

POLITICAL CONFLICT AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study examines political conflict and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Political parties are the pillars of democracy in all societies, either developed or developing nations. They are alliances of like-minded people who work together to win elections and control the government through their philosophies and policies hence there can never be democracy without political parties. The study is anchored on Elite theory which helps to understand that power in society is held by a small number of individuals which have control over key decision making. The study employed secondary method of data collection with information generated from text books, journals, newspaper and magazines. Findings of the study highlight that political parties are critical aspects of Nigerian democratic governance stating that there is a nexus between the nature and character of a political party, good governance and democratic consolidation. Consequently, the study recommends the overhauling of political parties in order to correct the state of current party politics and Democratic practices in Nigeria.

Key words: Political parties, conflict and democratic consolidation

Introduction

There is no vestige of doublet that in modern democracies, political parties provide the governmental administrative machinery for managing the affairs of a country, forwards the attainment of its set national goals. As an up shoot, parties in advance democracies have particularly proven to be agents for authentic socio-political change and transformation in societies. According to Agbese (2005) indeed, being in control of administrative machinery of government, political parties are most activity involved in making policies and decisions that government pursues on behalf of the country. Thus, parties initiate and execute ideas meant in every democratic society. They are fundamental pillars, essential components without which a constitutional democracy cannot junction optimally. Infact, political parties is to develop what blood is to the human body system (Abgese 2005).

As Observed by Adetula (2013) that parties perform a number of useful functions that makes democracy in modern states jiable. They represent political constituencies and interest, recruit and socialize new candidates for office, set polity making agendas individuals into the democratic process, and form the basis is stable political coalitions and hence governments. Altogether this means that political parties are the primary channels for building accountable and responsive government. He further buttressed that, parties also provide a number of systemic support that help make democracy work effectively. For example, they mediate between the demands of the citizenry in the demands of the other, aggregating the diverse demands of the electorates into coherent public policy; they make effective collective actions possible within legislatures. Without the predictable voting coalitions that parties provide, there would be chaos as legislative majorities shift from issue to issue and from vote to vote, they provide a link between ordinary citizens and their political representatives. Parties are also the primary channels in

democratic systems for holding governments accountable for their performance. (Reilly 2006).

Regrettably, the roles of Nigerian political parties have been historically unimpressive and highly abysmal. They engage in prolonged party conflicts which undermines democratic consolidation. Political parties with the transition to civil rule in 1999 , are not without political conflict, rather they are moving every inch by difficult inch to sustain democracy in Nigeria upto today which is preferred over military rule by Nigerians.

Objectives of the Study

The study is predicated on the following research objective:

1. Identify ways of resolving conflicts among political parties in Nigeria
2. Assess the role of political parties and how they translate into governance in Nigeria
3. Determine ways of consolidating democracy in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

Concept of Political Parties

Political parties have been defined differently by different scholars to suit their various circumstances and perceptions. Whatever their perceptions are political parties have basic characteristics and functions which they perform. Satori (1976), Maintained that political parties have a rather distinct habitat, a peculiar mode of operation and special characteristics of structure and junction. Simbine (2007) sees political parties as promoting the vital interest of a nation Lawson (2019) defines political party as a body of men united, for promoting by their joint endeavors, the national interest, upon some particular principles in which they all agreed.

Kura (2011) conceptualized political parties as a condition of groups and interest aimed at controlling state power for their own interest. Jinades (2012) defines political party as a group of people or an organized group of people who seek to control in order to put their ideology or program into practice. Human Right Watch (2007) sees political party as a formal organization whose self-conscious primary purpose is to place and maintain n public office persons who will maintain and control alone or in coalition the machinery of government. In this regard, they are also characterized as a coalition group interests representing a segment of the social community. However, such a group shall be regarded as a party only if it participates in electoral competition. This means that a political party cannot exist in isolation of a political system as both of act as lubricants and ingredients of ideal democratic system and so without them, there can be no democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The framework of analysis adopted in this study is the elite theory, which was propounded by Vilfredo Pareto (1843 - 1923) and Gaetano Mosca (1858 - 1941), the choice of elite theory is on the basis that public policy reflects the values and preferences of the elite rather than the demands of the masses. Those who ascend to the top are known as the elite. They consist of those successful persons who rise to the top in every occupation and stratum of the society who come from the same class of wealthy people who believe that the elite in society consists of two classes of individuals, a higher stratum divided into a governing elite and non-governing elite. This theory is related to political parties and democratic elections in Nigeria are largely influenced by the elite. They wealthy people who the financial wherewithal to purchase party nomination forms, organize elections or sponsor candidates of their choice. They also influence activities such as positions, appointment and party ticket. These elites manipulate election results in their favour even they lost an election with their resources hence public policy does not

always represent public interest. Elite theory also situate governance of the state in the hands of the elite as mechanism for majority control and are highly unaccountable to the masses a practice that is fundamentally against the principle of democratic consolidation. The choice and relevance of this theory to his study is premised on the fact that elite are influential people in society especially in political parties, with their wealth they push themselves into government, formulate policies that reflect their personal interest and values to the detriment of the poor masses in society. These elite are few influence and work assiduously to sustain the status quo which is their common interest. The implication is that policies of government are concentrative and marginal rather than bold with high change potential in other words, they policies are incremental rather than revolutionary and this antithesis to democratic consideration anywhere in the world.

Methodology

The study made use of secondary sources of data as veritable tools for this analysis. The choice of this method was informed by its outstanding quantities and expert submissions that enhance effort of findings and obtaining understanding of people's opinions and belief about the importance of ending political conflicts and ensuring democratic consolidation in Nigeria with all its attendant benefits. This methodology helps us to understand in the broadest possible enquiry but the step-by-step details of the procedures followed in carrying out the study it also avail readers the opportunity of assessing the views of authorities cited in the literature review. Data for the study were gathered from journals, textbooks, internets, magazines, conference papers, dictionaries, encyclopedias, published articles and quoted speeches.

Review of Related Literature

Political parties as major institution in democracy

There is a convergence of opinions among scholars about the inseparable nexus between political parties and democracy because they are indispensable to political system. The functionality of modern democracy depends to a large extent on the viability of political parties. Indeed, in the contemporary world, nowhere does democracy makes sense without political parties. (Ogundiya 2011).

Schattschneider (1998) claimed that “political parties created democracy”, and to Aldrich (1999:53) democracy is “unworkable” except in terms of political parties. Thus, policy makers and democracy promotion organizations often display a strong normative bias in favour of cohesive, organizationally (Relly 2006) the foregoing underscores the indispensability of political parties in democratic system. (Luka Etal, 2019)

According to the US National Democratic Institute (2008) political democratic society and serve a junction unlike any other institution in a democracy. Parties aggregate and represent social interests and provide a structure for political leaders who will assume a role in governing society. In addition, parties contest and win elections to seek a measure of control of government institution.

Similarly, the United Nations Development Programme (2008) maintains that “political parties are a keystone of democratic governance they provide a structure for political participation; serve as a training ground for leadership; and transform social interests into public policy”

Diamond (2011) aptly observed that political parties remain important, if not essential instruments for representing political constituencies and interests, aggregating demands and preferences, recruiting and socializing new candidates for office, organizing the electoral competition for power, crafting policy alternatives, setting the policy, crafting policy alternatives, setting the policy

making agenda, forming effective governments, and integrating groups and individuals into the democratic process.

This implies that political parties are indeed a major institution, the pillars without which the democratic system cannot stand. For a democracy to function effectively, political parties must be well organized and adequately structures to meet the need of the various competing groups in society. A functional and effective political system is the one that has a strong base in society (Ogundiya 2011). Strong parties according to Johnson (2005:3) “are essential to open, competitive democratic parties, particularly in emerging democracies”, such as Nigeria. It is therefore nor suprising that Diamond (2011) cited in Manning (2007:72) stressed that:

Institutionalized party system thus increased democratic government ability and legitimacy by facilitating legislative support for government policies: by channeling demands and conflicts through established procedures; by reducing the scope damage goes to win power, and by making the democratic process more inclusive, accessible, representative and effective.

Inherent these arguments is the fact that the operation of a democracy is not only unthinkable and or inconceivable save in terms political parties, but its consolidation is also impossible without a virile and institution alized party system (Ogundiya, 2011). Inded, political parties play vital roles in promoting democratic consolidation and stability. For hunting ton 1968; parities forge unity out of disparate and potentially dangerous social forces. Parties are furst and foremost, tools of social organization and control, whether they are ruling parties in a more open system, therefore the essence of political goes beyond the organization of people for winning elections.

The Challenges Of Political Parties In Nigerian Democracy

- i. Absence of internal democracy within the political parties: most political parties do not practice internal democracy because they hardly emerged democratically, hence the rising culture of political violence and assassination in the country. Internal party democratic process which involves accountability in all party affairs most especially in selecting party leaders, flag bearers, executive and other party officials in a political party (Ukaeje, 2011).

There is lack of internal democracy and poor governance system in the political parties as indicated by non-inclusive of participation and decision making lack of opportunities from board input, absence of well-defined structures, rules and group rights and weak mechanism for redressing grievances (Ikelegbe. 2014).

- ii. Inter and intra party crisis: parties in Nigeria have not attained the expected degree of institutionalization especially in the areas of material cohesion and discipline, this deficiency has contributed to the decline of their conflict management capacities at both inter and intra party relations and this is antithetical to democratic consolidation principles (Kura, 2020).
- iii. Political conflict and democratic consolidation: according to Hassner (1947) a conflict is a situation in which people, groups or countries are involved in a serious disagreement Stedman (1975). Posits that conflict is a situation which there are opposing ideas, opinions, or feelings. Overall, conflict refers to a situation in which it is pretty difficult to choose between two or more options or alternatives.

Conflict resolution according to Osaghae (1998) refers to a formal agreement of an opinion agreed on by a committee, political parties or a council especially by means of vote for peace to reign.

According to Ikelegba (2014) democratic consolidation refers to a way of making democracy succeed and this is consistently consistent without military take on the account of bad governance, corruption and lack of accountabilities of political leaders to the electorates. When the felt needs, yearnings and aspirations of citizens are met, all party members are carried along and are in a way point and parcel of policy making and benefits from the achievements of the party and not just a selected few, however, the internal characteristics and power configurations of political parties have manifested in huge organizational weakness and internal conflicts. Political parties in Nigeria have particularly been plagued by suspension and expulsions of party members, prior to elections and deep divisions and functions that have manifested sometimes in violent clashes. More empirically, whether a party in a particular policy is able to effectively perform these functions is a matter of the degree of party and party system institution (Kura, 2008).

Nature And Character Of The Nigerian Fourth Republic

Nigeria's transition from an autocratic military regime to a democratically elected civilian administration in May 1999 marked an important milestone in the short, but checkered history of the post-colonial era of the country. The transition ended sixteen straight years of authoritarian rule under several military heads of state.

By any yardstick, military rule was a monumental disaster for Nigeria. Despite the country's huge endorsements, Nigeria under military rule had all the classic features of a failed state. On the eve of military departure from politics, Nigerians left a sign of relief that the civilian administrators would set to work immediately to improve the living standard of the people. In specific terms, Nigerians expected that the termination of military rule would lead to drastic reduction in corruption, criminality and wanton violation of human rights. They also expected that public institutions such as schools and hospitals shall be

rehabilitated to provide needed services. Similarly, Nigerians had hoped that the termination of military rule would put an end to the divide-and-rule tactics which had become the hallmark of military administrations.

However, after twenty four years of democratic rule, Nigerians social, political and economic situations have largely remained the same, if not even worse than the situation under the military rule. Bad governance, high level of corruption, mass unemployment, dilapidated infrastructures, religious, ethnic and communal conflicts; insurgency among other have become permanent features of the Nigerian state under the current democratic dispensation. Scholars have adduced many reasons but the one that captures its very essence is the fact that democracy inherently rests the governmental administration on the parties and level of patriotic and national consciousness among political parties determines how abreast and concerned they would be in addressing or ameliorating the challenges of such a nation. The Nigerian case presents a scenario where all the challenges facing the nation since the advent of the fourth republic can rightly be attributed to the fact that the political parties do not exhibit any concern for the numerous sensitive and delicate issues bothering the nation. Omuruyi (2001) has argued that in many cases the so-called political parties since 1999 have become a major part of the problem in Nigeria.

The Place Of Political Parties In The Politics Of The Fourth Republic

Political parties have long been recognized as essential components of representative democracy. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how the governance of modern states could be accomplished without meaningful political parties. By recognizing voters, aggregating and articulating interests, crafting policy alternatives and providing the basis for coordinated electoral and legislative activity, well-functioning political parties are central not just to representative

government but also to the process of democratic development in transitional democracies (SICIS, 2003).

Yet in many countries particularly in transitional democracies, parties exhibit a rate of pathologies that undercut their ability to deliver the kind of systemic benefits on which representative politics depends. For instance, they are frequently poorly institutionalized with limited membership, weak policy capacity and shifting bases of support; they often based around narrow personal, religion or ethnic ties, rather than reflecting society as a whole; they are typically organizationally then, coming to life only at election time. They may have little in way ideology; they often fail to stand for any particular policy agenda; they are frequently unable to ensure disciplined collective action in parliament, with members shifting between parties; as a result, parties often struggle to manage social conflicts and fail to deliver public goods and thus to promote development (Reilly, 2008).

These deficiencies in party development are so widespread that they have become a major concern in many emerging democracies, to the extent that they are increasingly seen as a threat to stable democracy itself thus, their propensity towards democratic consolidation becomes infinitesimally low. (Saliu and Efejika, 2016).

According to Nwodobo (2012) the weakness of political parties structures emanate from actions of “Party Bosses” who handpick their loyalists to leadership positions regardless of qualification, character or competence. Party positions should not be at the whims and car pieces of and god father or god mother because true leadership that emerges from the collective will has high index of success.

Examination Of Major Nigerian Problems And The Response Of Political Parties

Based on its historical antecedents, and as a developing nation, Nigeria is faced with numerous challenges that have persisted in its body-politic over the years such as, leadership and governance of crisis, the unresolved question of national unity and integration, weak democracy, development crisis, the issue of corruption and embezzlement, election frauds and malpractices, incessant conflicts and violence among others. This study briefly undertakes an examination of these problems with respect to the role of political parties in contributing to the persistence.

It is crystal clear that political conflicts do not emanate from civil servants, business men, religious groups or farmers but they emanate from politicians and their political parties where different ideas, values, intensions or ambition to grab power, take over government and control the state emanates from. These political conflicts are inimical to development in al modern democratic consolidation anywhere in the world. (Collier et al 2007)

The main objective of his study has been to resolve political conflicts and to ensure democratic consolidation through the instrumentality of politicians and their political parties so as to bring peace, stability and development into Nigeria. Consequent upon the finding of the study this conclusion was drawn.

Conclusion

Elimination political conflicts and ensuring democratic consolidation is what all modern democratic states are seeking after since democracy is preferred over and above all other forms of government in the world today. Thus, instead of conflicting and halting development politicians and their political parties should rather control government in every democracy and run the affairs of a country

through officials elected on their platforms, provide voter, political and citizenship education, aggregating popular will and challenging them to the government, serving as link between the government and the citizen, representing the people in government, mediating and managing social conflicts, reconciling conflicting interest in the polity, promoting good, responsible and responsive governance initiating and executing government policy agenda, meeting the felt needs, yearning and aspirations of citizens and finally consolidating democracy.

Recommendations

The discussions involved and the conclusion thereafter drawn, the following recommendations are hereby proposed;

1. Politicians and their political parties should engage in peaceful resolution of conflicts to enhance the growth of democracy in Nigeria.
2. Politicians and their political party should firmly enthrone the culture of internal democracy in their decision making structures and processes.
3. Lack of ideological basis by Nigerian political parties poses fierce danger to the country's democratic consolidation.
4. Abuse or violation of electoral process should be outlawed
5. Politics that is today looked upon as gold mines with all its corrupt tendencies should be stopped.
6. Political parties should be set up based on ideology and a cross sentiments
7. Politicians and their political parties should insist on democratic consolidation rather that engaging in senseless conflicts that halt it.
8. These parties need to be re-engineered from mere institutions for acquiring political power to effective institutions that are capable of structuring, medicating and reconciling social interests and conflicts to guarantee democratic consolidation.

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