

POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE QUEST FOR DEMOCRATIC SUSTENANCE IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC

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Abstract

This paper argues that Nigeria's Fourth Republic political parties have failed to contribute fundamentally to the country's democracy. Though it lends credence to the widely held belief that political parties are essential elements in democratic states, it contends that Nigeria's Fourth Republic political parties lack the necessary traits that would enable them make crucial inputs to democratic sustenance. As a conceptual paper, the methodology is descriptive. Through the use of secondary data like textbooks and relevant journal articles, the paper undertook a scholarly exploration of Nigerian political parties from First to Fourth Republic and unveiled the bottlenecks that hamstringing them from carrying out their democratic roles. The paper concludes with suggestions on ways of repositioning Nigerian political parties.

Keywords: Political Parties, Democracy, Ideologies, Intraparty Democracy, Democratic Sustenance.

Introduction

Nigeria's return to democratic rule on May 29 1999 marked a political watershed in the country's history. This is not because it was her first attempt at enthroning democratic rule, but because the transition period was protracted and tortuous. Both Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha who midwived the transition programmes in the aborted Third Republic nurtured self-succession agenda and failed to liberalize the political landscape. They orchestrated the activities of political parties to suit that intention. While the political logjam that was precipitated by the annulment of June 12 1993 presidential elections forced Babangida out of power, Abacha sudden demise in June 1998 ended his transition time-table before completion.

Even though political parties have proliferated in Nigeria since Abdulsalami successfully handed over power to a democratically elected government in 1999, their character and operations leave much to be desired. They are faced with a plethora of contradictions which negate their roles in Nigeria's democratic project. Some of these challenges include (but not restricted to) lack of ideology, absence of institutionalized parties, manipulation of ethnicity and religion by the elites, political violence, godfatherism and profound lack of intraparty democracy.

Political parties are veritable and indispensable institutions in democratic societies. The roles they play are fundamental to the workings of democracy. These roles include interest articulation and aggregation, ensuring popular participation through their internal activities, electoral participation, political socialization and national integration. By carrying out these roles, political parties can make inputs to the

quest for democratic sustenance. When political parties perform their roles effectively, their institutionalization is assured and by implication, democracy would be sustained. The roles of political parties in democracies can, therefore, not be underestimated.

There has been some degree of intellectual reticence on the interface between political parties and the quest for democratic sustenance in Nigeria. What is prominent in the extant literature is the role of political parties in the consolidation of democracy in other political settings, especially in Latin America and Europe such as Portugal, Spain and Greece, particularly in the years following the overthrow of hitherto authoritarian regimes (Dix 1992, Omotola 2015). This research gap is addressed, in a modest manner by this paper.

The critical argument of this paper is that Nigerian political parties have been characterized by monumental defects which negate their potentials to deepen democratic ethos, norms and values. Their ability to guarantee democratic sustenance depends principally on the readiness of the stakeholders to reposition them for enviable performance in the Fourth Republic and beyond. The analyses of the themes of this study were done under introduction, literature review, discussion/findings and conclusion.

Literature Review

A political party is generally defined as a group of individuals working together to achieve common goals by controlling all or part of the government (Epstein 1967; Robertson 1976; Sartori 1976). More often than not, the ruling party dictates who will run governmental institutions and how the societal resources will be allocated. According to Ware (1996:5) " a political party is an institution that (a) seeks influence in a state, often by attempting to occupy positions in government, and (b) usually consists of more than a single interest in the society and to some degree attempts to "aggregate interests".

Functions of political parties: Political parties exist in both democratic and authoritarian regimes. Their major functions include: legitimation of the political system, integration and mobilization of citizens, representation, structuring the popular vote, aggregation of diverse interests, recruitment of leaders for public office, thus facilitating (normally) non-violent choice between individuals and formulating choice between policy options. The balance between these functions differ in line with the type of state (Garner 2012). Not all parties perform all these functions (Green 2007, McGregor 2010, Shambaugh 2008).

The myriad of functions notwithstanding, the legitimation of the political system remains the most critical function of political parties. Exceptional cases are parties whose motive is to overthrow the existing political order particularly those that are interested in violent revolutions and not pursuing change through elections. Moreover, the way and manner political parties carry out these roles is a function of three variables: the constitutional framework within which they operate the specific national systems of elections and the technologies available to them (Garner 2012).

Typologies of political parties: Over the years, political scientists have developed political parties' typologies in order to think more systematically about their activities and to make more meaningful comparisons. Gunther and Diamond (2003: 173) formulated a party typology that took into consideration the political parties in various regions of the world. It is anchored on the ways in which, and the degree to which parties organise themselves. As such, they identified the elite-based parties (which are traditional local notables and prevalent especially in the 19th century; these parties are often clientelistic in nature); the electoralist parties (this includes personalistic, catch-all and programmatic parties); movement party (like left libertarian, post-industrial extreme right); ethnicity (exclusive ethnic, congress/ coalition movement); mass-based (religious: denominational, fundamentalist, nationalist: pluralist, ultranationalist, socialist : class/mass based, Leninist).

According to Palmer (2001), political parties take a variety of forms depending on their primary objectives. In the catch-all parties, for instance, it is clear that the primary motive of the Republican and Democratic parties in the United States is to win elections. Each is characterized by a set of programmes that it seeks to pursue but these parties could easily disregard their programmes in their quest to win elections. The same thing applies to the major political parties in the United Kingdom and Germany.

Such categories of parties are usually classified as catch-all parties due to their readiness to relax their ideological considerations in order to appeal to a wide-range of electorates (Kirchheimer 1966).

The strength of catch-all parties lies in its ability to exploit the centre of the political spectrum and generally avoid holding on to extremist positions that have the tendency to create political apathy among a large segment of voters. They show little concern for their supporters and usually have loose organizational structures. It is not everybody that formally join catch-all parties and apart from their faithfuls, many of their supporters do not attend their meetings. A small cadre of leaders manage the affairs of the party on behalf of the entire party members and take crucial decisions in the name of the party.

Arranged in a hierarchical order, mass-membership or devotee Parties is at the opposite end of the catch-all parties. Devotee parties are characterised by the existence of explicit ideological objectives and demand that their members strive consciously for the accomplishment of their stated objectives (Duverger 1954). Some critical alliances could be made in their quest for power, but the primacy of ideology over votes is sacrosanct. Their organizational structures are so strong with party leaders acting like high priests while party members are expected to belong to study groups which integrate them into the organizational lives of the party and strengthens their sense of belonging.

It is important to stress that between the continuum of the catch-all and devotee parties lies a plethora of other party arrangements (Janda 1980). Several early Social Democratic parties of Europe, for instance, tried to establish mass-membership parties dedicated to both socialism and democracy (Neumann 1956, 395-42). The government was responsible for the management of economic ventures in the interest of the generality of the citizens, but the country was run democratically.

There are some political parties that focus on some narrow issues. In Europe, the Green parties, for instance, are specifically concerned with social and environmental issues. It is against this background that such parties are often referred to as single- or limited issue parties. There is an alternative typology patterned along nine general programmatic orientations in political parties globally. It is an offshoot of the model originally developed for Western European setting (Beyme 1985: 29-158). These are (1) Liberal or radical party (2) Conservative Party (3) Christian democracy (4) Socialism or social democracy (5) Communism (6) Regional parties (7) Environmental parties (8) Nationalist parties (9) Islamic parties.

Discussion/ Findings:

Historical background of Nigerian political parties

The first political party in Nigeria, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) was founded in 1923 following the introduction of the elective principle by the Clifford Constitution. The political underpinning of the gesture as to legitimize the actions of the colonialists by granting a limited franchise, specifically two legislative seats for Lagos and one for Calabar. The emergence of the early political associations was a reaction to the prevailing circumstances of the colonial administration (Sklar 1963). In view of this, the NNDP which was founded by Sir Herbert Macaulay in 1923 had its operations restricted to contesting elections for Lagos City Council.

The hegemonic dominance of the NNDP in electoral contests in the country was later challenged by the Lagos Youth Movement which later metamorphosed to the Nigerian Youth Movement formed in 1934 and challenged the supremacy of the NNDP and won the three seats allocated to Lagos for that year. The increasing activities of the nationalist struggles also gave rise to the emergence of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) which was later changed to the National Council of Nigerian Citizens led by Herbert Macaulay and later Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe (Omotola (2015).

In 1950, the Yoruba cultural group, the Egbe Omo Oduduwa transformed into the Action Group and was led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo. The northern socio-cultural organization, the Jamiyar Mutanen Arewa was repackaged into the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC). In 1951, a faction of the NPC, made up of mostly radical elements resident in Kano formed the Northern Elements Progressives Union (NEPU). Though regionally more prominent in their respective rights, these political parties dominated the

political firmament in the First Republic (Dudley 1973). Their regional inclinations notwithstanding, the First Republic political parties displayed overwhelming commitment to nationalist struggle aimed at ending colonial domination in one way or the other (Omotola 2009).

It is instructive to state that the First Republic political parties manifested ethnic and primordial sentiment to a monumental proportion and failed to deepen democratic growth. This absence of national commitment on the part of the parties contributed, in part, to the collapse of the First Republic through the coup of January 15 1966 (Dode 2010).

The Second Republic political parties could merely be described as 'old wine in a new wine skin'. This is apparently as a result of the fact that, though more parties came on board the political plane, they were just the reincarnation of the First Republic political parties with a few new ones. The National Party of Nigeria (NPN) was a direct offshoot of the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC), the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) was the reincarnation of the Action Group (AG) and the Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP) was an offspring of the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC). The relatively new entrants were the Peoples' Redemption Party (PRP) and the Great Nigeria Peoples' Party (GNPP).

After failing to meet the criteria for registration in 1978, the Nigeria Advance Party (NAP) was registered in 1982 (Osaghae 1998). These parties took part in the political wheeling and dealing, bargaining and gamesmanship in the Second Republic with its attendant abysmal rancour and acrimony, corruption and profligacy (Yaqub 2002). There was a great deal of internal party squabbles and inter-party antagonisms and coalition experiment until its overthrow in December 1983 (Joseph 1987).

After a series of proscriptions of political parties and old stock politicians for alleged irregularities and intransigence on the part of the political actors to meet the expectations of Babangida's regime as far as democratic commitment was concerned, President Babangida established two political parties, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republic Convention (NRC) (Oyediran and Agbaje 1991). Ideally, the SDP and the NRC were presumed to be ideologically-based parties with the SDP being a 'little to the left' and the NRC being a 'little to the right'. In actual sense, there was no palpable ideological distinction between these parties (Lewis 1994, Jinadu 1995, Omoruyi 2002).

Events later proved that President Babangida was intrinsically not committed to the unequivocal implementation of the transition programme as he was recalcitrant to vacate power due to his alleged ambition to civilianize himself and continue in power as the Nigeria. Consequently, he annulled the June 12 1993 presidential election adjudged to be free of irregularities and presumed to have been won by Chief MKO Abiola of the SDP. The political imbroglio which followed the infamous annulment forced Babangida to step aside and handed over power to a hurriedly contingent political arrangement called the Interim National Government (ING) headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan (Diamond 1997).

After pushing out the ING on November 17 1993, General Abacha later initiated a transition programme which later turned out to be tailored towards his self transmutation agenda. Eighteen political associations applied for registration but only five scaled through the process and were registered. There were the Congress for National Consensus (CNC), the Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN), the Grassroots Democratic Movement (GDM), the National Conscience Party of Nigeria (NCPN) and the United Nigeria Congress Party (UNCP) (Omotola 2015).

The activities of the above political parties and other political institutions were largely negated by the undemocratic self-succession bid of Abacha and, as such, forestall them from carrying out their democratic roles effectively. Among the parties, the UNCP was more notorious in the execution of Abacha's self-succession agenda even though all of them eventually adopted him as their presidential flag bearer in the ill-fated transition programme. His death in June 1998 ended the transition process (Diamond, 1997, Dode 2010).

Of the nine political parties granted provisional registration under Abdulsalami Abubakar's regime which succeeded Abacha, only three eventually scaled through the final registration process. These were the Alliance for Democracy (AD), the All Peoples' Party (APP) and the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP). More political parties were later registered after Obasanjo won the 1999 presidential election on the

platform of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP). The PDP dominated the political landscape due to the inability of the fragmented parties to wrestle power from it until 2015 when the All Progressives Congress (APC) won the presidential election.

The Fourth Republic political parties have been involved in intra/ inter party bickering, political violence, defection, poor organization among others. This retards their capacity to contribute meaningfully to deepen Nigeria's democracy.

Implications/Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is evident that the problems bedeviling Nigerian political parties are enormous and, to that extent, they cannot contribute fundamentally to democratic sustenance. It therefore, becomes incumbent upon all stakeholders to identify these problems and tackle them in order to reposition them for effective performance. The most crucial problem is that of ideological deficit. Nigeria's Fourth Republic political parties do not have classically distinct manifestoes. Their manifestoes cannot be clearly distinguished from one another. Attempts should be made by political parties to adhere to particular ideologies. Party formation and operations should be anchored on ideologies to enable them serve as instruments of mobilization and conflict management as well as direct individual sense of judgement (Omotola 2015).

It is mostly believed that institutionalization of political parties is good for a country's political stability and they are what is aimed for because parties' internal rules can help to minimize factional conflicts, or at least channel such conflicts in predictable ways, and often promote smooth leadership turnovers. Even when desirable, institutionalization is hard to engineer deliberately, because to a certain extent, it is a product of time. Moreover, it may not be something that all party leaders would want to promote since it would be viewed as a threat to their own power, especially when they have strong personal followings. It is, however, prescriptive.

Moreover, as a result of the elite's quest for capital accumulation, the character of the contest is so volatile and has assumed a warfare situation. This has resulted in politically motivated killings, defection and godfatherism (Tenuche 2011). They manipulate ethnicity and religion to suit personal and vested interests and this negates party institutionalization (Omotola 2015). The relevant authorities should sanction erring political parties and politicians that profess parochial agenda.

The need for political education and value re-orientation becomes paramount. Since parties cannot give what they do not have, conscious efforts should be made to ensure political parties embrace the principles of internal party democracy in their operations. This will mitigate the problems ravaging political parties in Nigeria and enable them to contribute to democratic sustenance in the Fourth Republic.

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