



Original Contribution

POLITICAL PARTIES AND PARTY POLITICS IN THE NIGERIAN FOURTH REPUBLIC

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ABSTRACT

The paper unfolds the dysfunctional operation of political parties in the Nigerian Fourth Republic as regard the performance of such functions as elite recruitment, political socialization, interest articulation, interest aggregation and political communication which are basic support ingredients of an enduring democracy. The paper through historical analysis further unfolds the gap between the masses and the elites in the post-colonial Nigerian party politics as an intentional device by the elites to manipulate the Nigerian masses for their own selfish interest, and thus stated that for the present democratic experiment in the Nigerian state to survive party politics must be people-centered.

Keywords: democratic, elite recruitment, institutional fragility, interest aggregation, political communication, stability,

INTRODUCTION

Political parties is one of the political institutions in a competitive democracy. Political Parties also serve as an index through which democratic governance could be compared in States, in that, the structure and operation of party politics in polities tend to serve as measuring rod for determining the fragility or otherwise of democratic systems. That is a situation where political parties are poorly structured to perform articulative, aggregative, communicative and educative functions, such a system is likely going to be associated with poor political culture which tend to make the democratic process so fragile. Conversely in a situation where political parties are well structured to perform articulative, aggregative, communicative and educative functions, such a system is often associated with participant political culture which tends to ensure a stable democratic process (1).

In the Nigerian State, the democratic process no doubt has been bedeviled with poor party-politics as a result of lack of internal party democracy, ethnicization of party politics, poor political leadership, excessive westernization of the concept 'democracy', party indiscipline, lack of clear cut party ideologies, the politicization of the higher echelon of the military profession among others (2-5).

The above factors, no doubt, snowballed into the abortion of democratic republics in Nigeria and have persistently threatened the survival of the Nigerian Fourth Republic. Based on the above background, the focus of this paper is to unfold political parties and party politics in the Nigerian Fourth Republic from a functional perspective by specifically looking at the operation of political parties vis-à-vis elite recruitment/socialization, interest articulation, interest aggregation and political communication. To be able to achieve this purpose the paper in addition to this introductory background is sectionalized into: theoretical framework; historical background, political parties and party politics in the fourth republic, towards effective party politics in Nigeria and conclusion.

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MATERIAL AND METHODS

Framework for Analysis

The material and method of analysis in this research work is anchored on: (i) Gabriel Almond's Input-Output functional variables and (ii) The historical method that provides a perspective background for discerning party politics vis-à-vis the problems associated with political instability in the Nigerian State. Gabriel Almond's Input-Output functions constitute seven functional variables which could be classified thus:

A. Input functions:

- (i) Political socialization and Recruitment – This refers to the introduction of individual citizens into different roles in the political system, and also selecting them for membership into the political system.
- (ii) Interest Articulation – It refers to the process through which demands are injected into the political system.
- (iii) Interest Aggregation – It involves the formulation of policies in which group interest are combined, accommodated and more or less committed to a particular pattern of public policy.
- (iv) Political Communication – It is the channel through which political information is transmitted among the different groups and between the governed and their rulers vice versa.

(B) Output Functions

- (i) Rule Making – This is the process through which laws are made. In a democracy, the legislature is basically charged with this function.
- (ii) Rule Application – This involve the process of implementing laws and governmental policies. This function falls within the Executive Arm of government.
- (iii) Rule Adjudication – This function lies within the province of the judiciary in the sense that the institution performs the basic function of interpreting laws that guides persons and institutions of the state (6-8).

From the above theoretical background, it is important to accentuate that the focus of this paper is to unfold partyism in the Nigerian Fourth Republic vis-à-vis party democracy in Nigeria from the perspective of the functions expected of political parties which falls within Almond's input functions: Political socialization/recruitment, interest articulation,

interest aggregation and political communication.

Historicism

Party politics in Nigeria is associated with the pattern of colonial governance in the state. It could be recalled that decolonization as envisaged by the British in what later became the Nigerian State was viewed as a gradual process of constitutional transformations that would give greater freedom to the Nigerian people in form of participation in governance through partyism before the attainment of political independence.

Thus, the nature and pattern of party politics during colonialism was to a great extent determined by the constitutional concessions permitted by the British Colonial System. For instance, while the 1922 Clifford Constitution gave birth to the first political party in Nigeria known as the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) in 1992, party politics in the State was restricted to just two cities; Lagos and Calabar (9-10). The implication is that party democracy during this era was restricted to two cities, and even in the cities, franchise was restricted because of property qualification coupled with the fact that the system was purely one party system.

However, shortly before the 1946 Richards Constitution, party democracy was widened with the birth of the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) in 1934. As a result, Nigerians in the two cities of Lagos and Calabar had the opportunity of choice between the NNDP and the NYM. With the operation of the 1951 Macperson Constitution, the Action Group (AG), the Northern People's Congress (NPC) were registered and they became a major player with the NCNC in the march towards Nigeria's independence (11).

It is however important to state that during this dispensation, the main objectives of the political parties were to (i) acquire political power (ii) to achieve independence status for the Nigerian State. These basic objectives therefore defined the operations of party politics in Nigeria in that even when parties were elitist formed, they were deeply rooted in the people in terms of interest articulation, aggregation, political socialization and elite recruitment coupled with political communication.

Although, this scenario of masses based political parties persisted in the First Republic though ethnicized, one basic manifestation of that republic which adversely affected party democracy was elitist contradiction in which ethnic sentiments, thuggery, rigging among other political ills were used as tools for acquiring political power. This is unlike what was obtainable before political independence in that while the parties wanted power, their activities were moderated by the need to achieve the shared objectives of acquiring political independence.

The scenario in the Second Republic was not however different from what was obtainable in the first republic except that the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) made attempt at having a broad based elitist support when compared to the other four that were active players during that era – that is, United Party of Nigeria (UPN), Nigeria People's Party (NPP), Great Nigeria People's Party (GNPP) and People's Redemption Party (PRP). These parties unlike the NPN were majorly ethnic based.

In other words, the focus of the NPN was not basically anchored on the masses for political support but on recruiting elites from the different parts of the country that could easily influence the political fortune of the party. Thus, with the emergence of the party as the party in power at the federal level and most States of the federation, there existed a very wide gap between the elites and the masses in terms of political representation.

In the aborted Third Republic, although parties were elitist created through the Ibrahim Babangida-led military administration, efforts were however geared towards making the parties to be people centered. This no doubt accounted for free and fair elections especially during the June 12 Presidential election in which the people voted for the candidate of their choice irrespective of ethnic or religious sentiment (12).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Party Politics in the Fourth Republic

Our conception of party politics in the Nigerian Fourth Republic would be viewed from Almond's perception of input functional analysis which encompasses political socialization/recruitment, interest articulation, interest aggregation and political communication. In other words, this section is focused on the extent to which political parties

in the Nigerian Fourth Republic has effectively been able to perform the above political functions as supportive mechanism for the survival of democracy.

As regard political socialization and recruitment, there is no doubt that the long years of military dictatorship negatively impacted on the democratic orientation of Nigerians. This pattern of orientation affected party structures which manifested in form of party indiscipline, mutual suspicion and conflict between Party Executive and Party Representatives in government, as well as poor political leadership as a result of non-submissiveness of elected political office holders to the core expectations of their political parties. A case in mind is the political conflict between the then Party Chairman of People's Democratic Party (PDP), Chief Audu Ogbah and Former President Olusegun Obasanjo which led to the forceful removal of the former Chairman of the party (13). On observational basis, other examples abound in cross-carpeting of politicians, emergence of factious Executives within political parties which snowballed into dual or multiplicity of Executives in the same political party.

Conversely, in the area of political recruitment, the support base for democratic governance in the Fourth Republic was on the high side as a result of the failure of military governance. However, the recruitment device of the political parties in the first phase of the Republic when we had three political parties – Alliance for Democracy (AD), All People Party (APP), and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) was not different from the old in that the recruitment focus was on the elites, except that while that of the AD was sectional PDP and APP were more national in their approach. In the second phase with the further registration of political parties and with the existence of fifty political parties in the democratic process, political parties became very sectional in outlook; e.g. Labour Party.

The above analyzed scenario in terms of socialization and recruitment in the Nigerian Fourth Republic no doubt had a far-reaching implication on interest articulation and aggregation functions of parties. This is because the recruitment focus of the parties to a great extent determines the interest to be articulated and aggregated. It is however important to state that political parties in the

present dispensation are elitist based rather than being masses based. Thus, elitist interest tends to be of utmost interest to the political parties in terms of articulation and aggregation as a mechanism for survival.

It is also important to accentuate that political parties also tend to manifest poor articulative and aggregative capability which has snowballed into cross-carpeting by politicians or the formation of new political parties. The case that vividly comes to mind is the formation of the Action Congress (AC) by the Former Vice-President Abubakar Atiku and other former PDP chieftains such as Chief Tom Ikimi, Chief Audu Ogbah among others who felt disadvantaged by the politicking within the ruling PDP government.

The resultant effect of the above is that the PDP though the party in power at the center and still controls majority of power in the states of the federation, but have lost some of her strongholds in States like Edo, Abia, Imo, Anambra, Ondo, Bauchi among others due to poor aggregative mechanism. The implication therefore is that, the political elites are so powerful either as a means of reaching out to the masses or for acquiring political power through electoral rigging. This explains the focus of political parties on the elites in terms of interest articulation and aggregation.

For political communication, the fact that the political process has been widened with the registration of more political parties totaling up to fifty, the system has witnessed functional political communication in term of demand emanating from the people but with poor channel into the political process and poor system capability to process the demands into policy outputs with effective communication to the people. This perspective no doubt discusses the limitations of the poor in influencing public policy (14).

Towards Effective Party Politics

(i) Experience of Party Politics in Nigeria has shown that more political parties do not necessarily translate into more or enhanced political education, communication, articulation and aggregation of people's interest. However, with the experience of two party system in the aborted Nigerian Third Republic the system proved to be more effective in terms of politically mobilizing the masses and negating sectionalism. As a result, there is need for

the present multi-party system to transform into a two party system. This could emerge not only be legislation, but through a built in withering mechanism especially when government stop the idea of giving financial grants to registered political parties.

(ii) There is need for a truly Independent Electoral Commission that would not only concentrate on electorate matters, but which will also monitor the structure and operation of parties in terms of membership recruitment, party financing and party discipline.

CONCLUSION

This paper have been able to show that there is an hyphen and buckle between institutional fragility expressed in form of the inability of political parties to perform the basic functions of political elite recruitment, party financing and party discipline. As a result, democratic stability in the present Republic could be ensured if political parties are well structured to perform the above stated functions in such a way that would be encompassing of the Nigerian people. That is, serving as a mechanism for elite-mass integration.

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