Political Parties, Elections and Governance in Nigeria: The Fourth Republic in Perspective

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Abstract

In 1999, Political Parties reclaimed the right to govern in Nigeria. This right was embodied in popular mandates derived from periodic elections. However, the political parties that emerged to drive Nigeria's democratization bore the imprint of the logic of accumulation and politics under military rule. Electoral processes such as voter registration, candidate selection, vote counting and announcement were impacted by this logic. Individuals, who came to be referred to as godfathers, supplanted the political parties, imposing their control on these processes, often criminalizing them. The hold of the godfather on the electoral process pays little or no attention to rules governing electoral engagement. Electoral victory is predicated on the ability to plan and meticulously deploy violence and corruption at each stage of the electoral process. This deformation of the electoral system has tended to produce elected government officials who either proceed to conduct public affairs in brazenly criminal manner, or risk serious schism that pitch them against their godfather where they chose to conduct governmental affairs against the dictates of the latter. The improved quality of management of the 2011 elections diminished the influence of the godfather, creating a closer match between the preferences of the electorate and electoral victory.

Key Words: Political parties, elections, godfatherism, internal party democracy, governance

Introduction

In broad terms, an election is a means of choosing people to occupy positions of authority in organizations, institutions or government. In a democracy, the

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personnel selected through the electoral process are expected to embody specific norms and policy platforms which command the support of the electorate. Elections in this sense are "an expression of the peoples' sovereign will" (Agbaje & Adejumobi, 2006: 26). If elections express the sovereign will, political parties provide the platform for articulating that will and selecting the personnel who must embody it in government. A critical core of liberal democracy is predicated on competition for political power with the governed, as free agents, exercising their free and unfettered choice among competing platforms which are provided under different political parties. Political parties seek to capture political power but they do this by seeking popular support through elections. By contesting and winning elections, political parties become the effective agents for choosing those who exercise governmental power. In effect, political parties act as channel of expression between government and the governed, set and implement agenda for the society while acting as agents of socialization and elite recruitment (Hague & Harrop, 1987: 139-141).

The claim to govern by a political party is anchored on its ability to get the support of a majority of voters in free and fair elections. However, there are differing perspectives as to how political parties align themselves with the voters. While some assume that this process is largely driven by the voters themselves, with the 'rational' political party simply aligning itself with the preferences of majority of the voters (Downs, 1957), others see the political party as the creator of the vision behind which it mobilizes the voters. The first perspective suggests that political parties are pragmatic entities whose overriding need for power compels them to adopt electoral platforms that reflect the positions of most voters. In this the populist conception of democracy, elections express a relationship between the voter and the elected official with the former controlling the latter (Ware, 1979: 6). On the other hand, the conception of parties as essentially instruments through which like-minded people organize to enthrone their interests as the basis of government action (Duverger, 1959), see the party as the creator of the platform, the vision, behind which it then mobilizes the voters. Political parties under this liberal variant of democracy influence voters' choice "through the alternative views of political reality they present to the electorate. In effect, they interpret the political universe for the electorate and invite them to chose among such competing interpretations" (Ware, 1979: 32-33). In this case, it is

the party or the political leader that actually creates the agenda. The sovereign will of the people is manifested in the act of choosing among the alternatives available.

In general, the difference between the two perspectives lies in one seeing political parties as buying into the vision of the electorate, while the other sees the parties as the creator of that vision. These contrasting views on the mediating role of parties in advancing the popular will are not unproblematic. For example, it is quite difficult to see how a particular political party can align itself to the preferences of most voters on every issue area. On the other hand, where parties are held to be the creators of alternative platforms out of which the electorate manifests its will in the choice of one or the other, Ware suggests that the competition between the parties can degenerate to one "mainly in the provision of ... 'disinformation'" (Ware, 1979: 32). In addition, no matter which perspective holds sway, there is the problem whether elections (even when adjudged free and fair) can correctly bring out the people's will "with dwindling participation, limits to real choice, and growing sense of powerlessness" (Agbaje & Adejumobi, 2006: 27).

However, irrespective of these weaknesses, both perspectives hold strongly to the view that in contemporary democratic systems, political parties govern and they must do so by acquiring the mandate of the people in periodic elections. Through this, the electorate can expect government to be responsive, responsible and accountable. There is also a recognition that for the popular will to be truly manifested in governance, the electoral process must be shown in all ramifications to be free and fair. The failure to meet these basic conditions robs elections of the quality of anchoring government policies, programs and actions on the will of the people.

Political parties are expected to play an integrative and adaptive role in society. This makes them vital intermediaries between society and politics (Bogaards, 2010). Political parties can do this in any of three ways. They can translate socio-cultural divisions, aggregate them or block them. The scope and spread of membership, issue thrust at elections, party leadership, and the manner all these add up in the ways the parties manage their electoral activities are critical to the determination of the outcome of the intermediation process. Indeed, African elections have been described as being particularly

useful in illuminating the nature of the political system as well as the form, rate and direction of changes in it (Cohen, 1983: 72-3). The direction that elections chart for a political system can be gauged from the degree of credibility in their conduct, their openness in terms of allowing for competition among differing and opposing platforms, the extent the results of the elections are respected by those in power, and the way they shape political attitudes. A rigged election, or one in which a dominant party turns the political arena into an uneven playing terrain for opposing parties, could have various destabilizing consequences for the direction of political evolution.

In Nigeria, the long-drawn out struggle for the return to civil rule came to pass when the Fourth Republic came into existence in 1999. Power has been passed over to an electorate but the sole platform for a candidate to stand for an elective office resides in membership of a political party. This paper discusses how political parties approach and organize themselves for elections in Nigeria. The electoral process involves different activities such as voters' registration, candidate selection, election day activities and post-election issues and processes. The paper focuses on the involvement of political parties' in these activities, the factors that shape their participation in them, and the emerging electoral trends in the country. The paper concludes with a note on elections and the emerging governance dynamics in the 4th Republic.

Political Parties and Elections since 1999

Party Formation
The 1999 elections ushered in the Fourth Republic. Three political parties contested the elections. These were the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the All Peoples Party (APP) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD). The political parties that had sought to engage the emerging democratic order were 24 (Abdu, 2002: 94). However, only three were registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission to assume the status of political parties. This was after supposedly surmounting the constitutional huddles of showing that they were not sectional, ethnic, or religious party and that their membership and support bases were sufficiently reflective of the diversity of the country. The empirical test of this national spread requirement was the nationwide local council elections conducted in 1998. Actually, the AD did not exactly

pass the test "but was nevertheless registered. The government felt this was the only way that the South West which had sustained the pro-democracy agitation since 1993, would participate in the transition program, thereby lending it credibility" (Agbaje, Akande & Ojo, 2007:. 84; Simbine, 2006: 31). These three parties contested the elections of 1999. However, by the time the 2003 elections were held, 27 additional political parties had been registered to contest. This had further risen to more than 50 during the election of 2007, and by the 2011 elections, 63 political parties were on parade, reaffirming the trend already apparent when over twenty political parties had registered to contest the local elections of 1998.

Voters' Registration

The build up to elections is usually signpost by the voter registration exercise. Although this is the responsibility of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties are very much involved in the mobilization of the electorate for the exercise. While the involvement of political parties in mobilizing for the registration is an essential aspect of political education, there have been situations where party operators have attempted to inflate the register with fictitious names or deny registration to perceived sympathizers of rival political parties. Thus, in certain areas of Rivers State during the voters registration exercise that preceded the 2003 general elections, instead of INEC officials carrying out the registration, "officials of major political parties" were alleged to have taken over, and were turning people away (Deegan, 2003: 7). People massively turned out to register "but in some cases, INEC officials allegedly withheld voter's registration cards in order to prevent voters from registering at all, sometimes selling them to politicians". INEC itself was to later admit that the electoral register for the 2003 elections was "25-30 percent fiction" (Human Rights Watch, 2007: 22). The electoral registration exercise for the 2007 election suffered a similar fate. Some party operators have been known to seek to influence the process through desperate and subversive means. Some offer monetary inducement, 'hire' people from other places to increase their strength in their ward or constituency, mop up voters' cards, in even go as far as hijacking registration materials including direct capture machines, when these came into vogue, and carry out the compilation of the electoral roll within the confines of their homes.

Party leaders also take advantage of logistic and infrastructural deficiencies in the registration exercise to influence the process. In the 2006 registration exercise for example, politicians took over the responsibility of providing portable electricity generating appliances to power registration activities in some localities in Edo State. Where these were readily available, they took over the responsibility of fuelling them when necessary. In return, they provide list of names for registration which are accorded priority attention by registration officials, even when such names are not physically verifiable.

Candidate Selection

Political parties have the exclusive responsibility for the presentation of candidates for elective positions at all levels of government. Membership of a political party is therefore a condition for standing for election. Of course, for a political party to field a candidate, such a candidate must meet the statutory requirements for the position being contested as stipulated in the 1999 Constitution (as amended), the relevant electoral statutes and the party constitution. These include age and educational qualifications. From the point of view of the party, duration of membership and financial standing are issues usually considered in the selection of candidates? Extant statutory rule also prescribe party primaries for the selection of candidates. In other words, parties are must conduct primaries to select their candidates . Such primaries must take the form of direct elections or indirect elections. This attempt to instill internal democracy within the parties is often undermined in practice by a number of factors. For example, the practice of zoning, which is explicitly enshrined in the constitution of the PDP, and which is very much taken into consideration by other major parties even when not specifically provided for in their statute books, has considerable influence on who emerges as a party's flag bearer in any particular election. From councilors to the president of the federal Republic, zoning truncates a lot of ambitions, while facilitating others. It is affected by ethnicity, religion and geography. These are actually communities that could be mobilized behind candidates amidst raging arguments as to whose turn it is to assume the particular electoral position. What this means is that it is only candidates from a particular community that are qualified to make themselves available to the party for selection as candidates to bear its banner. Other communities will take their turns at subsequent elections.

In the major political parties and (ruling parties in the states) the candidate selection process is often a long-drawn out and financially draining affair. At local government level where most state governments have turned council elections into very personal affairs, aspirants are often engaged in prolonged primary electioneering campaigns, uncertain when elections will eventually hold. Many political aspirants complain of being compelled to 'step down' at the point of candidate screening by the party. In fact, allegations of candidate imposition are rife among all the major political parties. In the PDP, candidate imposition is rationalized in the name of 'harmonization' and 'consensus'. In reality, the candidates that emerged through this processes are either handpicked by dominant party leaders (godfathers), including the state governors and the president. In other cases, candidates emerge through a process of bargaining among the major party leaders. In the ACN, the leadership has clearly affirmed that it is the elders that have the sole responsibility of determining those that will carry the party's banner in any election (Olarinoye, 2011).

What these amount to is that the party base is really of no relevance. Delegate conventions which in most cases are expected to reflect the base are often carefully choreographed displays that are no better than the handpicked manner in which the delegates themselves emerged in the first place. The general criticism that parties lack internal democracy is mostly reflected in the manner in which those who carry their flags during elections emerge. The absence of internal democracy is generally seen as one major debilitating feature shared by virtually all of Nigeria's political parties. It is also a feature with major implications for the conduct of elections as well as the evolution of the party system. However, while virtually all the political parties suffer from this malaise, its complexion and shape varies from one political party to another. To put this proposition in perspective, we examine the ACN and the PDP.

For the ACN, the selection of candidates to contest elections is the prerogative of the elders of the party. Party primaries are essentially a gathering of these elders who decide among the candidates will carry the party flag. This has often meant that candidates with the support of the rank and file of the party are denied the tickets they seek. Some are arbitrarily shifted to tickets they never applied for, which invariably shunts out those who

originally sought these positions. This tends to produce a lot of disaffection, which party loyalty is expected to assuage. However, in the absence of a clearly articulated objective criteria, or a popular basis for the selection of those who carry the party's election banners, some of the aggrieved do not necessarily bury their disaffection in party loyalty. They move to other political parties or call on their supporters to vote for candidates fielded by rival political parties. The bitter rivalry occasioned by this insensitivity to democratizing the candidate selection process within the ACN has sometimes been reflected in cases of violence and competitive rigging of elections in areas where the party is dominant.

In spite of these negative consequences, the ACN celebrates the absence of internal democracy within the party. As the party national chairman, Chief Bisi Akande noted, "If election within our party is what you are trying to describe as internal democracy, then, we reject such idea" (Olarinoye, 2011). For the ACN, democracy is external. It is practiced in relation to other parties, not within the party. The position of the ACN is anchored on three major pegs. First, the party's culture assumes that "the leadership knows best". The leaders are the guardian of the ideological purity of the party. They understand the manifesto of the party and "know what the people really want". Third, candidate imposition by the party prevents '"dirty money" from hijacking the party. In all these, the objective is to pick "competent hands that are trustworthy in the judgment of the party". According to Bisi Akande, "this is not a matter of an individual but the party. Nobody should accuse ACN of imposition because that is our style. Anyone that is not comfortable with that should go and contest in another party. So if you see anyone carrying placard around, he is wasting his time" (Olarinoye, 2011).

The PDP has tried to establish itself as the dominant party in Nigeria since 1999. The party is the only one that could lay a claim to a pronounced electoral presence in all the six geopolitical zones of the country. This spread and geographical coverage could easily be taken as giving the party an unrivalled claim to embodying a national consensus. However, a critical analysis of the operational basis of the party's electoral dominance point to unwholesome practices that are fundamentally deleterious to the democratic practice and its consolidation. The electoral dominance of the PDP is erected on multiple, largely autonomous 'centres' of power dotted across the country.

Each of these centres is under the control of some self-appointed 'strong man' or 'leader' whose main claim to the position is based on a stranglehold on the party's financial and operational affairs. While such individuals build the 'niche' around themselves through the monopolization of party funding and in some cases, a vice grip on the base at the niche level, they also ensure generous contribution to the national party headquarters. This act ensures that they become the authentic voice of the party at the niche level. In fact, this individual is the party. Candidate selection for elective positions in government or the party within the niche area becomes a virtual monopoly, a monopoly which often has the implicit or explicit endorsement of the party leadership at the national level. Thus, as national chairman of the PDP, Ahmadu Ali described Ibadan as a "military garrison' and Chief Lamidi Adedibu as its Commander. Based on this, the PDP chairman told the governor of Oyo State, Rasheed Ladoja to go and take directives from Adedibu, "or get out of Government House" (Abati, 2006).

Electioneering Campaigns

Political parties and their candidates typically employ rallies and road shows for electioneering campaigns. The print and broadcast media are typically advertising outlets for stakeholders in elections. The advent of the internet and the mobile phone have further created a basis for strong, direct and targeted delivery of messages to voters. In fact, the increasing, wide use of social media through the internet and the mobile phone has created an intense, instantaneous interactive format for candidates and voters. This format has also provided a basis for widely followed commentary by voters on the parties, their candidates and their voters.

However, electioneering campaigns are very much dogged by various drawbacks. Violence, sometimes occasioning loss of lives are not unknown. Opposing candidates are sometimes restricted or intimidated into avoiding campaigns in their opponents' strongholds. Even presidential candidates have sometimes been forced to cancel planned rallies and road shows in localities where their rivals are considered very strong. Those who brave it into such areas have sometimes met with hostile acts involving prevention from entering well advertised campaign venues, denial of use of particular routes, defacement of posters and billboards, stone throwing, smashing of vehicles

and general rough-handling of candidates and their entourages. Also, and very much in contravention of relevant electoral rules, governments at various levels do not allow their opponents access to public, state-funded media. The state governments are particularly notorious for this. Even space for the display of campaign billboards by rival political parties is denied, or when allowed, a blind eye is turned to their defacement. On the other hand, the party in power as allowed full and unfettered access to the state-controlled print and broadcast media. State-funded bus transport systems are turned into mobile advertisers for the ruling party while the same facility is denied to opposing parties and their candidates. State control-media are used to disseminate uncomplimentary stories and news items about opposing parties. The right of reply which the latter should command in instances of this nature are hardly entertained. In all these, publicly funded media that should be neutral and provide equal opportunities for access to all political parties are turned into the exclusive campaign tools of the ruling party.

The political parties have generally defined themselves in terms of the manner they approach electioneering activities. Most of the political parties only appear in the political arena during elections, seemingly going into hibernation until the next election. The only known electoral activity of many of them is the endorsement of the candidates (generally presidential and gubernatorial) of one major political party or the other. This practice suggests that most of the political parties are either proxies for some top members of the major parties, or are merely put in place to position those who float them for political favours with the dominant parties. However, the major parties have tended to exhibit certain characteristics which both colour their participation in elections as well as define the character of these elections.

The control of the 'moneybags' was quite obvious from the 1999 elections. It was so prominent in the PDP and the APP that civil society organizations expressed anxiety over the way "influential political figures and businessmen" made large donations to political parties (Adetula, 2009: 23). Allegations of widespread bribery of the voters by parties and candidates invariably came out as a major fallout of these huge and uncontrolled donations and electoral financial activities.

The activities of these 'godfathers' became more pronounced from the 2003 general elections. In many places, they succeeded in imposing themselves on virtually all stages of the electoral process. This hold on the electoral process was more often than not, founded on a platform that pays scant attention to the rules governing electoral engagement. They actually thrived through undermining those rules. From their point of view, winning elections requires the politician to be unrestrained in hurling insults and abuses at opponents, be ready to pull off one's clothes in public to engage in fisticuffs with opponents, and be very willing to tell lies while on oath (Abati, 2006). This apt characterization has been taken to new levels through the systematic mobilization of violence, corruption and fetishism as electioneering tools by practitioners of this brand of partisan politics.   They thrive on the criminalization of the electoral process. Electoral victory is predicated on the ability to plan and meticulously deploy corruption and violence at each stage of the electoral process. State institutions and officials responsible for the conduct of elections, as well as security operatives are regarded as objects of special budgetary provisioning in the 'godfather's' manual for elections.

From the preparation of the electoral roll to the actual vote cast, the godfather's manual has contingency plans that must ensure that the outcome of elections are skewed in their party's favour irrespective of the disposition of the electorate. Thugs are hired to snatch ballot boxes and ballot papers, with little or no interference by compromised or thoroughly intimidated security agents and electoral officials. In some cases, results of elections are written even before votes are cast. 'Safe houses' are procured where snatched ballot boxes are stuffed with hijacked papers, and election results fabricated. The 'godfather' must be able to ensure that these are smoothly integrated into the official electoral channels and announced as the official results.   This is the absurdity of a manufacturing process that generates its output even before any input material is fed into it (Agbaje, 2010: 62). 'Godfather' politics typically ensures that results are declared even when there is no evidence that voting actually took place. It typically plays electoral politics with little or no respect for the established rules of conduct governing the process, and does not display any sense of moral restraint in its appreciation of what constitutes appropriate behavior in a democratic political order. It is not surprising therefore that elections results at all levels are vigorously challenged in law courts by defeated political parties and their candidates.

Political Parties and Electoral Trends

From inception, the PDP had shown itself as the dominant party. In fact, in the December, 1998 Local Council Elections which served as the test ground for national spread, the party won 459 (59.3 per cent) out of the 774 council chairmanship positions that were contested. This feat was repeated in the 1999 elections at various levels. It won the presidential results, polling 62.8 per cent of the votes cast. The APP, which had a joint ticket with the AD for the Presidential election polled 37. 2 per cent of the votes. In the gubernatorial elections, the PDP won 21 of the 36 states while the APP achieved control in 9 states. The AD took control of the remaining 6 states (Ibrahim & Garuba, 2008: .97). The distribution in the Senate and House of representatives followed this pattern of PDP dominance. While the PDP took control of 66 of the 109 Senate seats, the APP won 23 seats, leaving the AD with 19 seats. One seat was unfilled. In the House of Representatives, the PDP controlled 215 seats. The APP came second with 70 while the AD won 66 seats. Nine seats were unfilled as at the time of the election (Nigeria, 1999a; Nigeria, 1999b).

In 2003, the PDP won 27 Governorship seats, while the ANPP won nine seats. AD and APGA won the governorship elections in Lagos and Anambra respectively, although the Anambra seat was earlier 'awarded' by INEC to the PDP, until it was reversed through judicial action (Ibrahim & Garuba, 2008: 98). In the Senatorial election of 2003, only three out of the 30 political parties won seats. These were the PDP (73 seats), ANPP (28 seats), and AD (6 seats). The election into the House of Representatives followed a similar pattern, although with seven political parties winning seats, a much improved spread was apparent. The PDP won in 213 constituencies while the ANPP and the AD secured seats in 95 and 31 constituencies respectively. APGA and UNPP had two seats each, while NDP, PRP and PSP each won a single seat (Ajayi, K. 2005: 172-1733).

The figures for the 2007 elections are summarized in Table 1

Table 1: Seats Won by Political Parties in the 2007 Elections (% in parenthesis)

Political Party	No. of Seats won In Senate	No. of Seats won in House of Representatives	Seats won in State Houses of Assembly	Governorship Seats won
PDP	86 (78.90)	263 (73.06)	683 (68.99)	28 (77.78)*
ANPP	15 (13.76)	62 (17.22)	166 (16.77)	5 (13,89)
AC	6 (5.50)	32 (8.89)	98 (9.90)	2 (5.56)
PPA	1(0.92)	3 (0.83)	19 (1.92)	1 (2.78)
Accord	1(0.92)	------	2 (0.20)	-----
LP	-----	1 (0.28)	10 (1.01)	-----
AD	-----	-----	1 (0.10)	-----
DPP	-----	-----	10 (1.01)	------
Total	**109**	**360**	**990**	**36**

This figure was successively depleted following various pronouncements by the judiciary. First, the Supreme Court nullified the governorship election in Anambra State on the grounds that the tenure of the APGA incumbent would not expire until 2010. Second, following rulings by the Election Petition Tribunals and Appeal Court, the PDP lost Ondo State to the Labour Party, and Edo, Ekiti and Osun States to the Action Congress (of Nigeria), AC(N).

Source: INEC (2007) The Official Report on the 2007 General Election. Abuja: Independent National Electoral Commission.

The 2007 general elections showed a PDP whose electoral dominance had been reinforced. In the presidential election of that year, the party's flag bearer Alhaji Umaru Yar'Adua polled 24638063 to win the election. His closest rival, Major General Muhammadu Buhari of the ANPP polled 6605299 while Alhaji Abubakar Atiku of the AC garnered 2 637 848 votes. PPA's Orji Uzo Kalu polled 608, 808 while Attahiru Bafarawa of DPP got 289324 votes. Chukwuemeka Ojukwu, the APGA flag bearer polled 155947 votes (Aluko, 2008). As shown in Table 1, the PDP had in fact achieved control of more than two-third majority of the seats in both chambers of the National Assembly of the same year. This was actually the first time such magnitude of dominance of the legislative arm could be attained by any party since the advent of the Fourth Republic. On the other hand, the presence of the other parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives was reduced following

the same election.   This was also the case in the governorship election, with the PDP winning 28 of gubernatorial seats (well up from 21 in 2003) and the ANPP, the closest rival having to climb down from 9 governorship seats in 2003 to 5 in 2007. It is worth noting that the PDP was later to lose one gubernatorial seat to the APGA, one to the Labour Party and three to the ACN after these parties successfully various petitions against the PDP, thereby reducing its governorship seats from 28 to 23. These successful judicial interventions indicate the overwhelming capability of the PDP to deploy unwholesome measures in its pursuit of electoral victory.

The trend of dominance was again apparent in the 2011 election. 20 political parties fielded candidates for the 2011 presidential elections. As in all previous presidential elections since 1999, the flag bearer of the PDP, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan polled 22 495187 to emerge winner. In the process he attained a state threshold of 31. The closest rival, General Muhammadu Buhari of CPP polled 12214 853 votes. He was able to obtain at least, 25 per cent of the votes cast in 16 states. Nuhu Ribadu, the ACN candidate attained a state threshold of 4 while polling 2079151 votes (INEC, 2011). While the PDP retained its dominant electoral presence in the Senate and House of Representatives, this was not as overwhelming as it was in the 2007 National Assembly Elections. With 65.14 per cent of the seats in the Senate, the party failed to make the two-third mark which it had exceeded in the previous election. In the House of Representatives where the party won 205 seats or 56.94 per cent, the decline from its 2007 performance was quite apparent (Table 2).   The beneficiaries of the PDP's relative decline in the 2011 election in the National Assembly were mainly the ACN and the CPC. However, the ACN captured two governorship seats at the expense of the PDP While the latter along with the CPC further diminished the gubernatorial presence of the ANPP in the country.

The foregoing sketch of electoral trends suggests that it is only the PDP that can lay claim to an electoral presence that is felt in most parts of the country. Electorally, most of the registered parties can hardly lay claim to existential reality. In their rather confined electoral geographies, political parties such as AD (AC, ACN), APP (ANPP, DPP, CPC) and APGA which have electoral victories to show for their efforts since 1999 have in essence, confirmed their own essentially regional and provincial character. They make the PDP look

like the only political party that can lay claim to a noticeable presence in all the six geopolitical zones of the country.

Another observable trend is the ease with which the parties change their identities or spinoff new parties. The APP became ANPP. By the 2011 election, CPC had emerged from it, mirroring an earlier break that had seen the DPP spinoff from the ANPP while embracing aggrieved elements of the PDP along the way. The core element of the AD had transformed itself into the Action Congress (AC). This later became the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN). In all these, the PDP appear as the only party among the three original parties of the Fourth Republic to have retained its original character. While this is largely correct, a close observation suggests that it has not been free from the spinoff process. For example, the Peoples' Party of Nigeria (PPN) became the electoral vehicle for mostly elements in Ogun State who felt the PDP was unable to afford them a level playing field to emerge as its candidates in the 2011 general elections.

Table 2: Seats Won by Political Parties in the 2011 Elections (% in parenthesis)

Political Party	No. of Seats won in Senate	No. of Seats won in House of Representatives	Governorship Seats
PDP	71 (65.14)	205 (56.94)_	23 (63.88)
CAN	18 (16.51)	69 (19.16)	6 (16.66)
ANPP	7 (6.42)	28(7.77)	3(8.33)
CPC	7 ((6.42)	36 (10.00)	1(2.77)
LP	4 ((3.67)	9 (2.50)	1(2.77)
APGA	1(0.92)	6 (1.66)	2 ((5.55)
Accord Party	-	5 (1.38)	-
DPP	1 (0.92)	1 (0.27)	-
PPN	-	1(0.27)	-
Total	**109**	**360**	**36**

Sources: Index Mundi (2013), Nigerian Government Profile. Available from http://www.indexmundi.com/nigeria/govt_profilehtm, Accessed 20 September 2013; US Embassy (2012) Nigerian Political Fact Sheets, Economic Section, United States Embassy in Nigeria, January.

http://nigeria.usembassy.gov/nigeriafactsheet.html.   Accessed 20 September 2013; Ayinla, R (2011), "ACN Wins 2/3 House of Assembly Membership in Ogun",.   *Businessday,*   29   April   Available   from http://www.businessdayonline.com/NG/index.php/news/76-hot-topic/20714-acn-wins-23-house-of-assembly-membership-in-ogun   Accessed   20 September, 2013.

Finally, in practical terms, the judiciary has become the final determinant of electoral victory at all levels. In the 2007, it was only the governorship election in Jigawa State, out of the 36 states in the federation that had an outcome that was unchallenged in court. In Anambra State, the Supreme Court annulled the election of Andy Uba under the banner of the PDP on the ground that the incumbent, Peter Obi of APGA was yet to complete his term of office. The same court removed Celestine Omehia as the elected governor of Rivers State on the grounds that he was not the validly nominated candidate of his party, the PDP. The court decided that the validly nominated candidate of the party was Rotimi Amaechi who was consequently sworn in as governor of the state without actually having contested the governorship elections. The Court of Appeal, which is the final court in governorship elections ordered full election rerun in five states (Adamawa, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, and Kogi) and a partial rerun in Ekiti State. In most cases, the results of the rerun elections ended up again in the court. In four cases (Edo, Ekiti, Ondo and Osun), governorship election victories under the platform of PDP declared by the INEC were overturned by the judiciary and awarded to the ACN (Edo, Ekiti, and Osun) and the Labour Party (Ondo) as the legitimate winners.

Table 3: Petitions Brought Before Electoral Tribunals on Presidential, National Assembly, Governorships and House of Assembly Elections in 2007 and 2011

S/N	Election	No. of petitions in 2007	No. of Petitions in 2011
1	Presidential	2	2
2	Governorship	106	53
3	Senatorial	137	90
4	House of Rep.	324	208
5	State Houses of Assembly	714	378
	Total	1283	731

Sources: Adapted from: INEC (2007) The Official Report on the 2007 General Election. Abuja: Independent National Electoral Commission. Ppb57-8; INEC (2011) Results for 2011 Presidential Elections. Available at www.inecnigeria.org). Accessed 20 September, 2013.

Presidential elections results have always been contested in court . Elections to the Senate, the House of Representatives and the various State Houses of Assembly were all similarly disputed across all states of the federation. As shown in Table 3, the number of petitions in all elections has been quite high. This high rate of petitions to the relevant electoral tribunals after elections is a remarkable pronouncement on the quality of the elections and the low level of confidence the parties, the candidates and even the electorate repose in them. However, Table 3 also indicates a remarkable decline in the number of petitions submitted to electoral tribunals in 2007 and 2011general elections. This could be taken as a strong indicator of the improvements in the parameters of free, fair and transparent elections in the conduct of the 2011 election. Most of the disputes occasioning judicial intervention have been at the inter-party level. They have also sometimes manifested as intra-party crises. In the latter cases, judicial intervention is oftentimes aimed at determining the validly nominated candidate of the party who ought to occupy a seat already won under the party banner. In general, virtually all electoral mandates have to be affirmed, or retrieved through the judicial process, a situation that has not only overburdened the courts, but also raised questions as to whether the judiciary is not turning into the effective source of the mandate to govern in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Elections and the Emerging Governance Dynamics

It has been pointed out that in the current wave of democratization in Africa, there is the tendency for multiparty elections to produce one-party dominance, that is, a situation whereby "one is constantly in office and often governs alone" (Dororenspleet, 2003: 175). Doreenspleet explains this trend in terms of a history of strong anti-colonial struggle in most countries where it is found, and close interrelationship, often of an interlocking nature, with most social groups, ability to attract external support and funding, as well as factionalisation of opposition parties. (Doreenspleet, 2003: 181-3). It would seem however that the dominance of the PDP, which has tended to be more pronounced with each election has more to do with the ruthless manner of the deployment of political power in elections, once a foothold has been established in state power. This is aided in no small measure by the presidential system of government which concentrates enormous powers in the executive branch. The checks and balances which are copiously provided for in the constitution are easily overcome by a reflexive authoritarian disposition inherited from the long years of military rule.

Electoral politics in the Fourth Republic has been marked by the strong presence of godfatherism (Ayoade, 2008). Along with the ability to compromise various agencies and individuals involved with the electoral process, the godfather, in fact, typically establishes his control over the official administration of that process. Hence, when the usual ballot box snatching and stuffing seem uncertain to 'deliver' the votes, the godfather generally has the reach to write the results of the election and if necessary, have them announced while the official collation is ongoing.

Candidate selection at various levels also raised a number of issues, especially within the ruling party. First, there was the insistence by niche powers that they must have the exclusive right to determine candidates for all levels of elections within the niche. The most powerful godfathers invariably had their way. Imposing these candidates in the election put awesome powers in the hands of some godfathers, including those of assuming the de facto authority of acting as check on the legislature or the executive, as the case may be. The cases of Anambra, Oyo and Edo States are instructive.

In Anambra, a godfather lined up the whole apparatus of the state - the police, the State House of Assembly, and even the president of the country, behind his attempt to forcefully remove the governor of the state who had allegedly signed an IOU. For him, the winner of the 2003 gubernatorial election of 2003 was a product of his electoral investment. He "demanded payment for his investment in cash and in kind including strategic ministries such as finance and works". The Governor decided to declare his independence "and ignore the terms of the fetish accord at Okija shrine" (Nwanganga, 2005). Backed by the head of state who felt beholden for his party's electoral 'victory' to the godfather, the godfather abducted the state governor having allegedly resigned as governor. All this was done with the active supportive deployment of the police under the command of an Assistant Inspector General. The House of Assembly, most of whose membership owed political allegiance to the godfather simply primed itself to toe the line of its political benefactor in the context of the crisis that arose.

In Oyo State, a godfather, dubbed the garrison commander by no less a person than the national chairman of his own party, the PDP had no problems getting the State House of Assembly to illegally remove the Governor because the latter was too 'stingy' to allow him, the godfather, unfettered access to the public till (Ajayi B., 2006; Abati, 2006).

In Edo State, the governor who had reclaimed his mandate from the forces of a godfather found later that he was not yet free from those forces, as he had to go cap in hand to beg him to have the state budget approved by the majority in the House of Assembly who owed allegiance to the godfather. For purposes of this, he had to meet the godfather in his (the godfather's) home, were he, the godfather, an unelected person, determinedly crossed out unwanted line items from the budget estimates which the governor had submitted to the State House of Assembly, and then, ordered the lawmakers to go and pass the budget into law as amended while keeping a copy (Peace, 2010; Otabor, 2011).

The phenomenon of political niche creation does not only constitute a blockage on political parties and elections as platforms of representation and accountability. It is also turning national institutions located within the

geographical spaces of particular political niches as zones of godfather influence and control. That is of course, where the godfather belongs to the ruling party, as is typically the case. Even in situations where such institutions are not located within the political niche space, the godfather typically establishes himself as the point of reference in matters of the implementation of federal character provisions of the Constitution. Where godfatherhood resides in a person different from the state governor, as is often the case, this development typically imparts instability to governance.

Electoral politics built around in the Fourth Republic is devoid of ideological considerations. In fact, it avoids issue –based politics. The task of representing the interest of constituencies therefore is either downplayed or non-existent. Given that the electoral situation is such that "what emerges is a set of simulated outcomes in which votes did not count, or worse still, were not even counted" (Ibeanu, 2007: 2), the focus of attention of supposedly elected representatives and government is not the electorate but the godfather. The electorate finds itself lacking the power to exert its preferences on those who govern, or given the opportunity to be offered a choice among competitive visions. Political operators generally put extra-premium on access to state power, and generally imbue its routine exercise with arbitrariness and criminality (Bayart, Stephen & Hibou, 1999). The disassociation between political parties and electoral representation also finds expression in the willingness of politicians to maintain vacuous positions on burning political issues of the day or basic welfare matters. The emerging form of politics indicates a clear inability of political parties to act as intermediaries between society and politics. Political niches exist in near isolation, with godfathers exerting control on their appropriated political spaces almost to the exclusion of any overarching authority within the political party. This feudal structure virtually obliterates the possibility of the political party providing a common platform for a serious national conversation. What translates as national conversation is essentially inter-niche talk on sharing of positions. The implication is that elections that are invariably manipulated might have thrown up a political party that appears national when viewed against the backdrop of control of the federal government and an overwhelming majority of states in the country. However, that political party has not been able to evolve a policy platform that can offer an ideological blockage of the major socio-political fault lines in the country.

Conclusion

The electoral map of the Fourth Republic points at single-party dominance. While the observable pattern of national membership spread suggests that there is some logic to this, there is also the possibility that the electoral dominance has been reinforced by the manipulation of elections in very crude forms to eliminate opposition, or seriously undermine its political viability. The use of state resources and coercive machinery has been quite apparent in these electoral manipulations. This is evident in the fact that ruling political parties at state levels hardly allow election outcomes in which candidates from other parties can emerge victorious. The dominant party is itself carved into niches or fiefdoms in which 'godfathers' hold sway. This dominance is in many cases, founded on the very unscrupulous deployment of the multi-faceted reach of the godfather to mutilate the electoral process in order to produce victory at the poll. Through the same unwholesome means, the 'godfather' had to create and institute a vice grip on the party at the niche level.

These practices have imparted a very unstable character, violence and criminality to electoral politics at various levels. "Normlessness and lack of civility", as well as the "unrestrained conduct of leadership in governance" (Agbaje & Adejumobi, 2006: 27) became the defining traits of those who emerge from the electoral process into wielding political power. At the same time, being devoid of a well defined ideological or issue base, political parties have not been able to use the electoral machinery, their candidate selection, their manifestoes, their campaigns and general electoral conduct as a basis for framing a national discourse.

In a way, that instability may also be seen in the proliferation of political parties. The proliferation has often been the resultant effect of a fission process that can be characterized as a reaction against 'godfather' politics. However, these parties also encapsulate that form of political practice, at least, in embryonic form, given their general 'one-person' character. But more often than not, most of these political parties lack any serious electoral presence, or what it takes to play in the evolving political terrain.

What then, is to be done to enable elections reflect the sovereign will of the people? It is apparent that the party system and the electoral practices have been fostered under the Fourth Republic have deep roots in the country's history, military authoritarianism and a structural adjustment programme-anchored political economy that has virtually obliterated any distinction between legitimate and criminal forms of accumulation. While a comprehensive approach must go to these roots, the more urgent task is to liberate the parties and electoral management from the vice-grip of godfatherism. Returning the political parties to the generality of the membership will require popular financing of party activities and a determined policing of campaign finance at the level of party primaries and general elections. Internal democracy must be enforced in the political parties. This necessary requires that statutory provisions dealing with party primaries should be rigorously enforced. Finally, the election management agency must live up to its billing as an independent body. This it can do by maintaining a neutral disposition to all political actors as well as a consistent display of absolute intolerance for any infringement of the electoral rules.

The vast improvement in the conduct of the 2011 elections was apparent in the sharp fall in the number of litigations in the post-election period. Importantly too, the very crude forms of godfather interference in governance have not been very visible in the public domain since the 2011 election. This could serve as a strong indicator that the closer the match between the preferences of the electorate and a party's electoral victory, the stronger the accountability value of elections. For elections to be transparent, free and fair, closer attention has to be paid to the issue of internal democracy in the political parties. There are extant rules on this. Policy then, should really focus on implementing these and reinforcing them were necessary.

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