbolize and legitimize the demise of the old order and the founding of the new democratic one” (Haynes, 2005:41). The ‘old order’ that is the military was considered an impediment to the country’s development (Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), 2001; FGN, 2014:31; Nnoli, 2011b:179; Olorode, 2006:3). Having said that, it is however important to point out that the issue of imposition of registration guidelines for political parties to be registered by INEC such as fees, geographical spread with identifiable office locations and membership list, etc as contained in the Electoral Act 1999 were viewed with contempt (see FGN, Electoral Act, 1999a). This was one of the first major challenges of Nigeria’s transition to multiparty democracy. It was considered as an infringement on the democratic right of Nigerians as enshrined in the 1999 constitution as amended. Komolafe in his “INEC as a Political Licensor” argues that by the guidelines the Commission: simply arrogated to itself awesome powers of determining which organization participates in the electoral process and on which terms... INEC has blatantly usurped the powers that are supposed to reside in the electorate... INEC has ascribed to itself more than the role of a referee. It is actually posturing as a political licensor (Komolafe, 2002).

Chapter 4 of the constitution dealing with “Fundamental Rights” states in section 40(1) that: Every person shall be entitled to assemble freely and associate with other persons, and in particular belong to any political party, trade union or any other association for the protection of his interests (FGN, 1999b).

Consequently, additional political parties were thereafter registered and recognized by INEC, bringing the total number to more than 50 political parties (see INEC, 2011; Olaniyi, 2004). As noted by scholars, such political opening has the effect of enhancing effective participation, competition, and civil liberties of the people (Berger, 1993; Dahl, 2000; Lindberg, 2009, 2004; Plattner, 2010; Rakner et al 2007; Weghorst and Lindberg, 2011).

It is imperative to state at this point that, Nigeria’s multiparty/electoral democracy has been severely marred by sustained electoral flaws. This is contrary to the strategic importance of a transparent, free and fair electoral process in the consolidation of democracy (Ajayi, 2007:142; Jinadu, 1997; Omotola, 2010). Reinforcing this, Seteolu (2005:36) avers that the success of constitutional democracy is tied to the integrity of the electoral process. The quality of representative governance is also linked to the capacity of a state to evolve a viable and transparent electoral system that inspires the confidence of the broad spectrum of civil society and contending fractions of the political elite. The four general elections (1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011) before the last one in 2015 (the 2015 election is not covered in this paper), have shown the dysfunctionality of the electoral system and its dominance by the political elites. The democratic institutions including INEC, security forces, political parties and the political elites have all been implicated beginning with the 2003 general elections (Adejumobi, 2007; Agbaje and Adejumbi, 2006; Obi, 2011).

The 2003 general election the second under this dispensation and the first conducted by the civilian government after the end of military rule in the country was gravely marred by the PDP using state power. Nowhere was this more clearly evident than in the South-Western states where the PDP massively manipulated the elections to win the governorship positions in Ogun, Osun, Ondo, Oyo and Ekiti states originally controlled by Alliance for Democracy (AD)- part of which metamorphosed to Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN). It was only in Lagos that the AD remained in control after the 2003 general election (Obi, 2011:380; Obianyo, 2008:50). Osiki writes to corroborate the above in what is described as “Political ‘Tsunami’”: In a bid to capture the south-west, which was the stronghold of the Alliance for Democracy (AD) prior to the 2003 general elections, the ruling PDP employed all sorts of strategies to dislodge the AD. In the end, only Lagos could manage to remain in the fold of the AD while the rest states of Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Ogun and Ekiti went to the PDP (Osiki, 2010:156). The take-over of power in South-West by the PDP marked the beginning of the abuse of the power of incumbency to win elections in Nigeria’s current multiparty/electoral democracy.

Using manipulation of INEC and security forces (Ajayi, 2006a), the PDP in addition to winning the Presidency and majority seats at the National Assembly increased its share of the governors of states from 21 in the 1999 election to 28 in the 2003 election (Agbaje and Adejumbi, 2006:39). Again, the 2003 election contributed considerably to the ‘crisis of electoral governance’ that the country has been enmeshed in under the current democratic dispensation (Jinadu, 2009; Oyovbaire, 2007).

The Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), a coalition of over 90 civil society groups that monitored the election, in its report on the 2003 election, gave a vote of no confidence on the election (Agbaje and Adejumbi, 2006). The Group (2003) reports that the voters wanted their votes to determine the winner of elections while the political elites wanted to corrupt the process and rig their way into elective office, and therefore the results of the elections did not reflect the will of the Nigerian people. To this end, ASUU raises the question of legitimacy in relation to the conduct of the 2003 elections when the Union declares: In view of the weighty evidence, backed by Nigerian and international bodies, of the overwhelming rigging of the 2003 elections, the argument that the 2003 elections conferred no genuine mandate from the people has a lot of weight. What we have is either no mandate at all or a seized mandate (ASUU, 2004a:3, Communiqué of NEC Meeting, 10-11 July).

Furthermore, worse was to happen in the 2007 election to the extent that the opposition parties led by the All Nigerian Peoples' Party (ANPP) and 28 others alleged that the ruling Peoples Democratic Party massively rigged the 2007 elections (see Bratton, 2008:2-23; Adejumbi, 2007; Agbaje and Adejumbi, 2006; Omotola, 2009a; Osumah and Ikelegbe, 2009; Suberu, 2007:98-99). According to INEC, the 2007 election like the preceding one in 2003 was criticized for not meeting minimum standards of organizing national elections (INEC, 2011:ix). Similarly, ASUU on the 2007 election following reports from all its branches that monitored the elections states in part: It is sad once again that the 14th April elections exhibited at a higher level the repetition of the experiences of the past, surpassing the 2003 that was called election (ASUU, 2007:2, Press Statement, 29th April).

Also, Obianyo argues that "The civility that attended the 1999 election was not present in the 2003 election, in which the level of electoral fraud reached an unprecedented height, though it is nothing compared to the impunity that attended the 2007 election" (Obianyo, 2008:43). Rightly so under the current democracy, "The country's 2007 elections were without doubt the most cynical illustration of the exasperation of the country's ruling elite with the electorate" (Adebanwi and Obadare, 2011:323). Following this, ASUU further argues that there were:

Widespread and deliberate manipulation of the voters registers. Not only were there no display of the voters register on most wards and local governments; where there was a display, a lot of names were omitted; the use of illegal and unconstitutional disqualifications of candidates by INEC; the INEC gave questionable accounts of its preparedness and facts on the ground; the police and soldiers were used to intimidate voters, and in many places, were observed to have participated in the seizure of ballot boxes; in a good number of states, voting materials never arrived and no voting took place, yet results were announced; the use of state security to intimidate opponents of the ruling party; evidence of widespread snatching of ballot boxes and electoral materials; money was freely used in exchange for votes; the National Television Authority (NTA) conduct throughout the exercise was more like an official organ of the ruling party than that of a publicly owned institution (ASUU, 2007:2).

By implication, the opportunities for political expression required of a democracy were seriously limited (Joshi, 2013:187-214). In a related development, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) declares just to substantiate the above that: Indeed, this highly compromised electoral process was in the words of President Obasanjo 'a do-or-die affair' which had to be won by PDP by any means necessary and at whatever cost to the country... Specifically, the National Assembly and Presidential elections, just like the state elections were characterized by late voting and non-appearance of electoral officials in many parts of the country; severe shortages of ballot papers; declaration of results even in places where elections were not held; under-age voting; voter intimidation; snatching and stuffing of ballot boxes and a general subversion of the people's will (NLC, 2007:1, Press Statement, 30 April).

Indeed, the rigging of election and do-or-die politics have come to be synonymous with the ruling party (NLC, 2011:7-8). For as the Nigeria Bar Association (NBA) aptly puts it "Nigeria's democracy under Obasanjo's eight-year rule was characterized by electoral fraud, impunity, disrespect for the rule of law, and abuse of human rights" (NBA, 2007:2). The Bar also notes that there was evidence of "unconstitutional disqualification of candidates by INEC" and the complicity of the ruling party in ensuring that "The Electoral Commission hand-picked those in the good books of the ruling party to run for political office, and excluded opposition candidates" (NBA, 2007:2). And one of the high profile unconstitutional and unjustifiable disqualifications that INEC carried out during the 2007 election was that of former Vice President Abubakar Atiku who left his ruling PDP to ACN to actualize his presidential ambition, having been schemed out by the Obasanjo led PDP in a grim power struggle.

It took a belated judicial verdict to reinstate his candidature for the general election of 2007 (Ibrahim, 2007a:5; Obianyo, 2008:49; Odion-Akhaine, 2008:128). Just also to add if only to reinforce the flaws of the electoral management body, the NLC states that INEC: Indulged in self-inflicted logistical problems such as wanting to distribute election materials across our vast country only hours before polls were scheduled to open. Also, millions of ballot papers especially for the Senatorial elections were unusable because logos of some political parties were omitted. Generally, INEC under Prof. Maurice Iwu was an unmitigated disaster. The president compounded the political crisis by employing armed forces, police and other security agencies in its 'do-or-die' plans, thereby, compromising the integrity and moral standing of these institutions... It is clear that Nigerians were denied a unique and historical opportunity to freely choose their leaders (NLC, 2007:1).

All these were confirmed by both local and international observer groups including; Domestic Election Observation Group (DEOG), National Democratic Institute (NDI), Human Rights Watch (HRW), Commonwealth Observer Group (COG), and European Union Observation Mission (EU-OM) whose reports on the elections were damning (Bland et al 2013:370; COG, 2007; DEOG, 2007; EU-OM, 2007; HRW, 2007; NDI, 2008). Their "reports showed that all external observers of the elections announced them a failure, a charade, and a fraud... The observers said the results of the Nigerian elections were not credible, pointing out that the elections did not meet elementary international standards for free and fair polling" (Okafor, 2008a:17). The NDI a US-based organization encapsulates this when it reports: During the 2007 elections, polling stations in many states opened hours late, closed early or failed to open at all. This represented a fundamental barrier to popular political participation in numerous places and most likely disenfranchised many prospective voters... such a delay in the delivery of essential electoral materials and in the opening of polling sites was unprecedented. In addition, the NDI delegation also observed the following serious irregularities in majority of the states visited: failure to display the voter register; inadequate supplies of voting materials; ballot papers that did not include all of the candidates; inadequate locations and facilities for voting and collation; lack of secrecy in voting; disenfranchisement due to errors in voter register; and underage voting (NDI, 2008:3)

Indeed, the cumulative effect of the serious widespread problems witnessed and identified with the 2007 elections made it uncertain whether the elections reflected the will of the Nigerian people (NDI, 2008:7). Similarly, the EU-EOM observes concerning the electoral management body: INEC lacked transparency in its decisions and did not provide important information on a number of issues, including the final number of candidates, the final number of voters per constituency and the number of ballot papers that were printed and distributed... the EU-EOM and other international observer missions received poor cooperation from INEC HQ and several INEC offices (Lagos, Ogun, Osun, Anambra, Cross River, Benue, Borno, Gombe, and Katsina States). Contrary to international best practice INEC made no provision for results to be posted at polling stations or published at superior levels of the election administration... Preparations by INEC to conduct elections were delayed throughout the process (EU-EOM, 2007:12).

Overall, it is "demonstrated that the country suffers from poor election administration" (Bland et al 2013:370). The problems of INEC are connected to two fundamental factors. Firstly, the President of Nigeria by the provision of the electoral Act 2006 appoints the chairman and members of the Commission. Secondly, INEC is funded by the federal executive controlled by the President (FGN-Electoral Act, 2006, 2010). These among others have given rise to the situation where "INEC lacks autonomy from the Presidency and is institutionally weak and unable to cope with the task of organizing free, fair and credible elections that meet universal standards" (Obi, 2011:378; see also EU-EOM, 2007:1; Omotola, 2010). Effectively, the administration of election has not been insulated from partisan politics and the manipulation of state managers (Adejumobi, 2007:14; Ibrahim, 2007b; International Crisis Group (ICG), 2007:2-4; Jinadu 2009; Okafor, 2008a:18; Omotola, 2010). Furthermore, the whole electoral process is tainted with corruption. Nigeria's democracy on a general note is "characterized by corruption and financial inducement in exchange of votes... Electoral officers are corrupted with cash" (NBA, 2014a:1, Press Release, 9 December). For as ASUU observed earlier, "money was freely used in exchange for votes" (ASUU, 2007:2). According to the immediate past chairman of INEC, "the role of money in Nigerian politics is very significant... The negative impact of vote buying is widely recognized" (Jega, 2012:8).

The NBA aptly captures this: The voters are corrupted with cash, bags of rice, salt and various gifts which corrupt the electoral system... We condemn this high level of corruption, as it inevitably impedes growth of democracy, discourages the demand for accountability from elected officers, and reduces their desire to provide dividends and deliverables of democracy for the people.

The resultant effect of financial and/or material inducement for votes is that voters cannot hold elected officers accountable for their performance in public offices in Nigeria. This no doubt leads to absence of accountability between elected officers and voters because elected public officers believe they have paid off the electorate and are therefore not accountable to any person (NBA, 2014a:1).

Afro barometer (2008) reports that 68% of voters in Nigeria said that politicians or their agents “usually offered money” for their votes. And the incidence of vote buying was more prevalent among the poor (Bratton 2008:4-6). Also, the NDI (2011:8) acknowledges this much in its account of the 2011 elections in Nigeria.

Consequently, the sizeable victory of the PDP in the Presidential elections of April 2007 has little to do with voting intentions (Ajayi, 2006a:61-62; Bratton, 2008:2-3; Edozie, 2008:141; Ibrahim, 2007a, 2007b). The PDP “swept the polls with 28 governorship seats out of 36, and 24 million votes to win the Presidency, trouncing its closest rival the Action Congress (now the Action Congress of Nigeria) with a difference of about 18 million votes (Adejumobi, 2007:15; Suberu, 2007:95).

At this point, it is salutary to mention that an improvement in the conduct of elections in Nigeria’s current multiparty/electoral democracy took place in April-May 2011 general elections and post-2011 governorship elections in Edo, Bayelsa, Cross River, Ondo and Sokoto States (INEC, 2011:26; Jega, 2011, 2012:6-7). The criticisms of previous elections and demands for electoral reforms led to some slight reforms of INEC including the appointment of Prof. Attahiru Jega, a former National President of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), as national chairman of INEC (ASUU, 2010; ICG, 2011a:8; NBA, 2009, 2007; NLC, 2010, 2009). The Late President Musa Yar’Adua- who took over political power from Obasanjo had in his inaugural address on 29th May 2007 condemned the election that led to his emergence as President for falling below minimum international standards and promised the reform of the electoral system (Yar’Adua, 2007). This resulted in his setting up on 28th August 2007 of a 22-member Electoral Reform Committee, headed by Justice Muhammadu Uwais a former Chief Justice of Nigeria (CJN) (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2008). So, the Federal Government as part of electoral reforms changed the leadership of INEC from Prof. Maurice Iwu as chairman of the Commission to Attahiru Jega. Jega’s appointment was hailed by not a few Nigerians based on his antecedents and pedigree as a scholar and former ASUU President (INEC, 2011:3; Joseph, 2010:2; Le Van and Ukata, 2012:3; Obi, 2011:378).

The 2011 general elections the first under Jega’s leadership of INEC were far better than that of 2003 and 2007. They were adjudged locally and internationally as the freest and the fairest under this dispensation (Le Van and Ukata, 2012:2; International Crisis Group, 2011a, 2011b). The NBA in a press statement after collating reports from its ‘independent election monitoring groups’ substantiates this when it states in part: INEC must be congratulated for conducting a transparently credible election so far... It is on record that this is the first general elections where alarming reports of disenfranchisement in the way of sub-serviced polling stations, inability of registered voters to vote, violence at polling stations and the hijacking of ballot boxes were recorded at the barest minimum. There is a consensus among observers, local and international that covered the election so far that the whole process was free and fair (NBA, 2011:1, Press Statement, 20 April).

Similarly, the NLC admits that “despite the flaws, the April 16 2011 presidential polls and other elections conducted by the INEC have to a large extent met the required international minimum standards of transparency, fairness and letting the votes count” (NLC, 2011:2). The NDI agrees no less when it reports that “Nigeria’s 2011 general elections, the fourth since the return to civilian rule in 1999, were significantly more transparent and credible than the three previous polls in 1999, 2003 and 2007... These polls represented a key milestone in the country’s democratic development” (NDI, 2011:7). In conclusion here, multiparty/electoral democracy has improved relatively lately. However, it is still littered and submerged by other deficits or negative outcomes that reinforce its flaws. The chapter turns to these.

3.1 Internal Democracy, Ideology and Opposition Political Parties in Nigeria’s Multiparty/Electoral Democracy

The way political parties in Nigeria’s current democratic process have conducted their internal affairs and the ideas that drive their actions and activities raises concern for counter-elites civil society organizations. Political ideology is at the very heart of party politics being a vehicle for mobilization. Political parties jostle for votes and seek the mandate of the electorate through well defined party programmes rooted in most cases in the parties’ ideology (Omotola, 2009b; Howarth, 2001; van de Walle, 2003:304). As observed and this is germane here, political parties in Nigeria like in most of Africa “are not easily placed in a traditional left-right spectrum.

The policy differences which define them rarely appear to be about ideological issues relating to the economy or the role of the state within the economy” (Bleck and van de Walle, 2011:1127). Besides, the political parties in the country lack internal democracy in their operations (Adejumobi, 2007:13; Oyovbaire, 2007:24-25; Suberu, 2007:101). These explain partly and reinforce the flaws in the country’s democracy. The NBA acknowledges the lack of internal democracy and ideology in Nigeria’s multiparty/electoral democracy, which makes it difficult for mobilizing the electorate. The NBA avers that: The electoral process is marred by factors such as, poor or totally non-existent internal democracy mechanism for political parties; apparent lack of philosophy and/or ideology in all the political parties; reliance on poster politics; and inability to communicate with the electorate (NBA, 2011:2).

Also, the NLC corroborates whilst addressing critical national issues as is customary with its activities especially during May Day rallies: At the political level... the political parties not only lack internal democracy, but are bereft of ideology and effectual programme for the people. Of much concern has been the penchant of our politicians to win elections at all cost and engaging in internecine struggle for power in a do-or-die fashion (NLC, 2011:7-8).

Oyovbaire intervenes to further explain this dominant deficit of Nigeria’s democracy: From only three registered political parties which contested the 1999 elections, the number rose curiously to fifty by 2005. But these political parties are known largely for their barrenness in ideas and ideological disposition, and owned by a handful of persons with which to trade and bargain for material benefits... they operate as emergency structures with barely articulated purposes and resources to compete for power... We are under civil rule and aspire to democracy, yet the constitutional structure of political parties and the party system are devoid of the essential elements of internal democracy... We do not have a party system in aid of governance and political development (Oyovbaire, 2007:24-25).

In this context, it does not seem clear what differentiates one political party from the others, that is, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) from All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) from Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) from Progressive Peoples Alliance (PPA), and Labour Party from Democratic Peoples Party (DPP) - (Amucheazi and Ibeanu, 2008b:5; Ephraim, 2013; Komolafe, 2013; Soludo, 2013; Usman, 2013). Prof. Soludo (the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria under President Obasanjo) encapsulates this widespread deficit when he avers: When election approaches, each party hires consultants to write up glossy ‘blueprint’ or ‘manifesto’- with everything in it, except telling Nigerians HOW they will implement/finance them. In content, they all promise the same thing. Politicians talk about what to ‘give’ the people, but hardly anyone addresses the question of ‘HOW’ (Soludo, 2013).

Again, the NDI observes that “most party primaries were conducted under opaque conditions and several party leaders hand-picking many of the candidates” (NDI, 2011:8). For as Freedom House corroborates, “Despite nominally open primary process... the public has virtually no input on how parties select candidates” (LeVan and Ukata, 2012:1). The ruling PDP particularly “chooses its leaders without meaningful transparency or public accountability” (LeVan, 2014:116). Jega contends that the situation is worsened by the fact that the Electoral Act “forbids INEC from removing a candidate from election list, once he was submitted by the party, for whatever reason, and we ended up with parties sending us people who did not even go through democratic primaries” (Jega, 2012:5). The Electoral Reform Committee (ERC), succinctly notes that “the structure of the political parties is such that internal democracy is virtually absent” (ERC, 2008:26).

ASUU avers that one of the fundamental reasons for the ‘handpicking of candidates’ is that: The ruling class does not believe in free and fair elections; all the ruling parties are investments by the wealthy; the people have no say in them (ASUU, 2011:11, Press Conference, 14 December).

The political parties, more often than not, operate like “electoral machines”: owned and funded by a few powerful individuals who behave like business men or “political entrepreneurs” whose main driving force is to make profits and reap bonanzas in the form of contracts and political appointments (Adejumobi, 2007:13; NLC, 2011:7; Obi, 2011:376, 2004:3; Ojo, 2002:16). Indeed, the lack of internal democracy in the political parties in Nigeria remains a dominant deficit especially in the ruling PDP (Adejumobi, 2007:13). A notable case is that of Rivers State where one Celestine Omehia was ‘selected’ by the leadership of the ruling PDP as its governorship candidate to run for the general election of 2007.

Omehia eventually won and consequently became the Governor of Rivers State. Omehia on record neither picked a nomination form nor was screened by INEC. But he was brought in to replace Rotimi Amaechi who was originally elected by the party to contest the 2007 general elections and who was duly accredited and screened by INEC (Onoyume and Onah, 2007; Yagboyaju, 2011:98). However, Amaechi went to court and the Supreme Court in a landmark judgment on 25th October 2007 nullified the election of Celestine Omehia as governor and ordered that Rotimi Amaechi be sworn-in as the rightful candidate of the PDP and governor of Rivers State. The Supreme Court ruled that in the “eyes of the law Amaechi remains the candidate of the PDP in the April 14 election and should be sworn in immediately” (Olasanmi, 2007), having satisfied the provisions and requirements of the 1999 constitution and the electoral Act 2006. And as aptly observed “The assault on internal democracy within the political parties is a major cause of serious cracks within the rank and file” (INEC, 2012:107).

One of the consequences of the above is the incessant cases of ‘cross-carpeting’ or ‘defection’ of politicians from one party to another. ASUU proffers an explanation in one of its interventions on ‘The State of the Nation’: Politically, Nigeria is in a precarious position... The Nigerian ruling class is in disarray, manifesting itself in cross-carpeting to other parties at will... They are in PDP today, ACN tomorrow, CPC the next, return to PDP or move to Labour or some other party tomorrow (ASUU, 2011:11-12).

The most popular case is the defection of the Vice-President Atiku Abubakar from PDP to ACN in 2007 even while still in office, just so that he will actualize his Presidential ambition when his boss President Obasanjo refused to support his aspiration (Bratton, 2008:2; Obasanjo, 2014:189-193). Also, the defection of Governor(s) Isa Yuguda of Bauchi State, Aliyu Shinkafi of Zamfara State, and Saminu Turaki of Jigawa all from ANPP to the PDP (Aleyomi, 2013; Mbah, 2011:6). This situation not only underscores the fluidity of the country’s multiparty/electoral democracy but also the crass opportunism of the political elites (Ihonvbere, 2006). Obi interjects to reaffirm the point: It explains why those who lose out in the intra-party struggles often cross to the rival party or set-up a new one which they can abandon once the conditions in their old party turn favourable. Illustrations of this include the cases of former Vice President Atiku, who returned to the PDP from the ACN (after losing the 2007 presidential election), and the governors of Abia and Imo states, Theodore Orji and Ikedi Ohakim, who returned to the PDP from the PPA and APGA on whose platforms they won the governorship election in 2007 respectively (Obi, 2011:375).

The NLC reminds us that what drives ‘cross-carpeting’ of Nigerian politicians and indeed the political elites is the desire to share in public treasury (NLC, 2011:7-8). In his “Struggling for Seats in a Sinking Boat”, Madunagu argues that the PDP being the ruling party at the centre like other political parties is “a party of ‘strange bedfellows’, simply providing the largest platform for sharing the ‘national cake’” (Madunagu, 2013). And as usefully observed, the significant financial resources of incumbent governments in much of Africa including Nigeria makes it difficult if not impossible for opposition political parties to effectively challenge and topple the ruling party at elections (Rakner, 2011:1109). According to Campbell, the ruling party is the forum in which most of Nigeria’s grim struggle and contestation for political power is done (Campbell, 2010:2). This perhaps, explains Thomson’s observation also in the wider African context that “political competition within post-colonial Africa was now limited to the in-fighting within the state elite itself” (Thomson, 2010:277).

Furthermore, it is observed that a related deficit of multiparty/electoral democracy in Nigeria that impairs popular participation and undermines the whole democratic process is the overwhelming powers of the President and Governors of the States over the party (Abdul-Jelil, 2009). The party structure has four layers namely: federal, state, local government and ward with their respective executive committees. The power structure is patterned after Nigeria’s federalism where power is centralized, from where the President together with the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the party takes most decisions including determining party executives and candidates for elective positions at various levels (INEC, 2012:28; Jega, 2012). As heads of the executive arm of government at the federal and state levels respectively, the President and Governors also double as leaders of their parties. This confers on them extra-ordinary powers to determine who gets what, when, how and where. This has encouraged dictatorial tendencies manifested in the prevalence of what some have described as ‘godfatherism’ (Albert, 2005:82; Campbell, 2010:2; Okafor, 2008b:5; Sklar et al, 2006:101). That is, the situation in which formal structures and rules in political contestation do not matter but the personal dictates of “one man” or “big man” (Beckman, 2010:161-162; Bratton and van de Walle, 1997:7, Joseph 2008:99-102; Lynch and Crawford, 2011:282-285; Lindberg, 2004:62; Oyovbaire 2007:15; 2010:8-9; Thomson, 2010:277; Uddhammar, 2011:1169).

According to the Trade Union Congress (TUC), this has grave consequences for institutional-building in a democracy. It notes: One of such signs of danger is the dearth of institutions. What we have today in our country is pre-dominance of powerful individuals as President or head of state, Governors, ministers etc, instead of powerful institutions. No country makes progress anywhere in the world where we have powerful individuals as opposed to powerful institutions (TUC, 2013:2, Press Statement, 16 December, Lagos).

It is axiomatic that building a democracy is linked to long-term efforts that are rooted in the development of internal structures and processes (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997; Haynes, 2002). However, 'one man' politics undermines institutional-building and party discipline, and promotes lawlessness in the party system. According to INEC, the party system "has fallen prey to pressures from executive (the president and Governors) pre-eminence at the national and state levels by governing parties and the national executive of the parties, and the overbearing 'godfathers', all of whom virtually handpick party political and public political officeholders" (INEC, 2012:106). The President and Governors "are mini-emperors; they are lords and masters with access to the state treasury and with powers to favour whomsoever please them" (Azeez, 2009:5). This tendency was popularized under the Obasanjo Presidency, whose eight-year rule, the NBA recalls "was characterized by electoral fraud, impunity, disrespect for the rule of law, and abuse of human rights" (NBA, 2007:2). Obasanjo was too dominant to the extent that under him the ruling PDP changed its leadership at the party and National Assembly levels at will without due regard to the rule of law (Amucheazi and Ibeanu, 2008b:5; Kifordu, 2011:2). The ruling PDP is so fragile because it lacks internal discipline, a clear political platform or any obvious principle, and it generates little popular enthusiasm (Campbell, 2010:2). The PDP from 1999 to 2014 produced 9 national party chairmen namely; Solomon Lar, Barnabas Gemade, Audu Ogbah, Ahmed Ali, Vincent Ogbulafor, Okwesilieze Nwodo, Kawu Baraje, Bamanga Turkur, and Adamu Mauzu with the President deciding in most part who becomes the chairman, what decisions he takes and when he leaves office (see Adeniyi, 2013). Komolafe in his "Politics Without Ideology" sums up the points when he writes: Perhaps nothing demonstrates the utter lack of programmatic focus more than the way the PDP chairmanship changes like the weather. Every President elected on the platform of the party produces his own tailor-made chairman. And when the political size of the President fails to match that of the chairmanship, the chairman is swiftly replaced. So, instead of the chairman leading the party in making sure the President keeps to the party's philosophy in programme implementation, the President reshapes the party in his own image (Komolafe, 2013).

Also, the PDP has produced many 'godfathers' in keeping faith with 'one man' or 'big man' politics. Notable among them are Lamidi Adedibu in Oyo State popularly called "the strong man of Ibadan politics" (Abdul-Jelil, 2009; Ola, 2007), Olusola Saraki in Kwara State, and Emeka Ofor and later Chris Uba in Anambra State (Obi, 2011:376-377; Olarinmoye 2008:071-072). These individuals or 'godfathers' with the tacit support of the party leadership including the Presidency determined in their respective States those who occupied political offices, especially the governor of the State (Onu and Biereenu-Nnabugwu, 2008). According to Campbell (2010:2), the dominance of godfatherism in PDP and the travails of the ruling party are reflections of Nigeria's political underdevelopment. The Federal Government opines that personalized rule manifesting in godfatherism weakens the processes of democracy and the integrity of the operators (FGN, 2014:33). Onu and Biereenu-Nnabugwu (2008:74-75) graphically chronicles how the phenomenon of godfatherism manifested in the war of attrition between former President Obasanjo and former Governor Chris Ngige of Anambra state. A war that virtually undermined all democratic institutions including the Nigerian Police, judiciary, the rule of law, political parties, and freedom (ASUU, 2011:11-12; NLC, 2009:10-11; Obasanjo, 2014:193-204).

In conclusion, the aforementioned features provide the ground not only for the flourishing of a dominant party state but also the difficulty of having political power alternation and viable opposition party system. It is to this the paper turns.

4.1 Dominant Party State, Political Power Alternation, and Opposition Parties in Nigeria

One of the thorny issues in Nigeria's more than 16 years of multiparty/electoral democracy is political power alternation. That is, "the transfer of authority from one governing party to opposition" (Joseph, 2010). Political power alternation or 'turnover of power' is considered as one of the ways of measuring progress in a democracy (Bratton, 2004; Huntington, 1991; Lindberg, 2004; van de Walle, 2003). Political power alternation between political parties "reinforce the legitimacy of political institutions and deepen democratic consolidation" (We ghorst and Lindberg, 2011:1193).

Except in a few cases particularly in South-Western states of the country namely; Oyo, Ondo, Osun, Ekiti, and Ogun States where the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) and the Labour Party (LP) dominate, the PDP controls most parts of the country including the federal government. The experiences shows that since 1999, the PDP remains dominant and lords over few contenders- the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), Progressive Peoples Alliance (PPA), All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), representing a largely weak and divided opposition (Obi, 2011:369-370; Le Van and Ukata, 2012:1). The PDP has been in control of the Presidency since 1999 producing 3 Presidents namely; Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007); Musa Yar'Adua (2007-2010); and Goodluck Jonathan (2010-2014).

Tables 4.1.1, 4.1.2 and 4.1.3 below also provide evidence of the dominance of the PDP in the number of states and membership of the National Assembly (i.e. the Senate and Federal House of Representatives). Table 4.1.1 shows that the PDP has 23 governors representing 64.2% of 36 and the remaining 13 governors (i.e. 35.8%) are shared by the opposition parties. Similarly, table 4.1.2 demonstrates that the PDP has a total of 71 (i.e. 65.1%) of the Senators, whilst the opposition parties have 38 (i.e. 34.9%). Finally, table 4.1.3 shows that whilst the PDP has 206 (i.e. 57.2%) out of 360 members of the Federal House of Representatives, the opposition parties have 154 (i.e. 42.8%) members.

Table 4.1.1: Distribution of the 36 State Governments of Nigeria: 6 August, 2012

Political Party	Number of States
PDP	23
ACN	6
ANPP	3
APGA	2
LP	1
CPC	1

Table 4.1.2: Distribution of the 109 seats in the Senate of the National Assembly of Nigeria: 6 August, 2012

Political Party	Number of Seats
PDP	71
ACN	18
ANPP	7
LP	4
APGA	1
CPC	7
DPP	1

Source: National Assembly of Nigeria www.nass.gov.ng

Table 4.1.3: Distribution of the 360 seats in the Federal House of Representatives of the National Assembly of Nigeria: 6 August 2012

Political Party	Number of seats
PDP	206
ACN	66
CPC	35
ANPP	32
APGA	7
LP	7
Accord	5
PPN	1
DPP	1

Source: National Assembly of Nigeria www.nass.gov.ng

From the counter-elites interpretation, the PDP dominance undermines opposition and encourages authoritarianism. According to the NBA, political opposition which is anchored on the democratic principle of plurality of political parties not only promotes freedom of choice but also constrains authoritarianism (NBA,

2001:1, Press Statement, 8 March). For Uddhammar and his co-authors (2011:1057-1066), the democratic process is impaired when opposition political parties falter. Opposition political parties not only provide alternative platforms for citizens' participation in politics and policy choices, but also offer significant challenge and check on the ruling party. The NLC attributes the lack of a viable opposition political party to the intolerance of the ruling party to opposition that manifests in the use of state power against opposition (NLC, 2015:1, 1 January). To this end, the NLC notes that: On the political opposition front little has been done to deepen democratic culture in the polity as government through the institutions of the state, especially the police demonstrated unacceptable intolerance of political opposition (NLC, 2015:1).

For as ASUU corroborates, "The Federal Government is intolerant of dissent and opposition" (ASUU, 2004b:3). The INEC admits that for the ruling party, "political power is acquired and monopolized as a force for repression of oppositional forces and intolerance of diversity" (INEC, 2012:xiv). An intolerant state controllers only help to impede the consolidation of democracy. In a democracy, it is trite that 'the culture of tolerance' among political actors including the elites and the opposition helps in embedding democracy in a society (see Haynes, 2001b:5). What is more, politics for the ruling elites remains a zero-sum contest, given the huge benefits of controlling state power (Ake, 1996:7-8; Amuwo, 2009; Jinadu, 2009; Tar and Shettima, 2010). This is the point that EU-COM makes when it observes that: The most visible party, the PDP was often accused of the use of state resources, mainly vehicles and some reports indicate restriction for opposition parties on accessing state-owned spaces and assets. It should be noted that the line between the ruling party and the state is often blurred. This lack of a clear distinction may have led to an uneven playing field for the opposition (EU-EOM, 2011:27-28).

INEC admits that "The most grievous deficits emanate from the huge... partisan use of state resources... through abuse of the power of incumbency by governing parties to obtain unfair electoral advantage" (INEC, 2012:xvii). Besides, Weghorst and Lindberg remind us that in new democracies, "opposition parties find it hard to win elections... mainly due to fraudulent electoral processes" (Weghorst and Lindberg, 2011:1208).

This is compounded as earlier noted by the inconsistency of politicians who are in the habit of defecting from one party to another especially to the PDP for sheer opportunism or to partake in the sharing of the 'national cake' (ASUU, 2011:11-12; Madunagu, 2013; Obi, 2011:375). Political opportunism vitiates the capacity of opposition political parties and reduces the chances of political power alternation in Nigeria's multiparty/electoral democracy particularly at the centre (Adeniyi, 2011a; Rakner, 2011:1109). The Nigerian experience only confirms van de Walle's observation concerning party politics in the wider African context. He states:

Whichever was able to control the chief executive's office, and attain a winning legislative majority following the first election, was then able to consolidate power... it was able to use all the resources to marginalize the opposition and reconsolidate power in the second and third elections (van de Walle, 2003:301).

Freedom House reckons that this situation underscores the problem in "dominant-party states in which multiparty systems exist on paper but genuine electoral competition is suppressed". Elections, "present little or no risk of defeat to incumbent even when such an individual and/or party has performed woefully in office and may be very unpopular with the electorate" (Freedom House, 2006 quoted in Adeniyi 2011a:1-2). Moreover, lack of credible opposition tends to incentivize politicians to pursue their narrow/personal interests rather than acting as agents of development (Weghorst and Lindberg, 2011:1194). For as Haynes aptly puts it in another way "political elites may formally comply with the dictates of democratic politics yet still behave in unhelpful ways, by showing little or no regard for democratic principles and with little interest in developing public policy to benefit most citizens" (Haynes, 2002:250).

This is the tragedy of opposition weakness in Nigeria's democratic process (Adeniyi 2011a; Rakner, 2011; Rakner and van de Walle, 2009). What these observations suggest is that the conducive environment that is critical for the flowering of a competitive multiparty political system has been largely absent in Nigeria (Adebanwi and Obadare, 2011:328; Banwo, 2008:138-139; Bratton and van de Walle 1997:279; Fawole, 2005; Obi, 2008a, 2011; Tar and Shettima, 2010:136). At this point, the paper now turns to examining further the overall implications of Nigeria's flawed multiparty/electoral democracy on the Nigerian state and for popular empowerment.

5.1 Implications of Nigeria's Multiparty/Electoral Democracy

Remarkably, the implications of Nigeria's multiparty/electoral democracy are as mixed and multifarious as they are far-reaching. They range from the political to the socio-economic, from the negative to the positive (Lynch and Crawford, 2011). This is somewhat like the debate between demo-optimists and pessimists (Fraser, 2014:151-152; Haynes, 2001b:1-2; Lindberg, 2004; Uddhammar, 2011:1169-1170). The paper examines the issues beginning with the positives.

Firstly, the regular holding of elections in Nigeria since 1999 suggests optimism and gradual development in the process. President Goodluck Jonathan in his annual 'Democracy Day' broadcast on 29th May 2014, which is "a day dedicated to reflect on the meaning, gains and sustainability of democracy in Nigeria" (FGN, 2014:1), makes a similar point as if to affirm that: Nigeria, has certainly come a long way and made notable progress since our first 'Democracy Day' on May 29, 1999 when the military finally relinquished power and handed over to a democratically-elected government... As a result of our collective efforts since 1999, democratic governance is now entrenched in our nation and institutions... The scope of fundamental rights and liberties enjoyed by our people over the past 15 years has been expanded beyond measure (Jonathan, 2014).

There is increased opening of the political space with the government committed to protecting the rights and freedoms of Nigerian people (FGN, 2014:37-41). Freedom House considers Nigeria to be 'partly free' but not an electoral democracy, as freedom rating, civil liberties, and political rights stand at 4.5, 5, and 4 on the scale of 7 respectively (Freedom House, 2013a, 2013b). In general, citizens, organizations and mass media express opinions rather freely (BTI, 2012:6).

Beyond this, the subordination of the military to constitutional will of the people since 1999 is considered "perhaps the very tiny ray of light in what had for more than five decades been a canvass of political tragedies" (Ezekwesili, 2014). It is reported that 68% of Nigerians despite the flawed nature of the country's democracy "prefers democracy to any other kind of government" (Lewis and Alemika 2005: vii; see also Afrobarometer, 2009; Bratton 2004; BTI, 2012:11; Obianyo, 2008:53; Okafor, 2008b:1). This much is corroborated by another report which demonstrates that 74% of Nigerians favour democratic rule against military government (Ajayi, 2006b:123-124). The point is that for the very first time Nigeria has successfully without interruption transitioned from one civilian government to another on a consistent basis producing 4 Presidents to date.

Furthermore, the performance of the electoral management body-INEC in 2011 and post-2011 governorship elections in Edo, Ondo, Bayelsa, Cross Rivers, Kogi, Adamawa, and Sokoto States in which opposition parties namely, ACN and LP won in Edo and Ondo states respectively has also given cause for optimism for political power alternation at the federal level (FGN, 2014:39-41; INEC, 2011:26). The Federal Government readily admits that "In the past, the major hindrance to consolidation of democracy in Nigeria was the impossibility of the ruling party at the centre losing elections, even in states or communities where it is evidently unpopular" (FGN, 2014:40). However, this is changing as the Federal Government under President Jonathan has "fostered a competitive electoral system by deliberate refusal to deploy the instruments of federal power to determine outcomes of election in Nigeria as shown in Edo, Ondo states" (FGN, 2014:40).

Similarly, in a press statement on the successful conduct of the governorship election in Ondo State on October 20th 2012 which led to the re-election of Olusegun Mimiko of the Labour Party, the NLC re-echoes the emerging feeling of democratic optimism in the country when it argues: The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has so far proven to Nigerians that under a patriotic and focused leadership, the Commission can conduct a free and fair election. The Attahiru Jega leadership since assumption of office has demonstrated a high sense of responsibility, patriotism, sincerity, and commitment to a credible electoral process and this is what we need as a nation for democracy and good governance to grow (NLC, 2012a:1).

The EU-EOM argues with particular reference to the 2011 general elections that despite the operational and logistic challenges characterizing the organization of elections in Nigeria, "INEC nevertheless managed to organize the 2011 elections guaranteeing overall effective voting rights to Nigerian citizens" (EU-EOM, 2011:4). Like in other African countries, these events "testify to the fact that real political competition is becoming more common" (Weghorst and Lindberg, 2011:1208). Haynes recalls that democracy as shown in the experience of Western countries such as Britain and the United States "gradually evolved over a long period of time- decades or longer" (Haynes, 2001a:4).

In short, “to develop democracy to the point of consolidation takes time and continuous efforts” (Haynes, 2001b:5). Effectively, elections in Nigeria are becoming regular mechanism for selecting leaders. This, “reflects the growing recognition (however reluctant) by leaders that to maintain their legitimacy in the eyes of both their citizens and international community, they must subject themselves to elections in which opponents have at least a theoretical possibility of winning” (Posner and Young, 2007:127-130). Indeed, the regular conduct of elections suggests that the country is demonstrably “on a slow but steady track to democracy” (Lindberg, 2006b:149).

However, some of the counter-elites interpretations advanced in this paper point to negative outcomes and need for caution in the assessment of democracy in Nigeria. This only reflects as observed in transitional democracies that, “despite the positive features, however, democracy remains shallow and troubled” (Carothers, 2002:10; see also Le Van and Ukata, 2012:1). Indeed, the challenges associated with democracy in Nigeria as in much of the developing world, “has given way to more sober appraisals about the current health of democratic system” (Rakner et al 2007:11).

The Nigerian state as an institutional apparatus for governance is “first and foremost an agency in the hands of the political elites who manipulate it in achieving desired objectives” (Tar, 2009:5). It is the thinking from some advocates of multiparty/electoral democracy that elections will redirect the affairs of the state and change its authoritarian character (Animashaun, 2009; Fawole, 2005; Obianyo, 2008:42; Odion-Akhaine, 2008; Olaitan, 2006a:65-68, 2006b). However, from the counter-elites interpretation, multiparty/electoral democracy has scarcely changed the authoritarian character of the state. To this end, the NBA retorts just to put the issue in perspective:... years of civil democracy has been characterized by illiberal democracy. Democracy in Nigeria has no rule of law content. The constitution is largely ignored and many democracy scholars view Nigeria as extremely fragile and weak. The Nigerian state is semi authoritarian. Nigeria’s latest experience of democratic government since our last cycle that started May 29, 1999, has continued to present unique challenges and profound strains (NBA, 2007:1). ASUU states that the Nigerian state “has been an assembly of greedy, corrupt and dictatorial instrument of oppression” (ASUU, 2009:1). It is a state where members of the ruling class including the President, Governors, and Senators act with impunity and above the law (Alapiki, 2015:26). The NLC reminds us if only to buttress that: Although the country has had 15 years of unbroken democracy but the state continues to exhibit “serial acts of impunity, abuse of human rights, harassment of the media, the disruption of peaceful protests... (NLC, 2014a:1, Communiqué, 15 August).

According to Freedom House, though Nigeria is ‘partly free’ but political and civil liberties have dwindled, with the largest decreases in freedoms of expression and association (Freedom House, 2014a:1, 2014b:12). Indeed, despite being ‘partly free’, “At times however, individuals and organizations expressing critical views are harassed by state security services” (BTI, 2012:6). This suggests as has been observed in much of Africa that the Nigerian state under the control of very conservative and corrupt political forces, has survived the ‘changes’ after so-called multiparty elections (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997:235-236; Flanary, 1998; Ihonvbere, 1996b:28; Olaitan, 2006a, 2006b, Fawole, 2005; Obi, 2008a, 2004a).

In this context, Nigeria at the very least especially in relation to the state is fundamentally a reflection of “facade democracy”- a transition to a democratic system with a democratic exterior but lacking genuine change in the internal workings in terms of values, norms and the nature of interactions of actors (Haynes, 2001a, 2001b). The process has an outward appearance of democracy with hardly any of the substance (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997:235-236; Carothers, 2002; Schedler, 2002:36-37). What is further suggested as Haynes again alludes though in the broader context of Africa but which finds resonance here is that: Democratic transitions did not lead to regimes qualitatively different from their antecedents because institutional structures, deeply ingrained in the societies and politics of most African countries, could not be changed in a fundamental way simply because there had been relatively free and fair elections (Haynes, 2001a:136).

In many ways, Nigeria’s multiparty/electoral democracy appears to feature more of the attributes of “illiberal democracy” (Engberg and Ersson, 2001; Zakaria, 1997), and “competitive” or “electoral” ‘authoritarianism’ that pervades the developing world ever since the inception of the “third wave” (Levitsky and Way, 2002; Lindberg, 2006a, 2009; Rodan and Jayasuriya, 2012; Thomson, 2010). Also, the prospect of democracy delivering dividends or popular empowerment remains elusive. The counter-elites perspective appear to capture and interpret democracy in such a way that transcends the conventional interpretation associated with the conduct of election to focusing on social welfare and justice (see Ake, 2000, 1996, 1994; Amuwo, 2010; Bleck and van de Walle, 2011; Bratton and Mattes, 2001; Lynch and Crawford, 2011; Rakner et al, 2007; Zuern, 2012).

This, perhaps, is part of the ‘uniqueness’ or ‘exceptionalism’ of democracy in Nigeria (Ake, 1993; Lynch and Crawford, 2011:276; Olukoshi, 2011). We are reminded that: There is a growing recognition that the holding of elections alone does not offer a cure for the deeper political and social problems besetting states in many developing countries. In particular, the inability of many of these new democracies to meet the demands and basic needs of their citizens- including economic development and welfare (Rakner et al 2007:11).

To this end, “assessments of democracy’s prospects in Africa- including Nigeria- should attend more closely to democracy as more than a set of rules for managing power struggles among elites. In the context of the great material deprivation of the masses of the people, democracy is an avenue by which their legitimate aspirations for a better future can be expressed and claims for redress made” (Joseph, 2008:96). In Nigeria as in much of Africa people “care deeply about many substantive issues” (Bleck and van de Walle, 2011:1139). It is suggested that electoral authoritarianism in the country prevents representative governance and denies people the benefits of the political process (Thomson, 2010:279).

According to the NLC, democracy should be measured in terms of the way the system provides for welfare needs of the people (NLC, 2010:4). However, the NBA argues that the ruling class has not used democracy to empower the people by “the improvement of the quality of lives of our people”. Noting that the democratic process and the institutions “are largely ineffective in representing the aims and aspirations of our people for better life” (NBA, 2010:1, World Press Briefing, Abuja, 29 September, 2011:2). Rather, “in today’s Nigeria, many elected public officers have taken to more politics and less governance. Provision of the dividends of democracy... has taken the back seat” (NBA, 2014b:5). The “political leadership in Nigeria has been characterized first and foremost by personal rather than the welfare interests of the people” (NLC, 2010:5-6). ASUU observes that: The ruling class does not believe in democratic elections, it specializes in election rigging; and politics have been practiced as competition for accumulation of wealth (ASUU, 2004a:3).

According to the NLC, the labour movement has become disillusioned with the political elites having realized “with pain that the motivation for seeking political power, and the zeal for office is not service but vainglory and self-aggrandizement” (NLC, 2014b:4). Indeed, ‘politics is the fastest path to wealth... through direct self-enrichment and state patronage’ (ASUU, 2005:6). Admittedly and this is the point, “political leaders spend more time in office scheming how to keep opponents at bay than on strategizing and evolving development policies that would improve the living standards of the people” (Ekekwe, 2015:36). This is dominant in new democracies where “politics is widely seen as stale, elite dominated domain that delivers little good to the country and commands equally little respect... and economic performance is frequently bad or even calamitous” (Carothers, 2002:9-10). What is more, under Nigeria’s democracy “The ruling class has failed. It cannot provide jobs, education, healthcare, affordable transport, roads, etc... is unable to protect the people from hunger...” (ASUU, 2011:11). Corroborating this, The NBA argues that beyond voting at elections, the Bar:

... expects security, the industrialization of the nation, the provision of basic amenities such as power, education, health, transportation and a peaceful environment for the conduct of business (NBA, 2011:2).

The TUC admits that the organization’s expectation that “politicians must work towards improving the national life of the citizenry has not been realized” (TUC, 2013:2). Besides, the NLC argues poignantly that: Since the transition from military to civilian rule in 1999... The Nigerian people, who had suffered under the yoke of military dictatorship, had looked forward with passionate enthusiasm to swift delivery of dividends of democracy. Regrettably, after a dozen years, the yawning gap between the rich and poor remains (NLC, 2011:6).

Furthermore, “the promise of civil rule since 1999 is yet to signal attainment of high standard of living for majority of Nigerians” (NLC, 2012b:1). It is reported that “Fewer citizens believe that democratic era has brought about improvements in such economic dimensions as availability of goods, employment, the general standards of living, social inequality, or the enforcement of property rights... (Lewis and Alemika, 2005:ix). The Federal Government readily admits this much when it states *inter alia*: Studies have also shown an abysmal performance of office holders in their quest to provide good governance and better living conditions for the people. Thus, Nigerians suffered from impoverishment of large number of peoples, corruption and mismanagement of funds, infrastructural decay, and lack of trust from the governed. Many citizens therefore viewed government in Nigeria as something distant from their interest, and governance has become for them an oppressive machine...

Majority of Nigerians acknowledge government as legitimate and committed to the extent that it improves the public welfare and responds to the needs of the citizens, competent in guaranteeing law and order, delivering public services; able to create an enabling environment for productive activities and equitably distributing Nigerian's vast natural and mineral resources to its populace (FGN, 2014:31-32)

For as Thomson argues, "After all, a significant element of political legitimacy is the ability of governors to supply adequate public services to the governed" (Thomson, 2010:276). Thus, Congress insists that for democracy to be valuable the political elites must "make democracy more benevolent and beneficial to the people" (NLC, 2014a:1). However, Afrobarometer reaffirms that "the various dimensions of democratic performance show substantial disenchantment among the Nigerian public" (Lewis, 2006:10). This appears a global trend in that there is "a general dissatisfaction with regime performance in new democracies" (Moller and Scaaning, 2013:97).

To put it pointedly, Nigeria under the current democratization remains among the most impoverished nations in the world in terms of life expectancy, maternal mortality (El-Choueiry et al, 2013:3). According to the NLC, "Life expectancy is only 47 years compared to 60 years ago" (NLC, 2011:6). The consistent poor HDI rating is an indication of poor socio-economic condition (see BTI, 2012:2; Soludo, 2012; UNDP, 2013, 2011). Mass poverty and unemployment remain defining features of contemporary Nigeria (see Mattes et al, 2013; National Bureau of Statistics, 2013, 2011a, 2011b; National Planning Commission, 2012, 2014). The fundamental result of the whole process is the engendering of 'democratization of disempowerment' (Ake, 1994). That is, a process whereby multiparty elections allow for the replacement of self-serving political elites of different parties, whilst lacking material/welfare benefits for majority of the people (Ake, 2000, 1994; Obi, 2008a; Obianyo, 2008; Zuern, 2012).

However, it is instructive to point out that some observers have faulted the interpretation of democracy offered above. They argue that such a maximalist interpretation of democracy risks overburdening the concept and places unrealistic expectations and/or demands on what democratic regimes should achieve by sheer virtue of being democratic (Rakner et al 2007:7). It is stressed that the purpose of democratically elected regime is not to strive to alter materially the position of the mass of citizens for the better, as an electoral democracy cannot necessarily guarantee such an outcome. This is because such a regime does not primarily exist to shift power and resources from the control often of a small group of elites to wider constituencies (Bratton, 2004:157; Bratton and van de Walle 1997:235-236; Haynes, 2001b:15).

In sum, whatever the arguments, the counter-elites interpretation offered here only highlights some of the negative outcomes of Nigeria's democracy including its lack of welfare/empowerment amidst the positives.

6.1 Conclusion

On the whole, multiparty/electoral democracy in Nigeria with regular elections and increased civil liberties has led to the verdict of progress and a sense of optimism. However, from a counter-elite perspective it is argued in this paper that despite the positives, Nigeria's multiparty/electoral democracy is deeply defective and has failed to address the substantive issues of popular empowerment and change in the behaviour of the political elites and the authoritarian character of the state. Considerably and given the deficits identified, Nigeria's democracy requires a more cautious and sober assessment that balances the positives against the negatives.

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