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X-Raying the Dynamics of Political Parties on Democratic Process in Nigeria

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Abstract- In any given society, political parties are the sine qua non to the practice of modern democracy, because it involves people's participation in governance and this participation is attained through involvement in the activities of political parties. This paper examines the role the political parties have played in entrenching democratic values into the Nigeria political system. The paper assesses the process of democratization especially with regards to the political system. The paper uses qualitative research design as a method of gathering data from the secondary sources. The study concludes that there exist negative relationships between the research findings with the first assumption which states that political parties in Nigeria have effectively enhanced the democratization process. Finally, the study highlights the following recommendations: adoption of two-party systems in Nigeria to achieve democratization in order to avoid a political party identifying itself only with a particular ethnic group; massive mobilization and political education of the Nigerians for a societal re-orientation; and integration of the country as one that is devoid of ethnocentrism and particularism. Finally, the study contends that the implementation of these recommendations would assist in ensuring democratization in the political system in Nigeria.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In any given society, political parties are sine qua non to the practice of modern democracy, because it involves people's participation in governance, the attainment of which involves political parties in democratic activities. In the words of Akindele, Obiyan, and Owoeye (2000) political parties are indispensable features of democratic societies due to the conglomeration of people with similar ideologies under the same political aegis. Naturally, a human being has been described as a socio-political animal; in some cases, a bred-in-the-bone political animal. In any society where man finds himself, he accepts that there should be an appropriately constituted authority in a political system to maintain law and order. Man wants a political environment in which he is guaranteed freedom of movement, expression, beliefs (religious or whatever)

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and freedom to realize his potentials to the fullest without let or hindrance as long as his pursuits are not in conflicts with the law of the land or a trespass on other people's rights (Olowu, 1996). Man wants to have a say in deciding who governs him and he wants his input taken into consideration in the governance process, just as the population definition of democracy as government of the people by the people and for the people.

The Nigerian society after independence in 1960, witnessed different political dispensation which has been abrupt, frequent and unstable. Thus, at the inception of democratic governance in May 1999, the Nigerian society was filled with aspiration for a better political system. This is because Nigerians believe the system of democracy is a befitting system of governance for the Nigerian society as many Nigerians believe that the problems that pervade the Nigerian society could possibly be attributable to the military rule and opine that those problems would go underground as soon as civilian democratic governance is enthroned (Oarhe & Ikelegbe, 2009).

The evolution of the Fourth Republic in Nigeria after the exit of the then military regime headed by General Abdulsalam Abubakar witnessed the registration of three political parties: Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Alliance For Democracy (AD), All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) among other numerous political parties that contested the election. The emergence of the fourth republic marked the beginning of a new democratization process in Nigeria polity. There is always a polarity between the political party's policy orientation or political farsightedness and that of other political parties. At the inception of Nigeria's Fourth Republic, all the political parties then: The People's Democratic Party (PDP), Alliance For Democracy (AD), All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), etc. had different ideologies, regarding the governance in Nigeria. In the area of education and health policies AD, PDP, and ANPP were non-symbiotic while AD believed and embraced free healthcare delivery and free education at all levels, and implemented policies amidst financial stringency in the AD-Controlled states, the PDP believed otherwise (Alapiki, 2004).

Clearly, political parties are vital for maintaining democracy and governance. Agbaje (1999) noted that the extent to which political parties aggregate freely,

articulate, represent and organize determine the level of accountability in public life including access to and use of power as well as political performance. In essence, therefore, political parties have become, in the majority of African countries, a critical linchpin for the institutionalization, nurturing, deepening and consolidation of democracy in the continent.

Merkl (1977:99) summarized the role of political parties in democracy as follows; (i) Generation of programmes and policies for government, (ii) Coordination and control of governmental organs, (iii) Recruitment and selection of leadership personnel for public offices, (iv) Regulatory policies (setting limits on flows of funds; transparency and accountability), (v) Emphasis on individual candidates, (vi) Creating a consistent and comprehensible range of choices for citizens.

This study intends to examine the effects of political parties on the democratization process in Nigeria during the Olusegun Obasanjo administration as regards socio-political and economic development prospect.

II. THE OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The study aims to:

- i. Examine the roles the political parties have played in entrenching democratic values into the Nigeria political system; and
- ii. Assess the process of democratization especially with regards to the political system.

III. ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY

The study tested the following hypotheses.

1. Effective political parties enhance the democratization process.
2. A diversely represented political party in Nigeria will enhance the democratic process.

IV. THE ASSESSMENT OF POLITICAL PARTIES ON DEMOCRATIZATION IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC

Given the nature of Nigeria as a multi-ethnic society and an identifiable cleavage, the task of democratizing the various aspects of the country into one indivisible was a challenge Nigeria could not completely overcome. However, one of the ways of achieving democratization is through the activities and operation of political parties because, given their diverse social base, political parties tend to be one of such institution that could bring about democratization. However, the study will analyze and look into the performance of Nigeria political parties in the Fourth Republic towards this goal, to determine how far they have gone in this question of democratization.

The Nigeria Fourth Republic which begins in 1999 and still in progress in operating democratized systems and thus has the activities and operation of political parties vital to its survival. Political parties through their roles of articulating and aggregation of interests and recruitment of political office holders are very central to the smooth operation of democracy in Nigeria. The words of Dode (2010) emphasized these roles when he said that the existence of a vibrant political party is a sine qua non for democratic consolidation in any polity. However, within the framework of democracy in a country like Nigeria which is naturally multi-ethnic, there exists the problem of democratization. Some institutional and attitudinal constraints serve as challenges affecting the performance of Nigerian's Fourth Republic political parties, which is the primary focus of this research, towards this problem, which has made people regard them as an agent of disintegration rather than integration. Looking at the majority of the political parties in this current Fourth Republic in Nigeria, one apparent and common attribute is that they lack national outlook that will reflect on the composition of its members and their network of offices around the country. A lot of the parties could not command a base nationally regarding membership and could not even boast of offices in as many parts of the country as possible, and consequently, political parties that ought to serve as a networking institution for many people could not serve this purpose. Anifowose (2004) noted that the majority of the political parties existing in Nigeria's Fourth Republic do not have a national outlook in relation to their operations. Looking at the current number of political parties in Nigeria, which is more than 50, only a few like the People Democratic Party (PDP), All Nigeria People Party (ANPP), Action Congress (AC) and probably the Labour Party (LP) and the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) could be said to have members that clearly cut across several parts of country, which is roughly 3% of the total number of registered political parties with the Independence National Electoral Commission (INEC) (Anifowose, 2004). Based on this estimate, we can generalize that most of the Nigerian political parties in the Fourth Republic do not have a national outlook. With this assertion, we then say that political parties in this Fourth Republic do not represent the interest of the vast majority of the people and thus do not bring about the needed democratization.

Having asserted that Nigerian political parties in the Fourth Republic lacked national outlook, it is then evident that ethnicity influences these parties regarding their support and operations; this is a problem militating against the quest for the democratic process. Emmanuel, (2009) asserted that except the PDP, the registered political parties at the inception of the Fourth Republic could not detach themselves of ethnic affinity. With this in mind, we expect that the parties will draw

support from their ethnic groups and seek to represent ethnic cleavages and appeal for votes predominantly along communal lines. Where such exist, we anticipate that political parties will replace national interests with ethnic interests and will instead preserve their ethnic interests at the expense of national interests, this claim, we can be asserted when we look at the nature of electoral support that follows the 1999 General Elections where the Alliance for Democracy won massively in the Yoruba speaking of the South-Western region while the All Peoples Party won majorly at the Northern part of the country. It was only the People's Democratic Party which we can adjudge to have a national outlook that won across the country. This result showed that the AD had an affiliation with the West while the APP had an affiliation with the North. Though, we may say that the level of ethnicity in the activities of the current political parties in operation is incomparable to that of 1999.

This claim is out of the fact that political party like the ANPP performed considerably well outside the traditional Northern region that they were familiar with, they gained the level of support in states like Oyo and Ogun, where senators Bola Ajibola and Ibikunle Amusun were presented as gubernatorial candidates (Dode, 2010). Also, the Action Congress which emerged from the Alliance for Democracy made a meaningful impact in states like Edo, Delta and Adamawa. But it is essential to note that we cannot say that these parties have lived above the troubled water of ethnicity because we observed that in the states cited, people essentially voted for personality fairly than political parties (Dode, 2010). This is to say that even if these candidates contested on the platform of the more relatively unknown party, they will still command such support. Example of such is the emergence of Dr Olusegun Mimiko on the platform of the Labour party as the governor of Ondo State (Dode, 2010). So with this, the current parties in this Fourth Republic, excluding the PDP we could not claim to be devoid of ethnic affinity, which affected their operation in connection to democratic process because they tend to have priority to ethnic interests over national interests. What happens in effect would be a situation where an individual identifies with his own ethnic group and where an individual feels more relaxed and secured among his kinsmen. Once this practice obtains in a given political system as it happens in the present day Nigeria, it will defeat the purpose of achieving democratization. So one could affirm that the more political parties in a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria show their ethnic affinity, the less they achieve democratization.

However, taking a closer look at the activities and operations of the PDP, which at least has a national outlook and above the claim of ethnic affinity. One is poised to look at various activities of the political parties and see whether they have brought about democratization or not. There is a diverse representation

of People's Democratic Party as it can boast of membership that cuts across all ethnic groupings and even its level of support does not restrict to a particular part of the country which could explain why it has been in control of the central government since the inception of this Fourth Republic (Oarhe & Ikelegbe, 2009). We expect that in a country like Nigeria, the more diverse representation a party has, the more it enhances democracy, which is true of a party like the PDP, but there are some activities within the party that cast doubt over such claim. One such case is the issue of zoning that is going on within the ranks and file of the party. This zoning issue which has to do with a particular region presenting the presidential candidate on the platform of the party could be a form of affirming ethnic loyalty and cleavages (Oarhe and Ikelegbe, 2009). The interests and comments this issue has generated among the people have shown that people are still more conscious of their ethnic interests than national interests. So this will infer that it is not a sufficient condition that a political party that has diverse representation will necessarily ring about or enhance democratization. But as a political party which aggregate interest, the more diverse its membership is, the more the chance of improving democracy will be.

Apart from the above peculiarity of Nigerian political parties in the Fourth Republic, it is worthy to note that there is a lack of policy programmes in parties' policies. Looking at the parties in operation in this Fourth Republic, virtually all these parties cannot be said to have a clear-cut policy programme that they intend to pursue about democratization, and thus we should not expect any line of action that will bring about the democratization of the country. It should be noted that all these parties have as one of their objectives to ensure the democratization and unity of the country, but we cannot see any practical policies that enable the realization of such aims.

Also, the occurrences in Nigeria's Fourth Republic have shown that there is the poor interface between political parties and civil society as co-participants in the ecology of governance. It is with regret that we see that Nigerian political parties have failed to recognize civil society organization as a complementary agent in ensuring democratization. These political parties always consider their primary aim of gaining political power and fail to provide groundwork on how to put in place a mechanism through which there will be a form of partnership with other civil society in order to gain national unity. Also, the civil society on their part could not view the parties as partners in achieving the unification of the country; fairly they are always criticizing at any chance, the activities of these parties.

Having looked at how far Nigerian political parties in the Fourth Republic have performed toward democratization. It is pertinent we shed light on some

principle, other than the structure and activities of political parties, which has effects on the question for democratization.

One of such is the principle of Federal Character. This principle intends to facilitate representation of all groups in a particular government. The provision of the 1999 Constitution supports this principle toward the operation of political parties in the country. The political parties must reflect this principle in the composition of their executive committees or other structural institution of the party. This step is to have a sense of belongingness from various ethnic groups in the country. They believe that once they adhere to this, it will advance the course of democratization. Although, given the current lack of integration in the country, people have called for the jettison of the Federal Character principle saying it has proven ineffective in promoting democratization. However, we do not welcome this principle because it achieves its key purpose of making sure there is representation in the government and should not bear the blame for people's ethnic consciousness. So it is of note here, that there is the need for attitudinal re-orientation on the part of Nigerian people. Based on this, it necessitates considering the role of the National Orientation Agency (NOA) which has been making efforts in sensitizing and even appealing to people to see the country's interests as that which is over and above that of the narrow ethnic system. Mostly, people continue to underutilize the aim of this agency because of their lack of widespread sensitization and propaganda.

With the foregoing analysis, it is evident that we have not yet achieved democratization in Nigeria as a result of the activities of political parties, which lacked national viewpoint in order to aggregate all interests into the country's common interest thereby leading to pursuing ethnic interests. Noted also is the attitude of people toward national interests as people tend to align themselves more with their ethnic group compared to that of national interests. People see themselves first as a nationality of a particular ethnic group before seeing themselves as a Nigerian. The link between the attitudes of people and activities of political parties is such that it is the essential attitude of party members that will reflect in the direction of such party.

If all the above-mentioned facts are what prevailed in Nigeria since the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1999, it then meant that democratization in Nigeria had disintegrated instead, one which we could attribute to the activities of the existing political parties.

V. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Political scientists have constructed many theories for political analysis. For the purpose of this study, we will use two theories which are the Systems Theory and the Structural- Functional Theory. The

significant and guiding concept in Systems Theory is the 'System'.

Systems are general relationships, that is, a whole which comprises many parts. Hence systems emphasize relationships and not individual. One of the proponents of Systems Theory is David Easton. Easton identifies the political system as the basic unit of analysis. He defines the political system as that 'system of interactions (set of interrelated components and processes) in any society through which binding or authoritative allocations are made'.

From the aforementioned interactions, we can observe that there are three phases in the political system - inputs, conversion, and output. The political system takes inputs consisting of demands which are the articulated needs, problems and aspirations that are brought to bear upon the political system, and expression of support for the regime which consists of adherence to laws or positive orientations which promote the political system from the society and convert them into output-authoritative policies and decisions. Feedback mechanism put output back into the system as input, thus completing a complex cyclical operation.

Structural-Functional Theory is an offshoot of System Theory. It is a methodology of analysis which examines a system regarding the structures, which are part of the system and the functions these structures perform. However, concerning politics, Structural-Functional theory describes the means of explaining the fundamental functions of the political system. It explains the relationship between components (structures) on one hand and between the constituents and the whole (political system) on the other hand. It is the contributions of each structure that help to sustain the political system.

One of the proponents of Structural-Functional Theory is Gabriel Almond. Almond identified the functional requirement of the political system and proceeded to explain the contributions of these functions towards the maintenance and stability of the system. He categorized the functions into two which are inputs roles (which include, political socialization and recruitment, interest's articulation and aggregation, and political communication) and output function which includes rule-making, rule-application and rule-adjudication (Yagboyaju, 2008).

Having explained the chosen models, the purpose of their choice is based on the fact that the democratization process is caused either when the system succeeds or fails in achieving a stable political system. In the Estonian's view, the political system will bring good governance when all the interrelated components perform their functions (Yagboyaju, 2008). Political parties in this sense are the core elements of the system that deal with the inputs that they obtain either in form of support or demand from inside and

outside the society that affects the political system and vice versa. The political party then processed the input and produced output in the form of the ways they carry out their activities. Also, the political party as one which has a structure describes a system with various constituents through which they formulate and execute policies. For example, party caucus can discuss issues of national interest, anything that comes out of such discussions would refer to as the output and anything that is emerging for discussion within the party can represent as input. With this interrelationship, a political party can contribute to national development and democratic process.

The Structural-Functional Theory views the state as a whole System which is capable of bringing its sub-system elements into one entity through the process of integration. The political party as one of the sub-systems within the political system performs many functions which include that of communicating the wishes of the voters to the government, informing the electorate on significant political issues and allowing for broader participation by more people in the political system. Through this participation of people with different backgrounds democracy can thrive (Yagboyaju, 2008).

Regarding this work, our system is the political parties in the Nigeria political system. Based on the above analysis, the research work will examine how Political parties in Nigeria have been acting as agents for democratic process especially the Nigerian political parties during the Fourth Republic, which was from 1999 to 2007.

VI. FINDINGS

The general objective of this study was to examine the role of political parties in the democratization of Nigeria with special reference to the Fourth Republic. The introductory part started with the background to the study, which highlighted the composition of political parties in Nigeria, and thus the need for democratization. A theoretical framework was also used as a stepping stone of what type of approach to use in analyzing certain issues. This theoretical framework stated the functions which political parties performed in every political system and defined the key concepts like a political party, party system, and democratization. Also, the study discussed and reviewed some literature. The researchers were able to see how different scholars viewed the roles of political parties in improving democratization in a country like Nigeria which is multi-ethnic. The political parties in the Fourth Republic were not devoid of ethnic affinity which gave a reason why they could not engender democratization for the country. It was against this background that political parties served as an instrument of democratization. Also, the researchers were able to uncover the historical account of Nigerian

political parties from the pre-independence up till the present Republic. The study looked at various activities geared toward democratization starting from the pre-independence era and showed the peculiarity of each Republic as regards democratization. Finally, based on information gathered, the researchers analyzed certain claims that were made on the present day experience in Nigeria and were able to determine the fact that Nigeria's political parties in this Fourth Republic have not been able to bring democratic process because of certain perceived factors which constrained their effectiveness as an agent of democratization.

VII. CONCLUSION

In concluding this research, we can objectively say that from the research findings from various sources, there exists a negative relationship between the findings and the first assumption, which states that political parties in Nigeria's Fourth Republic have effectively enhanced the democratization process. Regarding the second assumption which states that diversely represented political parties in Nigeria will enhance democratic process, there also exists a negative relationship because an example was made of the PDP which is diversely represented and still could not bring about national integration for the country.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

In the real sense of political parties, their activities and operation ought to serve as a catalyst for democratization especially in a country like Nigeria which is a multi-ethnic society. However, having seen the performance of the Fourth Republic political parties in Nigeria, it is apparent that they have failed in achieving this purpose for the country, a claim which this research work has concretized. Given the various problems that are confronting political parties and indeed the search of democratization, the following recommendations will bring about the desired democratization for the country.

The study observes that the number of political parties in operation is too much. Though, the country is practising a multi-party system which gives no restriction to the number of political parties that can be in operation. Experiences have shown that majority of these political parties lacked recognition from the populace and have seen the formation of the party as a means of enriching themselves through a collection of various allowances from the electoral body. So the study recommends that if Nigeria adopts only two party systems, the country will achieve democratization because there will be no room to identify a party solely with a particular ethnic group and such a party will be national in outlook. Though people may argue that two-party systems will even divide a country into opposing blocks, but the study contends that given the nature of

Nigeria, such an introduction cannot lead to such blocks rather it will serve as an avenue to bring all ethnic groups into a single fold since there are no many parties that individual groups can align with on their own to create political identity.

The study also recommends that political parties should base their candidate selection on merit and not on preference or hidden affection. When there is a selection of candidates on merit, then the candidate will definitely command legitimacy and support from everybody cutting across the ethnic boundary and thus serves as a catalyst for democratization because he or she will represent common interest. This should replace the current practice among parties in this Fourth Republic which impose their candidates on the basis of the interest of particular people as against the wish of the majority. Example of such a case is the emergence of Umaru Yar'Adua as the standard bearer of the People Democratic Party in the 2007 Presidential Election, who many believed the President, Olusegun Obasanjo imposed. This only act of the president attracted many negative utterances especially from the part of the South-South people which did not augur well for the democratization of the country.

In addition to the above, Nigeria should have a societal re-orientation. What Nigeria needs now is not political system 'per-se' but a societal change of attitude. There should be a massive mobilization and political education of the Nigerians toward a belief in the interest of the country as one, and any government that is assuming office should avoid ethnocentrism and particularism.

Intra-tribal marriage should also be encouraged especially between the core North and the core South. This will foster unity and ensure the needed democratization. Finally, the study argues that if the Nigerians uphold and implement all the foregoing recommendations, they will improve democratization in Nigeria and its political system.

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