

## **Multipartyism, Majoritarianism, Electoral Process and Elusive Peace in Post-Colonial Nigeria**

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### ***Abstract***

*On the eve of Nigeria's political independence, Nigerians expressed high hopes that indigenous Nigerian leadership would do things in positively different ways. However, about six decades down the line, Nigeria's electoral process has remained a shadow of itself, despite adoption of multipartyism right from the first republic. Rather than attract peace and development, Nigeria's multipartyism has continued to breed widespread violence and lawlessness. It is on that note that this paper attempted to interrogate Nigeria's electoral process with a view to answering such questions as: Is Nigeria really democratising? Does multipartyism mean more democracy? Who are the real beneficiaries of Nigeria's multipartyism? To answer these questions, historical materialism was adopted as the theory that guided the study. Analysis of the data, which were collected from both primary and secondary sources, revealed that Nigeria's electoral process has remained the tool used by the capitalist ruling class to manoeuvre its access to state power to further its primitive accumulation interest, to the detriment of the peace and enhanced wellbeing of the masses. The paper recommended, therefore, among other things, for adoption of a two-party system and a general review of the Electoral Act to accommodate certain salient amendments.*

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**Keywords:** *Multipartyism, Multiparty Democracy, Majoritarian Democracy, Electoral Process, Political Parties*

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### **1. Introduction/Statement of the Problem**

Colonialism, everywhere it was practiced, was brutish, authoritarian, dictatorial, oppressive, exploitative and above all, engendered all forms of conflicts, internally and externally-oriented. For the specific period of its existence, the colonial state in Nigeria implemented policies largely favourable to the coloniser (Ekekwe, 2009; Ake, 1981).

Shortly before independence in 1960, Nigerians were jubilant, full of excitement and quite enthusiastic about the soon-to-be-independent Nigeria. Their hopes were high and their expectations from the indigenous Nigerian leadership were understandably great. For one thing, unlike the authoritarian and oppressive colonial regime, independence was to usher in a participatory multiparty democracy in Nigeria. It was thought that political independence would bring peace and development in real terms to Nigeria. This was because the nationalist movements which later transformed into political parties promised the people that independence would usher in a period of harmony

between the different ethnic and social groups, and would be characterised by lack of violence, conflict behaviours and the freedom from fear of violence. Specifically, multiparty democracy in Nigeria at independence promised a high prospect for peace which would be an era of absence of hostility and retribution. The peace promised also implied sincere attempts at reconciliation, the existence of healthy/newly healed interpersonal/international relationships, prosperity in matters of social and economic welfare, the establishment of equality, and a working political order that would serve the true interests of all Nigerians (Ubani, Ehiodo & Nwaorgu, 2013).

However, instead of peace and development, multiparty democracy in Nigeria's First Republic seemed to have witnessed widespread violence and lawlessness in the country. This prompted the military to overthrow the first civilian national government on 16th January, 1966. From that date up to the commencement of the Fourth Republic on 29th May, 1999, the military and the ruling class experimented with multiparty democracy in the country in the Second Republic (1979 - 1983). From keen observations, it appeared that the common trend in both attempts at multiparty democratic experiments in the Nigerian political process was disputed electoral processes accompanied by widespread violence. This factor prominently accounted for the aborted life span of both civilian regimes.

So far, the current Fourth Republic which started on 29th May 1999 has been the longest multiparty democracy in Nigeria but has witnessed more fatal violence, destruction of properties and wanton waste in the political history of the country (INEC, 2019). This negative trend in the politics of Nigerian multiparty democratic system has continued to cast serious doubts on the efficacy and capacity of multiparty democracy to bring about the much-needed peace that would articulate the necessary ingredients that would engender development in real terms, in the country.

This paper, therefore, seeks to evaluate the operation of multiparty democracy in Nigeria and its role in engendering peace and democratic culture in Nigeria, especially, since the return of civilian government in 1999. The political trend in Nigeria since the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999 has prompted vital recurring questions, such as: Is Nigeria democratizing? Does multiparty system mean “more” democracy? How has the electoral process enhanced democracy and peace in Nigeria? Who is/are actually benefiting from the multiparty democracy in Nigeria? These are the questions which this paper sets out to answer.

## **2. Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

The theoretical approach adopted in this study is the historical materialism. This approach is a scientific perspective for understanding and explaining society. It helps us to understand the forces that form and transform economic, political and social life in society. This approach is particularly useful because it is a science of history and social change that helps us understand the relatedness of the historical processes and general phenomena; how any one part gears into the other, but alone is incomplete and incomprehensible without the other (Ekekwe, 2009; 1986; Ake, 1981).

It is important to posit here that the major goal for all data collection is to capture quality evidence that could translate to rich data analysis and allows the building of convincing and credible answers to questions already posed. Thus, in consonance with the adopted theoretical paradigm, data were collected from both primary sources (participant observation) and secondary sources (books, journals, articles, newspapers, the mass media, and internet searches).

### **3. Conceptual Clarifications**

#### **3.1 Multipartyism**

Multipartyism is used, in this paper, interchangeably with multiparty democracy. It is a system in which multiple political parties would have the opportunity and capacity to gain control of government offices, separately or in coalition. It is mainly characterised by competition among more than two political parties thereby reducing the chances of a single party government and increasing the likelihood of coalition governments. It is categorised as a polarised pluralist system (Heywood, 2007). In other words, multipartyism provides for a situation where more than two political parties have the opportunity to contest for political power in a given political system, at the same time. In this arrangement, there is possibility of formation of a coalition government in the event of the inability of any particular political party to have absolute majority in the elections. It is important to note here that coalition governments are more common in parliamentary democratic systems.

#### **3.2 Majoritarianism**

Also called majoritarian democracy, majoritarianism is a kind of democracy based on majority rule of a society's citizens - a political contest in which the winner takes it all. However, though common, majoritarian democracy is not universally accepted. It has been famously criticised as having the inherent danger of becoming a "tyranny of the majority" (Pojman, 2002) whereby the majority in society could oppress or exclude minority groups (Arter, 2006). This is because the type of electoral system within a particular party system has tremendous influence on electoral competitions in the context of multiparty democracy (Malachova, 2012). Thus, Karvonen & Anckar (2002), in their comparative study of the Third World countries, argued that "in countries with majoritarian electoral system, a high degree of party system fragmentation is detrimental to the development of democracy". This is because the majoritarian electoral system implied one governing party. To be more precise, the party that got the majority of votes executed the greatest power and, thus, in general, only people who had voted for that party got their interests fully represented; other constituencies lacked the representation of their interests which, obviously, had a negative impact on multiparty democracy (Malachova, 2012).

## 4. Discussion of Findings

### 4.1 Is Nigeria Democratizing?

With 20 years of non-interrupted civilian rule, and in view of the first transition process from a ruling party, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) to the hitherto main opposition party, the All Progressives Congress (APC) occasioned by the victory of the APC at the March 28, 2015 presidential election, a passive observer would cursorily argue that Nigeria is democratizing. But, is Nigeria really democratizing? To help us appreciate this question, it may be profitable to refresh our memory about the essential elements of democracy here. For our purposes here, we shall use the terms democracy and liberal democracy interchangeably. This is partly because both terms are in alignment with our focus, which is multiparty democracy. It is also partly because the term "democracy" is sometimes used as shorthand for liberal democracy, which is just a variant of representative democracy that may include elements such as political pluralism; equality before the law; the right to petition elected officials for redress of grievances; due process; civil liberties; human rights; and elements of civil society outside the government (Ukachikara, 2019).

However, in the contemporary world, there is no consensus on how to measure democracy. Definitions of democracy are contested and there is an ongoing intellectual and lively debate on the subject. According to Kekic (2007), although the terms "freedom" and "democracy" are often used interchangeably, the two are not synonymous. Democracy can be seen as a set of practices and principles that institutionalize and thus ultimately protect freedom. Even if a consensus on precise definition has proved rather elusive, most observers today would agree that, at a minimum, the fundamental features of a democracy include government based on majority rule and the consent of the governed, the existence of free and fair elections, the protection of minorities and respect for basic human rights. In other words, democracy presupposes equality before the law, due process and multiple centres of power.

Diamond (2004) corroborated the above position that democracy consists of four key elements: a political system for choosing and replacing the government through free and fair elections (a multiparty system); the active participation of the people, as citizens, in politics and civic life; protection of the human rights of all citizens; and a rule of law, in which the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens. This paper shall accept reference to these basic features as necessary and sufficient for a satisfactory concept of democracy.

However, Ake (1996) contended that, the contemporary world is not a favourable environment for democracy. While democracy spreads, our world is more *repressive*. After the cold war, there is only one power block whose leaders act as though "might" is "right". There is only one ideology, liberal democracy, only one religion, market forces (capitalism). It is imperative to note here that the issue of democracy is not only of academic interest. For instance, according to Kekic (2007), although democracy

promotion is high on the list of American foreign-policy priorities, there is no consensus within the American government on what constitutes a democracy. Kekic (2007) stated that, as one observer recently put it, “the world’s only superpower is rhetorically and militarily promoting a political system that remains undefined, and it is staking its credibility and treasure on that pursuit” (Horowitz, 2006).

Even so, Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, are special cases of the problems of democracy. To begin with, the self-appointed agents of democratization in Nigeria seem implausible. They are likely not so much supporting democracy as merely *using* it. For instance, it seems like the Nigerian political elite support democracy only as a means to power; the international development agencies seem to support it as an asset to structural adjustment; and western governments appear to support it ambiguously torn between their growing insincerity to Nigeria and their desire to promote their own way of life, even among others (Ake, 1996).

Thus, Ake (1996) argued that what was being foisted on Nigeria was a version of liberal democracy reduced to the crude simplicity of *multi-party elections*. This type of democracy was not in the least emancipatory especially in Nigerian conditions because it offered the people rights they could not exercise; voting that never amounted to choosing; freedom which was patently spurious; and political equality which disguised highly unequal power relations. It was further observed that one of the most remarkable features of democratization in Africa (indeed in Nigeria) was that it was totally *indifferent to the character of the state*. Democratic elections were being held to determine who would exercise the powers of the state with no questions asked about the character of the state as if it had no implications for democracy. But its implications were so serious that elections in Africa and particularly in Nigeria gave the voter only a choice between oppressors. These oppressors were equally responsible for the colouration of the Nigerian post-colonial state because the ruling class largely characterises the state (Ukachikara, 2018; Ekekwe, 2015). This is hardly surprising since Nigeria largely retained the colonial state structure which was inherently anti-democratic, being the repressive apparatus of an occupying power. Uncannily, this structure had been survived, reproduced and rejuvenated by the legacy of military rule. By all indications, it is also surviving democratization, helped by the reducing of democracy to multi-party elections. So what has happened by way of democratization was that self-appointed military dictators were being replaced by elected dictators.

Accordingly, the Nigerian post-colonial state seems to have been democratising with no separation of powers: all powers having been vested in an imperial presidency. There is hardly any rule of law, no plausible system of justice, no transparency. The presidency arrogates all forms of powers to itself. In some cases, it draws up the list of preferred candidates to fill principal positions in the National Assembly; insists on working with such persons that had been severally rejected by the Assembly; chooses which court orders to obey or not, as is convenient to it. Obviously, the coercive institutions of the state are above the law while civil society is below it; and ordinary people are out of sight, far beyond its protection. The judiciary is dissociated from justice, and the bureaucracy is oppressive and arbitrary. The Nigerian State, like its colonial counterpart,

turns on the calculus of strength (Alapiki, 2015; 2010; 2001) in virtually everything it does simply because it lacks the legitimacy which is the hallmark of democracy. That is to say that the Nigerian post-colonial state seems to be inherently undemocratic. The pertinent question here is: what is the point of democratically choosing those who will control a state apparatus which is inherently undemocratic? It seems to make sense to argue that the state must be structurally transformed before such elections could become a meaningful exercise in democracy. Obviously, it appears that the genuine democratic transformation of the Nigerian state structures has not been in the agenda of Nigeria's ruling class, since independence (Ekekwe, 2015; 2009; Alapiki, 2015; Nwaorgu, 2014; Ake, 1996; 1981).

#### **4.2 Multiparty System, Democracy and Peace: The Nigerian Electoral Process in Focus**

It is germane to start this section by revisiting our earlier questions: Does multiparty system mean "more" democracy, and how has the electoral process enhanced democracy and peace in Nigeria? The liberal democracy practiced in Nigeria was merely multi-party elections. It was a non-transparent, non-accountable, warlike system where opposing oppressors violently contest for power to control a non-democratic state apparatus probably for selfish ends. According to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which is the electoral management body in Nigeria, there were over ninety registered political parties in Nigeria (as at February 2019). However, it was only about four or five of the registered political parties that were quite active both at the national and state levels. These might include the All Progressives Congress (APC), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), Labour Party (LP).

Indeed, the number of registered political parties in Nigeria was quite misleading, and in most cases confusing. For a passive observer, the large number of registered political parties could mean wider political space for citizens to participate in politics; wider alternative choices and healthy competitions. These were actually not the underlying factors that necessitated the registration of the large numbers of political parties by INEC. Two broad factors might account for the large number of political parties in Nigeria. On the one hand, the incumbent administration could have influenced INEC to register more political parties as a disguise for expanded political space and options for citizens to participate in politics. On the other hand, following from the first factor, since the government had liberalized the formation of political parties, aggrieved members in the various parties, especially during electioneering periods, would usually break away to form their own parties. However, the overall objective for allowing the registration of large number of political parties might be a ploy by the ruling political elite to seduce the fragmentation of opposing interests in order to manoeuvre its continued stay in power.

Multiparty democracy presupposes ideological divide of political parties and thus offer wider options for citizens to choose from. However, this was not the case with Nigerian

multiparty democracy. For instance, lacking ideological orientation and convictions, politicians and political office holders in the present Fourth Republic have been seen to cross-carpet with reckless abandon and form all manner of political *business alliances* in their desperate bid to capture power. This seems to largely explain the outcomes of the 2015 general elections, where all other major opposition parties joined forces to unseat the then ruling party, the PDP. It may be pertinent to observe here that the outcomes of the 2015 polls confirmed that Nigeria's claim to multiparty democracy was only on paper and not in practice. In terms of ideology, you could hardly differentiate the ideology of party A from that of B. For instance, the motto of PDP was “Justice, Unity and Progress”. When APC was formed in 2013, it adopted “Justice, Peace and Unity” as its motto. The difference in both mottos has continued to elude keen intellectual and political observers.

The tension and disruption caused by the internal power struggle among the political elite and within its larger capitalist ruling class in the build-up to the 2015 and 2019 general elections were unprecedented in the political history of Nigeria. From 2013, federal and state governments’ apparatuses and functions were seemingly arrested or distracted and destabilized by senseless power tussles among the ruling class. The ruling PDP was worse hit by those intra-class power struggles. Not satisfied with the internal power negotiations, many of the PDP stalwarts broke away and joined forces with other opposition parties, notably, the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) and the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) and formed a so-called mega party, the All Progressives Congress (APC) in 2013 to wrestle power from the PDP. As was seen, in electioneering campaigns devoid of ideology and clad with propaganda, terrorism and large scale rigging by all contending parties, the APC won the 2015 presidential election as well as majority seats in the National Assembly and most of the contested state governorship positions. Contrary to insinuations that the results of the 2015 general elections reflected the popular wish of the people, the outcome of the said elections were indeed the manifestation of the political business alliance of the capitalist class over and above the interest of the masses and the country at large, and this paper shall explain how.

Despite that APC won the elections in 2015, the victory was not for every member of the party. Certain groups in the party were obviously treated like outcasts in their own party. For instance, the leaderships that emerged in both chambers of the 8th National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria were purportedly not supported by the party. These “ostracised” members who were also party leaders by virtue of the political offices they held understood that their socio-political interests would not be protected in the party beyond 2019. Thus, they launched what they christened “home-coming”. They went back to PDP and vowed to unseat the incumbent president but to no avail. Some of them could not also return to any political office because the political equation had changed.

Currently, Nigeria is practicing “majoritarian” democracy. Generally speaking, one could argue that the existence of a multi-party system alone did not necessarily lead to “more” democracy in Nigeria. Many factors along with multipartyism shape the level of

democracy in a country. These include a strong political culture with solid institutions in the country; good coalition potential, that is, parties may be scattered along the political spectrum (representing quite big ideological differences), but have common interests and goals - the national interest. Moreover, parties ought not to act solely on the basis of self-interest but reflect the demands of the constituencies they represent. Thus, only the successful combination of all these factors within multipartyism may lead to the enhancement of democracy (Malachova, 2012).

It will suffice here to attempt an analysis of the electoral processes in Nigeria with a view to ascertaining how they have (or have not) enhanced democracy and peace in Nigeria. This is the next salient issue to consider in this section, after an overview of what elections, electoral processes and electoral systems mean.

Elections, electoral systems and the way in which they interrelate are important elements of any democracy, nascent or mature. Democracy is an “institutional arrangement”; an instrument for actualizing peoples’ democratic preferences in the form of governments controlled by the victorious political party or parties; and a means of competitive politics to fill public offices (in the legislature and the political executive) whereby the electorates decide who should represent them, rule, or make policies and take decisions that organize and impact on public affairs (Mohamed & Nordlund, 2007). Elections, therefore, are an important instrument in the democratic process. The conventional view is that elections are a mechanism through which politicians can be called to account and forced to introduce policies that somehow reflect public opinion. They are means through which governments and political elites can exercise control over their populations, making them more quiescent, malleable and, ultimately governable (Heywood, 2007).

According to Mohamed & Nordlund (2007), elections have at least the following seven major functions: recruiting politicians; making governments; providing representation; influencing policy; educating voters; building legitimacy; and strengthening elites. That is essentially to say that an election is not an event. It is a process which influences how a democratic polity and political party politics unfold following the election, including the type of government formed (majority, minority, coalition etc.). Because elections are contested by political parties, there will always be a conjuncture between party systems and electoral systems. More so, an electoral system consists of a set of rules that govern the conduct of elections. Apart from providing a set of rules for conducting elections, electoral systems establish three elements of the electoral process: (a) their scope - what offices are elected (in particular, to the legislature and political executive); (b) the franchise - who can vote; and (c) turnout - who actually votes. These rules are meant to regulate these aspects in order to ensure that the claims to electoral victories which will eventually allow the winning party or parties to form a government are legitimate (Mohamed & Nordlund, 2007). Electoral systems are important because they have crucial impact on party performance and particularly on political parties’ prospects of winning (or at least sharing) power after the election. It is therefore common in severely divided and multi-ethnic societies for electoral systems to become the focus of



heightened political debate and polemic—hence the debate on what electoral system is most representative.

Glaringly, electoral systems are essential parts of the democratic process. Depending on what electoral systems are used, they are vehicles for ensuring that parliament, the main representative institution, the face of the nation, so to speak, is representative. The extent to which parliament is representative is a function of whether the electoral system is capable of reflecting the diversity of interests, ideologies, concerns and commonly held or known interests of the political forces of a given country. This is important because the legislature—the end result of the electoral process and the electoral system a country adopts—is the only credible national institution that is capable of offering an inclusive platform for legislation, legitimacy and conflict management through peaceful means. This is why it is a widely-held view that electoral reforms are important instruments for conflict management in severely divided societies where conflicts are preferably resolved through parliamentary debate and compromise rather than by the use of the machete and the gun. It is through electoral systems in conjunction with political party systems that the whole political system could be sufficiently prepared to ensure inclusiveness and representation.

However, commenting on election as a tool of political oppression by the elite, Ake (1996) contended that the problems of emancipation for the poor in Africa and Nigeria in particular were compounded by the fact that the very process by which they participated reinforced their disempowerment. The peasant was not politically mobilized in the market-place of formally equal legal subjects who were negotiating their interests and finding common ground, but through patron-client chains, leveraging parochial identities, bribery and intimidation. In these circumstances, voting became a metaphor for powerlessness and exploitation. For instance, the use of traditional patron-client relations for securing votes reproduced and reinforced these regressive social relations which were inimical to democracy. In accepting bribe for her (his) vote, the peasant colluded in commoditizing her (his) democratic right and reinforced her (his) subordination, thus turning election into bondage. By responding to ethnic appeal, the voter was frozen in a moment of particularity and obliged to renounce the prospect of sharing in the universality of democratic consensus-building and collective identity. She (he) remained confined to a small parochial space, paying in her (his) isolation, her (his) political and cultural impoverishment, the price for the political power of the elite (Ake, 1996).

Although we have referred to the liberal democracy in Nigeria as merely multi-party elections; where one set of oppressors are replaced by another, it is widely held that credible, free and fair elections can be used to engender an all inclusive representative democracy. The June 12, 1993 presidential election in Nigeria is a case in point. Perhaps, if the result was allowed to stand it would have been a turning point in the history of Nigeria's democratization. Thus, commenting on the June 12, 1993 presidential election, Ake stated that "when the people revolted on June 12, 1993 voting against ethnic, regional and religious parochialism - all those things which the elite use to divide and to

manipulate them - a monumental crisis ensued. Visibly shaken to the point of incoherence, the incumbent military regime annulled the election to the delight of and enthusiastic support of the National Republican Convention (NRC), the defeated party. The NRC decided to abandon democracy for a chance of getting into power in another election, apparently determined to ensure that, this time, democracy is taught a lesson" (Ake, 1996:12-13).

On the other hand, Ake noted that, more significantly still, most leaders of the winning Social Democratic Party (SDP) heartily supported the annulment of their own victory. A few, the most powerful among them, did so on the calculation that annulment would allow them to resume their presidential bid. Many more supported it in order to corner some of the fortunes on offer. Others did so fearing a trend which would destroy the parochial base of their political power (Ake, 1996:13).

It is noteworthy that the two parties that participated in the third republic elections, the NRC and SDP, were the closest to what looked like national parties in Nigeria, since independence. Unfortunately, the two parties that had greater potentials were slain by their creator, General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida when they produced totally-unacceptable results to him from the popular June 12 1993 elections (Ekekwe, 2012). Annulment of that presidential election by Nigeria's ruling class and concomitant abortion of the third republic, which had the greatest promise of a democratic republic in Nigeria, further portrayed the nature, character and disposition of the Nigerian post-colonial state in an undemocratic light. Assertion that the election had the greatest national democratic potential in Nigeria's history stems from not only the fact that the two parties (NRC and SDP) that participated in the election seemingly had more national outlook than any other in Nigeria's political history but also that the election was nationally and internationally adjudged the fairest of all elections in Nigeria. Sadly, the republic was probably doomed for producing democratic results for an undemocratic state. About sixty years since the scepticisms about the Nigerian project were expressed by Nigerian masses, it seems that the ruling class has mindlessly continued to play the ostrich (Ekekwe, 2012) while the Nigerian state gradually but steadily stumbles to the edge of the precipice (Ndu, 2016) evidenced by the level of political insanity all around.

The emerging fact in all of these is that Nigeria's multiparty democracy and its electoral process have been characterized by election rigging since independence (Ukachikara, 2019). According to Nwabueze (2003), election rigging includes electoral manipulations which are palpable illegalities committed with a corrupt, fraudulent or sinister motive to influence an election in favour of a candidate(s) by way such as illegal voting, bribery, threatening and undue influence, intimidation and other forms of force exerted on the electorates, falsification of results, fraudulent announcement of a losing candidate as the winner (without altering the recorded results).

Also, election rigging connotes any form of undue authority or power that influence and manipulate election result in a dubious way to protect a particular interest against the interest of the generality of the masses. When the interest of the people are articulated in

a free and fair election, the government in power tend to enjoy the sovereign legitimacy of the people but election rigging can thwart the interest of the people hence the dubious imposition of an unpopular candidate. The sad end is governments' lack of people's support which is one of the basic principles of democracy (Osinakachukwu & Jawan, 2011:130).

Political actors in Nigeria have employed several ways and dimensions of rigging elections. Political observers have identified some ways by which elections are rigged in Nigeria. Ibrahim (2007) identified some forms of electoral fraud as follows: illegal printing of voters' cards; illegal possession of ballot boxes; stuffing of ballot boxes; falsification of election results; illegal thumb-printing of ballot papers; infant voting; compilation of fictitious names on voters' lists; illegal compilation of separate voters' lists; illegal printing of forms used for collection and declaration of election results; deliberate refusal to supply election materials to certain areas; announcing results in places where no elections were held; unauthorized announcement of election results; harassment of candidates, agents, and voters; change of list of electoral officials; box-switching and inflation of figures. It is noteworthy to state here that apart from the June 12, 1993 presidential election (which was conducted with the Open Ballot System - the physical counting of persons present and voting, popularly called Option A4), all elections in Nigeria from Independence to the 2019 general elections have been characterized by one or multiple forms of rigging as mentioned above.

It is also observed that some politicians who have upper-hand in the government, in an attempt to win an election or prevent political opponents from winning elections by all means, might call for an illegal arrest and detention of their opponents on or before the election day. This, as a result, could render mobilization of voters by his opponents very limited. Also, influential politicians sometimes hired thugs who would rigmarole the streets shooting sporadically in the air at polling centres to scare away genuine electorates who would, as expected, run for their dear lives allowing these thugs to take away the stuffed ballot boxes and replaced them with empty ones or with boxes containing thumb-printed ballot papers of their patron-candidate. At other instances, such influential politicians mobilised security operatives (who were supposed to serve as symbol of peace and order) to snatch ballot boxes and also barricaded election collation centres with a view to disallowing their opponents and agents from gaining entrance into such centres. Rivers State of Nigeria was a case in point during the 2015 and 2019 general elections, as reported by various media houses and international/local election observers. Through these terrorised forms of rigging, many genuine voters' card holders were subjected to fear that election was going to be a do-or-die affair and the peace loving Nigerians would prefer to stay at home rather than expose themselves to any wanton intimidation and this offered politicians the chance for massive rigging.

It might just be safe to assert that election rigging in Nigeria, from independence, had hindered the democratic consolidation in Nigeria. This is because, in a liberal democracy, elections are the best option to change government periodically. Furthermore, it does not only promote leadership change but also encourages

accountability in leadership. Precisely, free and fair elections are the best means of making the sovereign power of the people known because they allow for participation and help to reside power in the people. More so, in a democracy, those whose responsibility it is to exercise political authorities in a society are meant to perform it with the express consent of the people and genuine mandate expressed at periodic intervals by the electorate through an open, free and fair electoral process. This means that democracy must be a system of government where the people dictate the pace with the general consent of the governed (Ojie, 2006). Unfortunately, Nigeria's elections have so far thwarted the foundation upon which democracy is built due to election rigging. Nigeria is in the category where election management is less successful. The rules guiding elections are ambiguous, ever changing or easily manoeuvred; the electoral regulations and rules are institutionally less effective; the political bigwigs are the gladiators in their conduct; hence the electorates are often powerless as they live on the mercy of the political stalwarts and political outcomes. The political barons, who have special interest, impose unpopular candidates and employ every form of political gimmick to influence the election in their favours against the general will of the people (Osinakachukwu & Jawan, 2011).

More worrisome is the political trend since the beginning of the Fourth Republic. The electoral process between 1999 and 2019 has been accompanied by more bloodshed and this have claimed the lives of so many Nigerians, especially electoral ad-hoc staff, and these political killings were executed by hired assassins commissioned by desperate politicians who wanted power by all means. The contemporary political barons in Nigeria also imposed gullible electoral officers who employed various tricks to win election for their employers at the detriment of the masses and popular candidates. This has made the system very boring and many have resorted to stay at home during electioneering for fear of being intimidated or coerced to vote against their will, as has been observed earlier in this paper, and this is too bad for a country that is eager to institutionalize a consolidated democracy (Ekekwe, 2015; Alapiki, 2015; Nwaorgu, 2014)

Worse still, the electoral management body (the INEC) which would have been neutral, and ensure free and fair elections has been biased because in most cases, they are employed by some power brokers to serve as a rescue mission to some illegitimate candidates to the detriment of popular candidates and Nigerian electorates. To ensure that their unpopular candidates emerged victorious in elections, they have seen election rigging as a way out against the general wish of the popular candidates, electorates and the good of Nigerian democracy. This trend has triggered multiple election tribunal cases, and in some cases, fatal post-election violence across the country, thereby threatening the peace and stability of Nigeria. Of course, the main aim of election rigging or malpractice is to frustrate the democratic aspirations of citizens who have voted or would have voted into office someone instead of the victor. These trends have, in no small measure, undermined the chances of successful elections and consolidation of democratic peace in Nigeria. Who, then, benefits from all these?

### 4.3 Real beneficiaries of Nigeria's Multiparty Democracy

From our discussions so far, it has began to be clear who the real beneficiaries of Nigeria's multiparty democracy are. Nigeria's multiparty or electoral democracy "is not a lawful competition to select those to manage our common concerns but a fight to capture and privatize an enormous power resource. There is no public realm, strictly speaking, no state. There is only a contested terrain, where interest groups and communities go to fight for appropriation. There is no space which incarnates a collective identity; there is only a battlefield where the act of doing battle constitutes us as a purely negative unity. We are a polity of *takers* rather than *givers*. What we dearly love to take is state power, and being strangers to one another and adversaries, we necessarily take it as private property" (Ake, 1996:8).

The foregoing has posed a big problem to Nigeria's democracy. Ordinarily, electoral democracy is about selecting managers of our common resources; about being involved in making decisions about our common concerns. However, the political elite have turned the electoral process into an endless war between regional, ethnic, religious and communal groups. In essence, multiparty democracy is about the masses. However, Ekekwe (2015), Nwaorgu (2014) and Ake (1996) are unanimous that the greatest obstacle to multiparty or electoral democracy in Nigeria is the absence of enabling conditions for democratic participation at the grassroots. They argued that the transformation of society for the empowerment of ordinary people is a prerequisite for the transformation and democratization of the state and its apparatus.

Unfortunately, it seems that since independence, multiparty democracy and the electoral process in Nigeria have been hijacked by the political elite to reinforce the subordination of the people and to reproduce itself. Thus,

Paradoxically, the democratization of Africa has focused on the power elite, who are the natural enemies of democracy. Although the elite have provided the vast majority of the leaders of the democracy movements, their involvement in democracy movements is mainly a tactical manoeuvre. It is a response to internal contradictions and power struggles within a group for whom democracy is essentially a means to power... If the Nigerian experience is any guide, Africa appears to be spawning a unique historical experience, a self-absorbed political elite with no national project whatever, not even an inadequate one. They are totally absorbed in the quest for absolute and eternal power. They know only their interests. It is the only morality they have and their only religion. They hear only echoes of their own voices and see only images of themselves looming to fill every space and every consciousness" (Ake, 1996:13).

## **5. Conclusion**

The main contention of this paper is that multiparty democracy in Nigeria benefits largely the capitalist class/political elite at the expenses of the masses. The electoral process has been the tool that the political elite (which represents the capitalist class) uses to manoeuvre its access to state power in order to selfishly amass wealth, leaving the masses in perpetual poverty and siege mentality.

From the time of Nigeria's Independence in 1960 to the 2019 general elections, the form, function and character of the Nigerian state has not changed. State power remains anti-democratic: immense, arbitrary, often violent, always threatening (Ukachikara, 2019; Alapiki, 2015; Ekekwe, 2015; 2009; 1986; Nwaorgu, 2014; Ake, 1996). It is argued that that politics remains a zero-sum contest or majoritarian - the winner takes it all; power is sought by all means and maintained by all means, in legacy of lawless political competition without any ideological base. Owing to the nature of the power struggle, the pursuit of development is nearly impossible.

We have seen that the clamour for multiparty democracy and its related electoral process in Nigeria were intended to ensure political stability and promote fundamental human rights of all people in the country. However, politics and the electoral process in Nigeria which should have been a prelude for achieving a stabilised government accompanied by people's consent have contradicted these standards because of faulty electoral process. This is a serious concern that affects the stability and secured environment needed for the success of multiparty democracy in the country. Politics and elections conducted since Nigeria's Independence have been played in a do or die manner and this has made many peace-loving Nigerians to be dead scared in exercising their voting rights.

Current trends have also shown that the rate of citizen participation in elections these days have drastically reduced due to limited choice or lack of qualified candidates. Violence and fielding of many candidates without vision by political parties have made the electorates indifferent to the country's political process. Sometimes, the electorates are disenfranchised by a politicised electoral management body and encourage political barons to employ all manner of illegal means to pervade the electoral process. It, indeed, seemed that politics was the only lucrative game in town, and it was played with deadly seriousness for the winner won everything and the loser lost everything. All these have in no small measures posed serious threat to Nigeria's democratic consolidation and the peace needed for development.

## **6. Recommendations**

1. Return to two-party system. It was only the two party structure of the aborted third republic that held out any dint of hope of truly national party system for

Nigeria, as found in this study.

2. Review of the Electoral Act to strengthen the autonomy, capacity and transparency of INEC.
3. Amendment of the Constitution to include (i) ban on cross-carpeting by elected officials; (ii) one, six-year term for the President and the Governors; (iii) proportional representation in elective bodies at all levels, for parties that win at least 5% of the popular vote; (iv) independent candidacy; (v) retaining local government councils to administer urban areas but scraping them in rural areas. In these rural areas, town unions should be constitutionally empowered to carry out the administration.
4. Fiscal Federalism: each state of the federation should retain at least 60% of the revenue it generates from all sources in its territory, including oil and gas, while it returns 40% to the federal government - which should be left to manage the nation's customs and excise, external relations and foreign policy, the armed forces and currency.
5. A Responsive Legislature: As the symbol of democracy, the legislature should be held liable for misappropriations because it holds "the people's purse" in trust and has constitutional oversight functions over the executive arm.
6. Reform of the Justice System: The justice system needs urgent reformation to facilitate the administration of justice and enthrone the rule of law in the everyday life and activities of the people.
7. In order to attract the right calibre of persons into politics, anyone running for office as LG Chairman, State Governor, legislator at the state and federal levels, must have held a verifiable paid job in either the private or public sector for at least three (3) years or have been self self-employed for 6 years.

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