

Political Parties and Electoral Outcomes in Nigeria

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Abstract

Using the theoretical tool of structural-functionalism, this paper examines the role played by political parties in Nigeria's Fourth Republics in relation to electoral outcomes. Elections in the country have been characterized by massive rigging; violence and confusion that often lead to undemocratic rules either by military take over of government or institution of a non mass-oriented and autocratic civilian government. The paper argues that this situation is prevalent because political parties have not learnt to play according to rules by playing their expected duties to maintain a true democratic system. Some of the recommendations of the paper include ways to minimize the influence of money politics; the need for continued control of party formation, organization and operations by the Independent Electoral body; the need for parties to build strong membership and followership; the need for incumbents to resign before re-contesting elections; and the importance of imbibing a civic culture by the citizens.

Introduction

Electoral failures are always blamed on the government and its agencies like the Electoral Commission and the police. This is often not unconnected with the high expectations with which governments are looked upon in the society especially among developing countries. Governments are looked upon as agents of development, which have to

perform with a magic wand in the solution of all national problems. This over-reliance on the capacity of the government has the usual implication of absolving individuals and groups on whose support and cooperation the government must effectively operate, and point all accusing fingers to the government for political and economic failures. It also has the corollary effect of making the government less liberal in trying to meet up with its expectations and so giving the incumbents the feeling that any unchecked attempt to change power from them may lead to the collapse of the country.

Elections serve a significant example where the cooperation of individual citizens and various groups especially political associations and recognized parties with relevant government agencies is necessary for success. Elections are multi-dimensional activity in which many institutions are relevant and critical for a successful outcome. Even the involvement of governmental agencies in elections is to be minimal if the outcome of an election is to be considered free and fair. The political parties on the other hand, are central in elections and thus contribute significantly to its success or failure. Their activities in choosing and presenting credible candidates, conducting electioneering campaigns, participating in the actual elections and handling the outcome of elections and acting as a loyal opposition to the government have been crucial to the failure of Nigeria's three Republics. Even the transition from civilian to civilian government in 2003 in this Fourth Republic nearly went the way of others if not for the heavy involvement of the military, the police and the Electoral body in favour of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party in the conduct of the elections and handling the outcomes.

This paper tries to appraise the role of political parties in Nigeria towards the successes or failures of elections in the country. This is not a project that can be perfectly accomplished within the limit set for this paper. Rather, the core task of the paper is to theoretically highlight that activities of political parties have been very relevant to bad electoral outcomes in Nigeria, and subsequently to articulate what ought to be the expected roles of political parties to ensure better electoral outcomes especially in future elections in the country. The paper is arranged in five sections comprising the Introduction, the Theoretical Perspectives, A Brief Appraisal of Political Party Activity in Nigeria, The Role of the Political Party for Electoral Successes- a Recommendation, and the Conclusion.

Theoretical Perspectives

The important role of political parties towards electoral outcomes will be x-rayed in this paper using the theoretical framework of the structural-functionalism. Gabriel Almond, David Apter and William Mitchell are the best-known proponents of the structural-functional approach in political analysis. Gabriel Almond's version of this approach is more common among political analysts and is going to be discussed within the limits of the paper. Almond believes that specialized political structures exist in all political systems. But it is often misleading to study structures as a way to understanding political phenomena. This is because structures that look similar may be performing different roles in different political systems. A better understanding of political issues therefore, should be achieved by studying the functions rather than structures of political organs. The implication of this theory as explained by Nwosu and Ofoegbu (1986, 46) is 'that certain roles must be performed, if a given system is to persist'. This entails contextually that political parties have significant role to perform if a democratic electoral system must persist.

Political parties are among the six key political organs identified in any political system by Almond. As he observed with some of his associates, there exists 'within the political system six types of political structures-political parties, interest groups, legislatures, executives, bureaucracies and courts. Such structures are found in almost all modern political systems', (Almond, Powell, Strom and Dalton 2004,36). The important question then should be what functions are performed by these structures within a political system. For Almond seven functional categories are common in most political systems. These are political socialization and recruitment, interest articulation, interest aggregation, interest communication, rule making, rule application and rule adjudication. These seven are divided into two broad types, namely the political or input functions and the output or authoritative or governmental functions. The first four of these functions as mentioned above are functions that are most often carried out by individuals and groups within a political system such as the political party, interest groups and partially by some government agencies. But the last three functions i.e. the output, authoritative or governmental functions as belonging exclusively to the three arms of government- rule making (legislative), rule- application (Executive) and rule-adjudication (Judiciary).

Political parties play an important part in most of the input functions. Political parties are known to act as means of presenting

credible leaders to the electorate, means of political socialization of future leaders, institution for the aggregation of societal demands and conciliation of groups, staffing of the government machinery and above all, stabilization and legitimization of government (Bell in Mckay, 2001). Similarly, Shively (2001) enlists mobilization of the masses, recruitment and socialization of political leaders, acting as a source of political identity and as a channel of control as the main functions of a political party. The functions of socialization and recruitment of leaders and communication are seen as very fundamental to any political system by Almond. He refers to these as system functions, believing that they determine whether a system will be maintained or changed. (Almond, Powell, Strom and Dalton, 2004). In effect, the activity of political parties in Nigeria has been very significant to incessant electoral crisis that have befallen the country. As Bell (2001;78) remarked:

A democratic society has to provide a mode of consistent representation of relatively stable alignments or modes of compromise in its polity. If a party system, with its enforced mode of compromise, gives way, and 'issue politics' begin to polarize groups, then we have the classic recipe for what political scientists call 'a crisis of the regime' if not a crisis of disintegration and revolution

It is this thesis that this paper seeks to present arguing that political parties in Nigeria has not lived up to their expectations and had thus contributed significantly to the incessant frauds called elections in the country, the end point of which is undemocratic governance in the country be it military or civilian.

A Brief Appraisal of Political Party Activity in Nigeria

Iyare (2004) rightly observes that political parties in Nigeria will largely falter if assessed through the crucible of widely acknowledged characteristics of a political party system. According to him "virtually all of them are open to the vagaries and manipulation by a few moneybags and god fathers." He mentions some of the major characteristic defects of the party system in Nigeria. These range from poor membership, spineless

leadership, indiscipline, lack of ideological/policy uniqueness, poor finance to ineffective organization.

Political party originated in Nigeria and most colonial states as a nationalists movements. Thus, when the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), believed by many to be the first political party in Nigeria was formed by Herbert Macaulay in 1923, it was partly in reaction to the elective principle introduced by the Sir Clifford Constitution of 1922 and partly in response to the need to form a rallying point for the emergent educated class and students in the impending struggle against colonial rule. As a party, the NNDP was very limited both in scope and functions. Its activities were limited to Lagos and only three members of legislative council were elected. The legislative council was merely advisory at this time. Hence winning election to belong to it has little intent to the primary objective of a political party, which is to win and control political power. Furthermore, suffrage was highly limited as only adult male capable of a gross annual income of £100 (Ojo, 1973) were eligible. In reality very few members of the public qualified. These factors in effect constituted a debased notion of a political party and made the party elitist both in membership and operations. As the first political party, NNDP sowed a seed for future political party formation in the country, as most of its leaders were instrumental to the formation of subsequent political parties in the country.

The Nigeria Youth Movement (NYM), which at some time competed with the NNDP did not fair any better. Iyare (2004) describes it as being more intellectual than a mass based movement. More importantly, the movement is seen as the origin of ethnicisation of politics in Nigeria (Olagunju, Adele, and Oyovbare, 1993); Osadebey, 1978).

Ethnicity and Party Organization

As recorded by Osadebey in his autobiography (1978), it was the derogatory statement which had tribal insinuation made by one Mr. Kinston Gomez, a Lagosian against Mr. Akinsanya, an Ijebuman who contested a by- election against Mr. Ernest Ikoli that led to the exit of many non-Lagosians from the NYM when Mr. Gomez refused to withdraw the offending words. Since then the impact of ethnicity in Nigerian party activity has been tremendous. Most of the political parties that operated in Nigeria's four republics were formed along ethnic lines. The Action Group (AG), The Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD) have consistently maintained Yoruba

identity within the First, Second and Fourth Republics; The Igbos constituted the majority of membership of the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) and the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) in the First, Second and Fourth Republics; the North especially the Hausa/Fulani breed dominated the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) in the First Republic, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) had northern antecedents in addition to the PRP and the GNPP in the Second Republic, and the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) in this Fourth Republic. The aborted third Republic of the Babangida transition and later that of Abacha has not been mentioned not because party organization was free from ethnic bearings but because the military government highly regulated it. In the case of Babangida, it has been argued that it was to avoid a repeat of history that government registered the two parties - the Social Democratic Party and the National Republican Convention- to break the jinx of ethnicity and lack of spirit of compromise and give and take (Olagunju, Jinadu and Oyovbare, 1993). In the case of Abacha, party formation and organization was controlled by government to enable him transform to a civilian president. Thus the five parties registered by his government had elections into their offices and other party organizational activities coordinated by agents of the Abacha transmutation plan led by Wada Nas, Special Duties Minister, Major Hamza Al Mustapha, Chief Security Officer and Ahmed Gwarzo, National Security Adviser (Iyare, 2004). These parties, which have been described as, the five fingers of a leprous hand by Ige (1995) were: the United Nigeria Congress Party (UNCP), the Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN), the Congress for National Consensus (CNC), the Liberal Convention and the Grassroots Democratic Movement (GDM).

Despite the national outlook reflected in the names of most of the parties during the First and Second Republics, the membership and activity especially during their formative years were ethnic in character. The implication of ethnic considerations in party formation and activity for a country with over 250 ethnic groups is obvious. With the three major tribes always concentrated in some parties, other minority tribes have no choice than to fight for their own political identity through opting for a political party of their own leading to multiplicity of the party system. In all, the problem becomes how to form a party with a national outlook that can win elections or form a loyal opposition. While Nigeria has tended to produce one national party in all its republics either by way of manipulated membership or weak coalitions (the NPC-NCNC alliance in the First

Republic, the NPN in the Second and the PDP in the Fourth) as the ruling party, these parties have not been strong enough to face the challenges of government or opposition because of selfish and uncompromising attitude of Nigerian politicians. In most cases these national parties, which formed the government in various republics, realized the need to integrate the ethnic nationalities through establishing a kind of alliance or zoning of party posts and political offices. The problem here therefore is not the issue of multiparty system, which is recognized for its advantage of presenting more choices both in terms of leaders and policy direction for the government. The problem rather is the ability of parties formed along ethnic lines being able to transcend their parochialism to present a national outlook that is capable of being seen by many sections of Nigeria as representing their interest. On the other hand, the impact of a strong national party as an opposition is also crucial. The third Republic of Babangida's SDP and NRC had the potentiality of offering these two choices to the country. The first republic was forced into party coalition by the prevailed circumstances of no party being able to form a government without a coalition and the opposition without the same. In the fourth republic while the PDP may have been established as a party with a national outlook, opposition has equally been attempted through forming an association of other political parties. But because these coalitions either to form the government or opposition were not built on strong organizational framework and accepted ideologies/programmes by all concerned, it has not been able to stand temptations.

Multiplication of Parties in Nigeria

Each of the Nigeria's Four Republics featured a tendency to multipartism. About twenty-two political parties were known to have participated in the First Republic from 1960-1966. Five parties were recognized and later six in the Second, two and five respectively in the Babangida and Abacha stillbirth Third Republic, and Thirty-seven as at today in this Fourth Republic (see the appendix for list and names of the parties). This is short of the numerous political associations that have sought to be recognized as parties in each of the republics. Up to eighty-one political associations were counted in the First Republic at the advent of the military in January 1966 (Iyare, 2004); Fifty-three were known to exist when the ban placed on party politics was lifted in September 1978, though only seventeen applied for registration in the Second Republic; no fewer than fifty appeared in the political stable of Nigeria in the Third Republic while only

13 applied for registration (Olagunju, Adele and Oyovbare, 1993). In this Fourth Republic the number is still indefinite. While many have scaled registration hurdles, about twenty-two have further applied for registration and recognition as a party by INEC by June 2006; others are still indecisive whether to end up as a political party of a pressure group. While party formation has tended to be many, the actual performance of parties has portrayed a two party structure (Olagunju, Adele, and Oyovbare, 1993). This position is justified by the tendency to form coalition either to form government or loyal opposition as already discussed above.

Multiplicity of parties has contributed to the poor electoral outcomes in Nigeria. Without undermining the advantages of a multiparty system, it is obvious that Nigeria has not benefited and may not benefit in the near future from whatever advantages the system holds. This is because of the great animosity and selfishness with which party politics is still practiced in the country. Multipartism has been formed along ethnic and other divisive cleavages rather than on integrative and provision of unique choices to the electorate. A country that is still faced with the challenges of building a common identity and a sense of community and nationhood among its citizens must continue to adopt policies that hold significant hope for achieving such a task. Cleavages cannot be ruled out in any polity, but it is better to erect structures for cleavages that cut-cross than ones that will continue to cumulate over divisive issues.

The truth remains that multiplication of parties in Nigeria is not based on presentation of choices to the electorate but on selfish goals of few elites. It may be argued for instance, that though parties were formed along ethnic cleavages, no party in Nigeria has been able to show a marked degree of advancement of any particular ethnic interest. While their manifestoes reflect national interest, ethnicity is exploited to promote selfish political and economic interests. As discovered by the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (2003:31):

In competing for political positions, ethnic differences are sometimes used for selfish interest leading to heavy casualties among the masses that are not necessarily the beneficiaries of the economic gains of the coveted office.

Reasons for forming parties often include the desire to share in the government's grants to political parties and not necessarily to do any

serious electoral business. Already, some twenty political parties have gone to court to challenge the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) decision to share the 2006 N600 million annual grants for party elections. INEC has proposed to share the money in the ratio of 10:90 for equality to all registered parties and according to the number of seats possessed in the National Assembly respectively. While parties reserve the right to protest and challenge such actions, it is full-hardy to expect that the money should be shared equally without regard to the strength and population of electoral offices controlled by a party. Even Federal allocations are not allocated to the states and local governments on equality bases. Furthermore, while the importance of multiparty system is recognized, it must also be stated that a political party is not an interest group and hence must not exclusively identify with an interest of one social group, class, geographical region or ethnicity. As far as a political party aspires to rule a group, it tries to be a coalition for the interests of all groups within its constituency.

Multiplicity and ethnicization in party organization in Nigeria therefore is not always to achieve a wider range of choices for electorate but rather as a ploy to win the support of a group and make them vanguard for the fight of the inordinate ambition of the few political elites. In the north, south, and east and west of Nigeria, the same story of neglect, corruption, violence, assassination, nepotism, selfishness and unhealthy rivalry dominate the party system in Nigeria.

Though there is no extant study on the relevance of political party influence to regime performance in Nigeria, it may be defensible to claim that performance of Nigerian democratic regimes is more related to the personality of the incumbent of the political office than to that of his political party. The events in Anambra state during the regime of Dr. Chinwoke Mbadinuju and Dr. Chris Ngige in this Fourth Republic may serve as an example. The two governors of the state ruled in the midst of opposition from their godfathers- Sir Emeka Offor in the case of Dr. Mbadinuju and Chief Chris Uba in the case of Dr. Ngige. Both governors were of the same ruling PDP. The party had tended to support Dr. Mbadinuju and recognized him as the party leader in the state, while Ngige was not so favoured. At a time both Ngige and his godfather had to be expelled from the party only for the godfather to be re-admitted latter. While Ngige never received any support and protection from his party as the party leader in the state, the performance of his administration is better rated than that of Dr. Mbadinuju. Nigerians has not learnt the art of

choosing leaders based on the party's performance. Neither has the parties learnt to produce credible candidates so as to win elections. They rather rely on their ability to swindle the elections to their favour by any means possible. And this is where the issue of prebendalism and money politics comes in.

Prebendal Political Culture and Money Politics

While the multiparty system has been characteristic of Nigerian politics since the late 1950's, it must be stated that the main reason for it is not ethnic centrism (i.e ethnic-centred interests) or the need to offer choices as argued above. Rather, prebendalism and money politics are the key reasons. Richards Joseph (1991) qualifies Nigeria's prevalent mode of political behaviour as the prebendal culture. This according to him is a culture where politics is seen as the clearing-house for jobs, contracts, and official plunder. Nigerian politics and prebendalism are two sides of a coin. He writes:

Democratic politics and prebendal politics are two sides of the same coin in Nigeria; each can be turned over to reveal the other.... The system of prebendal politics enables divergent groups and constituencies to seek to accommodate their interest.... The system is often wasteful, unproductive, and contributes to the increasing affluence of the relative few, paltry gains for a larger number, and misery for the great majority of people. (Joseph, 1991:10)

Not only is prebendalism linked to money politics, it is inherently selfish and conflict- engineering. Continuing further, Joseph (1991:10) explains that

It is a self-satisfying system, which grants legitimacy to a pattern of persistent conflict, and since its modus operandi is to politicize ethnic, religious and linguistic differences, it serves to make the Nigerian polity a simmering cauldron of un-resolvable tension over which a lid must

regularly be clamped, and just as regularly removed.

The obvious consequence of this is that while there are many parties in Nigeria, “the people are progressively marginalized from decision making as a result of a heavily monetised and militarized polity dominated largely by ‘godfathers’ and their private militia and thugs” (Iyare, 2004:83). The importance of money in deciding who is important in party activity in Nigeria is so central that only the moneybags and their hirelings eventually occupy party and government positions. In that way, both the political party and the government are seen as extended ‘business organization’ of the moneybags who decide and appropriate ‘profits’ at their personal whims and caprices. Little need to say that in such circumstances, political parties cease to be an avenue for presenting credible candidates and programmes to the populace. Rather, it becomes an investment conglomerate where the most reliable ‘profit-driven managers’ must be selected to go into the government to maximize profit for the political investors. With this state of affair, why will the political terrain not be characterized by high-level corruption, violence and assassination? Why will the party organization not lack discipline and basic democratic principles such as free and fair elections as means of getting to political power? Why will preparation for elections not be understood in terms of distributing money and gifts to the electorate, recruitment of thugs and bribing of electoral agencies instead of an obsession with presenting and marketing candidates that will deliver enduring leadership to guarantee success for the party in subsequent elections? And why will election itself not be a minefield of violence and rigging?

Intolerance and Violence in Party Activity

Politics in Nigeria is seen as a do or die affair (Okeke, 2003). Most Nigerian politicians take success in election as sure as day or night. As Okeke (2003:91-92) remarks about this category of politicians:

It does not matter whether the people want them or not. It does not also matter whether they have programmes for the people or not. What matters to them and of course the only thing that matters is their ability to manipulate the defective political

system and impose themselves on the helpless people.

This political mentality exposes the parties to unhealthy rivalry. In fact intra-party rivalry, conflict, violence and murder seem to be higher in the present-day Nigeria than inter party ones. Nigerian politicians lack spirit of compromise, give and take and tolerance. It has not been uncommon to hear our politicians assert that they would either win or mar elections. Some even swear to die rather than loose elections. Facing elections with such dispositions can only lead to thuggery, violence and murder of opponents who are potential threats. Okoigun (2000:37) has observed that thuggery and violence are significant issues in Nigerian party activities. In his words:

Thuggery is one of the main sources of violence during elections. The maintenance of thugs by various parties just to influence the outcome of elections results usually precipitates an uncontrollable state of violence. In this regard, it is pertinent to note that no single party can exonerate itself from this dimension of political disorder and rascality.

Political Parties and Electoral Outcomes - A Recommendation

Having x-rayed some of the harmful activities and organizational deficiencies of the Nigerian party system, which have contributed to electoral failures and over-all undemocratic polity, we shall in this section articulate some possible remedies. The political significance of parties is not determined in Nigeria by their popularity and policy/programme initiative. The parties have not played roles expected to provide successful electoral outcomes. Of course, in the usual developing country mentality, the government should be looked upon to provide the solutions. This expectation on one hand encourages those already in government to take advantage of the anomalies to create policies or make laws that will advance opportunities for them or their cronies to continue in power. Be that as it may, the government should involve a conducive political atmosphere to ensure a level playing ground for all citizens in politics and make laws that will continue to strengthen the unity of the country through regulation of party formation and organization. In this regard I am inclined

to believe that the 1999 Constitutional provisions (sections 221, 222 and 223) for registration and operations of parties are still necessary and consistent with a democratic order. Even polities that practised the one party system or the dominant party system claim to practice democracy talk less of a polity that allows for multipartism provided that parties meet certain conditions that are intended to promote unity and peaceful co-existence. I am so much inclined to suggest that INEC should involve stiffer conditions for registration of parties to ensure that it is only genuine parties that are for serious electoral businesses are registered. It should be recalled that the question of party politics becoming a constitutional matter since the 1979 Constitution was as a result of the conviction that regional and ethnic parties then operating engendered the disunity of the First Republic. The ethnic question may not have been eliminated in Nigerian party politics but the zoning formula adopted by many parties now to reflect the federal character of the country has actually minimized its effect when compared to the First Republic.

Another important area where the government can help to promote healthy party activity is by outlawing the centrality of money in party politics. The distribution of gifts and money during electioneering campaigns should be banned. Security agencies should have the onus to check it. While entertainment cannot be ruled out in party meetings and rallies, the distribution of gifts like wrappers, umbrellas, bags of rice and salt etc. unnecessarily increase candidates' expenses who often bear the blunt of all party expenses. More importantly, the money levied on aspirants either by their parties and INEC should be drastically reduced or scraped entirely. Prior to 2003 elections, INEC taxed presidential aspirants N500, 000, governorship candidates N300, 000 and so on and so forth for other grades of candidates. Various parties levied their aspirants' even more exorbitant fees. The Peoples Democratic Party for instance, taxed her presidential aspirants N5, 000,000 and the gubernatorial aspirants N3, 000,000. This financial demand is elitist and clearly signifies that these political positions are reserved for some few people. Nigeria being rated as a poor country does not need such condition which like that introduced by the colonial government (adult men that can afford a gross income of £100per annum) in the 1920's is aimed at disenfranchising the majority of the people. Knowledge, moral uprightness and other leadership qualities which Nigeria so much require of her leaders cannot be the preserve of those who can afford such a huge amount of money. Little wonder Nigerian former military leaders and their civilian administrative and

business collaborators who have ripped off the country in the past dominate political party and elective positions. Alternatively, those who have had no opportunity to steal public money and are desirous of getting to political leadership get themselves hooked on to the apron strings of god-fatherism. The government has taken the initiative of assisting political parties through financial grants. This is to prevent the issue of illegal funding that will mortgage the freedom of parties or their elected candidates to operate unencumbered. Yet the government has to tax aspirants through such fees charged by electoral commission. It is therefore suggested that such grants should be used to finance electoral campaigns of aspirants through media sponsorship and publication of candidates' profiles, party policies and programmes, candidates' public debates and party rallies. In this way government grants will be more useful than a situation where the grants are distributed to some bunch of 'fast guys' who float parties in anticipation of such grants.

The media has a role to play. There is need to let the public know the profile of intending government and party officials. 'Toronto cases' and record of criminality convictions against some elected officials might not arise if the press and security officials take pains to probe into their history before elections. A situation where these facts emerge after being elected does not help as these officials then use their positions to conceal the truth. The media houses also should show some fairness in reporting electoral matters. Though they are in business, reporting electoral matters especially as concerning the activities of parties and their candidates should be considered a social responsibility by the media houses. Government owned media houses must show restraint in favouring the parties of the incumbents as against other political parties since it is the masses that own the government, the parties and the government media. The government media houses do not belong to the party in government because per adventure they were in government.

Political parties must continue to mobilize, and sustain a membership capable of promoting the party policies through payment of dues and selfless service. The obvious truth is that most of the agents employed by parties during campaigns and elections are not party members but recruits from cultists, militia groups and Motor Park touts. This trend will be effectively controlled if security agencies are ready to prosecute party officials and leaders who failed to produce those responsible for any violent conflict during campaigns and elections. Parties are organizations. Within the ward, local government, state and the nation

at large, parties have their leadership and those responsible for them as organizations. These should be answerable for the parties' activities. We must begin to hold our leaders accountable if the spate of violence will be controlled.

Also the policy of allowing the declared winner occupy the position even when there is a petition challenging the election result disposes politicians to fight to win at all cost and be challenged later. The delays and the corruption in the election tribunals and the judiciary in general do not help matters. The money involved in pursuing a long drawn legal battle after the rigours of the elections is not palatable especially when one's opponent is already enjoying the goodies of the contested position and thus also fighting from the advantages of the position. It is therefore justifiable to argue that incumbents who wished to contest elections should resign their position within a reasonable time to the election and hand over to a neutral person who may continue to hold the government in trust where election results are contested. The secretaries to the three tiers of governments may be a ready option in this regard. Strange though this may be that an elected person hands over to non-elected personnel. But if Nigerians accept this as part of their democratic culture, it becomes so. In the same vein, a minimal time limit must be set within which to dispense with election petitions or re-conduct fresh elections in the contested areas. A situation where election tribunal lasts for over half of the tenor for the position contested like that of Peter Obi of Anambra state can only encourage a do or die attitude in elections as justice will not be readily available in tribunals. These recommendations are not problem-free but are important to check more serious problems of electoral violence, problems created by incumbents in election frauds and the need to guarantee some measure of independence for the electoral commission.

Finally, the citizens of Nigeria, collectively and individually have significant part to play. It is the citizens that are members of the political parties; it is to the citizens that parties distribute money and gifts during campaigns; it is they that are recruited as thugs and squad groups for parties; it is they that are recruited as field officers and staff for the electoral commission in the conduct of elections; it is they that assist parties to falsify results and rig elections. Yet when the chips are down and the wrong parties and candidates get into power, it is they that will suffer the burden of uncaring government. Why democracy works better in some developed countries is because of their civic culture. This entails popular

participation in governance, not necessarily in terms of seeking political positions, but showing commensurate interest in elections, which is the doorway to good democratic governance. We as Nigeria citizens must put our priorities right and be interested in what happens in the political process to build a better Nigeria for our children and ourselves.

Conclusion

Political parties in Nigeria have not performed optimally to produce successful electoral outcomes and by implication a reliable democratic polity. A lot of factors are involved. These include ethnicisation of party formation and organization, multiplicity of parties, which are not based on offering choices to the electorate, prebendalism and money politics and violence and intolerance. Nigerian party system will take a stronger foothold in producing better election outcomes if money is de-emphasized to encourage poor and middle-income persons that have great leadership ideas to participate. Also Nigeria citizens must recognize their collective and individual roles in building a virile democratic state. The need for the incumbents to resign prior to elections they wished to re-contest is also considered salutary. Above all, there is need for Nigerian parties “to develop their own self adjusting and self correcting mechanisms for conflict management and resolution” (Olagunju, Adele, and Oyovbare, 1993:221). A truly Nigerian party should be a micro-Nigeria reflecting all the social, cultural and economic differences that characterize the nation. It is therefore, the responsibility of the leadership and membership of political parties to show wisdom and tolerance in party activity. This will dispose the parties to perform their expected functions towards achieving successful electoral outcomes and lasting democracy in the country.

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Appendix

List of Political Parties in Nigeria's four Democratic Republics

First Republic 1960-1966

Action Group (AG), Borno Youth Movement (BYM), Democratic Party of Nigeria and Cameroon (DPNC), Dynamic Party (DP), Igala Union (IU), Igbira Tribal Union (ITU), Kano Peoples Party (KPP), Lagos State United Front (LSUF), Mabolaje Grand Alliance (MGA), Midwest Democratic Front (MDF), National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons later changed to National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), Niger Delta Congress (NDC), Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), Northern Peoples Congress (NPC), Northern Progressive Front (NPF), Republican Party (RP), United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), United National Independence Party (UNIP), and Zamfara Commoners Party (ZCP).

Second Republic (1979-1983)

Greater Nigerian Peoples Party (GNPP), National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Nigeria Advance Party (NAP)-registered in 1983, Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP), Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), and Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN).

Stillbirth Third Republic (1995-1998)

1. Babangida 1985-1993)

National Republican Convention (NRC)
Social Democratic Party (SDP)

2. Abacha 1994-1998

Congress for National Consensus (CNC), Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN), Grassroots Democratic Movement (GDM), Liberal Convention (LC), and United Nigeria Congress Party (UNCP)

Fourth Republic (1999-): Position as at June 2006

Action Alliance (AA), Advanced Congress Party (ACD), Alliance for Democracy (AD), All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), Action Peoples Congress (APC), All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), All Peoples Liberation Party (APLP), African Renaissance Party (ARP), African Democratic Congress (ADC), Better Nigeria Progressive Party (BNPP), Community Party of Nigeria (CPN) Democratic Alternative (DA), Democratic Peoples Party (DPP), Fresh Democratic Party (FRESH), Green

Party of Nigeria (GPN), Justice Party (JP), Labour Party (LP), Liberal Democratic Party of Nigeria (LDPN), Movement for Democracy and Justice (MDJ), Movement for the Restoration and Defense of Democracy (MRDD), National Action Council (NAC), Nigeria Advance Party (NAP), National Conscience Party (NCP), New Democrats (ND), National Democratic Party (NDP), New Nigerian Peoples Party (NNPP), Nigerian Peoples Congress (NPC), National Reformation Party (NRP), Progressive Action Congress(PAC), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Peoples mandate Party (PMP), Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), Peoples Salvation Party (PSP), Progressive Peoples Alliance (PPA), United Democratic Party (UDP), and United Nigeria Peoples Party (UNPP)

Source: compiled from various sources already contained in the References