

The Role of Political Parties in Democratic Consolidation: Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

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Abstract

Nigeria once again keyed into what most scholars termed as the third wave of democratic experience which it christened, the Fourth Republic in 1999. This came with the emergence of political parties, which were initially three registered, but with time these have increased. In spite of these increases and level of political awareness in the system, they are observed not to be effectively assuming its roles in engendering democratic consolidation. Political parties and democracy in any setting, assumes an axiomatic relationship. To this end political parties and democracy are supposed as same coin of different sides in a relationship. But in the Nigeria Fourth Republic it is saddening that political parties does little or nothing in deepening or consolidating democracy. This paper, therefore, seeks for those roles of political parties in deepening democracy in the system and how the political parties in Nigeria's fourth republic will key into these roles. Particular focus was placed on those factors that can be used to consolidate democracy, these include ideology, participation, legitimacy and integration. In achieving this, the secondary source of data collection, which involves the usage of books, journal, periodicals, and newspapers among others was highly depended on while the structural functionalist theory was deployed as the theoretical framework. In conclusion, this paper recommends various ways political parties through its roles can effectively contribute to democratic consolidation in Nigeria's fourth Republic, especially through tackling the crises emanating from participation, integration, legitimacy, among others.

Keywords: Democracy, Ideology, Integration, Legitimacy Participation and Political Parties.

Introduction

Political parties in the contemporary world are viewed as inseparable institution of democracy; this is anchored on the belief that parties have become an inevitable institution in every era of democratic politics. To put it more authoritatively, some scholars of political science like Schattschneider (1942) argued that political parties created democracy and that democracy is unthinkable without given a prominent place to political parties. The implication of this statement, therefore, is that political parties assume the centrality of achieving a consolidated democracy in a system. Policy makers and scholars charged with fostering the development of emerging democracies or empowering the qualities of those already established are of the strong opinion that political parties played a pivotal role in all democracies in the world. This is why it can be assumed that, relationship between a viable and well-structured political party and democracy can be said to be axiomatic.

There is this assumption that, the role of deepening democracy in the system lies majorly with political parties, owing to the fact that they are endowed with the ability to unify the diverse social spectrum in the system. Some of the conventional role of political parties includes that, it is a medium where citizens participate in government, it is the means through which bridges are built between the government and the governed, political parties provides the vehicle for recruitment of leaders in the system, they educate the citizenry politically, parties can also be channels through which interest articulation and aggregation takes place, the actions of political parties also can give the necessary political stability to the democratic system among others. For political parties to be able to effectively manage those aforementioned functions, efforts must be made to expand and consolidate the democratic space, it is also paramount that parties must in addition possess some characteristics like, having registered members or supporters, it must have well-articulated programs or manifestoes, the aims and objectives of the party must be well stated, the party must have high degree of resourcefulness in terms of sourcing for funds, seeking for talents and nomination of credible candidates for elections and ensuring national spread, parties must have written rules which spells out the do's and don'ts, it is also pertinent that parties must have clear cut philosophy or vision for the country, this vision or mission represents the party ideology, parties must have a leadership structure and succession pattern to avoid internal crisis but if crisis is inevitable, parties must put in place an acceptable or well-structured internal crisis management mechanism.

Parties with the aforementioned characteristics are believed to be able to effectively deplore its energy towards performing the roles earlier stated and if those roles are well performed, then the democratic system will be able to solve the crisis of legitimacy, the crisis of integration and the crisis of participation which are basic elements for democratic consolidation in any political system. Deriving from the above analysis, this essay among others seeks for those roles of political parties which aimed at deepening democracy. It also wishes to assess how well Nigeria fourth republic political parties have keyed into these roles, in achieving the desired goal.

Nigerian's journey to the fourth republic commenced in 1998 when a transition to civil rule program was initiated by the military regime of Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar. The army general assumed the helm of affairs as leader in Nigeria after the death of Gen. Sani Abacha who was alleged to have died mysteriously. The charged domestic and external pressure for democratization gave rise to the transition of a multi-party democracy. The act ushered Nigeria in what some scholars of Political Science referred to as the third wave of democratic experience. A queue was taken from happenings in Latin America, Asia and other African countries since the last decades of the twentieth century. Consequently, the arrangement was made to service the recent democracy through a regulatory framework put in place to usher in political parties, to play a major role in the democratization process, drawing references from the relevant sections of the Nigerian constitution, particularly section 221-229 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended (cited in Mohammed, 2007, p. 12).

The condition at the earlier stage of parties' registration was stringent; as a result, only three political parties scaled through registration by the country's electoral management body, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Though, the electoral act was later amended making it possible for political parties come on stream, more political parties are continuously being registered, bringing the total number to over ninety (90) before the 2019 general elections. Though the number of political parties has continually increased, but the worries are; do these

parties structures possesses ideology. Clear-cut manifestoes, succession pattern, devoid of rancour and acrimony among others to perform the much needed roles of consolidating and stabilizing democracy in Nigeria? Do these parties possess the capacity of resolving those common crises that emanate from democracy? For instance, how prepared are they to engage the crises of integration, participation and legitimacy in the system, these are the pivotal issues to be looked into in the course of this paper.

The concept of Political Parties

A political party has been defined by Marx Weber cited in Nekabari (2004, p. 213) as a voluntary society of propaganda and agitation, seeking to acquire power in order to procure chances for its active militant and adherent to realize objective, which are public, personal or both. This conceptualization sees a political party as firstly, an association of people that are organized for a goal which is to contest elections with the aim of winning and subsequently controlling the machinery of government in a given system. Collaborating with this assertion, Coleman and Rosbery cited in Dowse and Hughes (1972, p. 173) defines a political party as thus:

Political parties are association formally organized with explicit and declared the purpose of acquiring and /or maintaining legal control either single or in coalition or electoral competition with other similar association over personal and policy of the government of an actual perspective or sovereign state.

In reference to the assertion that a political party by its nature seeks the goal of power acquisition through the context of elections, no doubt the basic elements for acquiring this goal is much on the ability of the political party to organize itself and ensure that members and supporters of the party are reconciled in terms of ideological stand. This element is well captured in Hughes and Harrop (2001) who argued that a political party is a permanent organization made of people with ideas, principally concerned with contesting elections, with the hope of winning and occupying the position of authority within the state. Appadorai (2004) emphasized the need for individuals that are members of a political party to hold similar political opinions and work together if they actually seek to win elections and get control of the government.

The concept of Democracy/Democratic Consolidation

The concept of democracy can be said to have floods of definitions because individual and political leaders like associating with the usage of the word. Christensen, Engel, Jacobs, Rejal and Waltzer (1975) observed that even the Nazis Germany under Adolf Hitler claimed that its government was practicing a form of democracy. He referred to as a “*centralized Democracy*” Mao Tse-Tung of China and Nasser of Egypt both claimed to be practicing another form of democracy they referred to as “*party less Democracies*” Sekou Toure of Guinea branded his leadership style as “*Democratic dictatorship*” Ayubkluan of Pakistan and Fidel Castro of Cuba claimed that their governments were another form of democracy which they christened as “*Basic Democracy*” and “*True Democracy*” respectively. However, there are basic elements which must be observed or present in a system before such can be termed as democracy. These are part the indices present in Hoffman and Graham (2009) these authors acknowledged the confusion inherent in the effort of trying to give an acceptable meaning to the concept. Hence they argued that

democracy entails where the people or citizens directly or indirectly consent to and are major participant in their government. The implication of this conceptualization focuses on the people and by extension, the electorate as the principal factor that possesses the ultimate power in a democracy. In addition, the system of democracy is a self-determination concept; this is well captured in Baber and Watson (1988) who opined that Democracy is a charming form of government. They anchored their belief on the fact that it has the ability to improve the equality of the system and government through citizen's participation, which is part of the norms inherent in democratic settings. Jega (2007) argued that democracy must be deeply rooted in participation and/or representation and that government in democratic systems derives its power and legitimacy from the people. In this sense government exercises authority within the framework of bodies of supreme law called constitution and the right of the citizens to vote and be voted for in the system.

Democratic consolidation is a situation where democratic values which involve participation are deepened in a system. Linz and Stepan (1996) defined it as a situation where democracy has become the only game in town. That is a situation where democracy makes the government more responsive to the demands or the yearning of the people, where the people beyond periodic elections exercise their right to vote, but use their civic and political right, and where all groups in the system participate equally in the political system. Ojo (2006) argued that, consolidating democracy entails a process where democracy becomes so broadly and profoundly legitimate among the citizens, to the extent that it is unlikely to break down. This definition explains a process whereby new democracies mature and old ones stabilized in a way that, it is unlikely to revert to authoritarianism. The regime in a consolidated democracy meets all required procedures and criteria's of democracy, these bothers on enhancing both contestation and participation. Also, it entails a system where all politically significant groups accept established political institutions and adhere strictly to the democratic rules of the game. That is, for democracy to stabilize in a system, it must persist over time and democratic culture must be deepened, especially in the area of participation, contestation among others. Consolidating democracy can be interpreted as effort to secure and extend the life span of democracies, beyond the short term, thereby making them immune against the threats of authoritarianism and regression. The rules of the game serve as the dams against eventual waves to the original mission of rendering democracy, the only game in town.

Theoretical framework

The structural functionalist theory is deployed for this paper, as it is believed that, this perspective would better capture and explain the variables under study as well as state their relationship. The structural functionalist theory is a broad based perspective, which has its foundation in sociology and anthropology. It has a lot of prominent proponents such as Spencer, Parson, Moor, Milton, Almond and Powell etc. The functionalist set out to interpret society as a structure with interrelated parts, the society is viewed as a whole in terms of functions, and it has as part of its constituent elements, like norms, culture, traditions and institutions. According to Varma (2007), the theory was borrowed from Sociology and Anthropology and became popular in political science since the 1950s. Part of the assumptions of this theory is that, roles are bound up in institutions and social structures, which are functional to the extent to which they assist society in operating and fulfilling its functional goals or needs, this engenders the society to function smoothly. The understanding of the structural functionalist theory emphasis the society and political system as a whole, which are made up of sub-units or sub-systems with

interdependent parts, but the entire parts must contribute to the survival of the entire system to function well. On a relative basis, political parties in a democratic system exist in order to perform some salient roles; the overall effect of this expected role should be seen as contributing to the survival and deepening the democratic culture in the system. The assumption which forms the core of this paper therefore is that political parties are part of the sub-unit or institution of the democratic structure that is expected to key into its role well, so as to contribute meaningfully to enhancing democratic values in Nigeria.

The Role of Political Parties under Democracy

Political parties are one of those social structures or institutions visible in every democratic system; they are fundamentally saddled with the responsibility of enhancing democratic values and culture, through its activities. The implication of the aforementioned is aptly explained in Omoruyi (2007) who argued that, democracy is unthinkable without political parties. This implies that, the relationship between the duos is axiomatic. Magstardt (2009) argued that, political parties are sine-qua-non to democratic advancement in any system. Observably, it can be said that, no system can be described as operating a democratic style of government without the presence of political parties who naturally engage in competitive elections, especially in contemporary times when democracy have moved from the ancient Greeks city state style of 500 BC. The complexity of modern society makes direct representation impossible while indirect or representative style is the system in vogue; consequently, political parties are put in place to ease processes and practice of democracy. Furthermore, Nwabuzor and Muller (1988) while reflecting on the emergence of modern political parties affirmed that, the 19th century witnessed the formation and development of political parties which appeared first in the United States and Europe. Their development was linked with the development or advancement of democracy which at that period of history was necessitated by the extension of popular sovereign and parliamentary powers. The implication of the aforementioned view explained the reasons why it is often said in many quarters that political parties and democracy are two sides of the same coin and that the two concepts reinforces themselves. Political parties exist to beautify and deepen democratic belief, culture and values in the system; on the other hand, democracy exists to ensure popular happiness to the greater majority in the system.

How then can the political parties deepen or consolidate democracy in Nigeria through its roles? Political parties anywhere in the world are endeared with certain fundamental roles aimed at engendering sustainable democratic virtues. Idise and Otohile (1996), Roskin, Cord, Medeiros and Jones (2010) respectively provided some of these roles as follows; political parties are agents of political education, they play the role of interest articulation and aggregation, organizations of voters, it is the channel through which leaders are recruited, organization of government, they create room for political representation, they are the bridge between government and the govern among others. The aforementioned are perceived as the conventional roles of political parties. Nekabari (2004) argued that these functions are mainly roles which are primarily expected of a political party. The implication of this assertion is that political parties are expected to play a more advanced role in a democratic system. If political parties are to be agents that consolidate the democratic system, they must place more focus on those crises that undermine democracy in any system and by implication the Nigerian Fourth Republic. These crises tend to weaken the democratic structure; amongst these are the crisis of ideology, the crisis of participation, the crisis of integration and the crisis of legitimacy. When all these are not well managed by the political

party as an institution, the resultant effect may drastically weaken the democratic structure of any system. Another question of interest is how does a political party resolve these conflicts? In addressing this, the following should be taken into consideration.

Ideology Crisis

The absence of a clear cut ideological stand of a political party, render such an institution of democracy to be weak and at such these can also reflect on the democratic structure. Omotola (2009), argued that, party ideology represents a crucial element of a political party and their activities. Ideology in this sense, are sets of ideas about politics, all of which are related to one another, it modifies and supports each other. Nnoli (2007) further conceptualize political ideology as a systematized and interconnected sets of ideas about the socio, economic, and political organization of a society. The import of this on democracy is obvious because it is advised that the parties should cultivate the culture of building socially strong foundation through sound ideologies that will enhance democratic behaviours and competitions among political parties and provide the citizens with the ability to make choice during elections. Janda (2005) advocated strongly for the advancement of party ideologies, according to him, it will have a positive impact on participation both in the internal and external level. He puts it thus: the parties should be organized around ideologies, rather than ethnic, religion or regional identities. Their ideological differences should be distinct but not too sharp... The parties should not be a personality vehicle for the self-aggrandizement of charismatic leaders, but an organization with a democratic internal structure that seeks consistency among citizens and strive for openness, accountability and lawful behaviour.

Participation Crises

The absence of effective citizenry participation in the political process and by implication in a democracy have a way of weakening democracy. Political parties are to enhance participation at both the internal and external competitive levels, otherwise the democratic structure would be assumed to be weak. Magstardt (2009) defined political participation as citizens in democratic involvement in politics through expressing opinions and casting votes. This definition expresses the fact that one of the ways through which citizenship can be defined in any system is through participation. Therefore, political participation assumes the centrality of democratic actions, in other words, participation can be viewed as the political lubricant that overhauls democratic systems. It also implies that the absence of effective citizen's participation can dwarf the growth and consolidation of democracy. It is affirmed in many political circles that, without the opportunity to participate in the political process, citizenship are meaningless, there are various means through which citizens can participate in politics, these include voting during election, membership of a political party, criticizing policies and programs of Government constructively among others. But for the purpose of this paper, emphasis would be expended on how political parties should encourage participation of the citizen through internal democracy, i.e. within the party. Political parties are conventionally an association of people who organize themselves around their chosen ideology, concerned with contesting elections with the aim of winning and consequently controlling the government. In this wise, all members of a political party, are expected to be given equal level playing platform to actively participate either at the contestation or the voting level respectively. This is part of what enhances or deepen democracy and makes it matured.

Legitimacy Crisis

Democratic legitimacy can be viewed as a balance between the public demand for democracy and the perceived supply of democracy from the system. The concept is essential to achieving democratic consolidation. Political authority which is a vital element for political parties who won elections and assumed power in the system is a derivative of legitimacy. Acceptance cannot be enjoyed by a leader from the people if such leader was not elected in the first place by the people. Adejumobi (2000) argued that, the most effective and acceptable way a government can acquire democratic legitimacy is through election, this emphasizes election, both at the intra-party and inter-party levels which must reflect the true acceptability of members of the political party and the electorate respectively. Bratton (2008) observed that the advent of a freely elected political regime would have beneficial consequences on governmental performance. The core reason for this assertion is that election confers political or democratic legitimacy on leaders. Having voted for leaders through political platforms or parties to assume governmental powers, the citizens are always more willing to comply and support such a regime.

Crisis of integration

States with diverse ethnic, cultural, language and religious colorations must renew efforts politically to unite these forces and differences, in order to achieve democratic consolidation. It is believed in many quarters that the most effective machinery for achieving this function is through political parties. Mohammed (2007) argued that the task of political integration involves efforts of engendering national cohesion to achieve unity in the quest for nation building. It is assumed, therefore that, political parties have the capacity to drive these factors effectively. This is because, parties by its very nature are supposed popular organization with a diverse social base and organizational arrangement that links people of different social, cultural standing, and it has the prospects for mobilizing the diverse elements towards the achievement of consolidated democracy. Also, it is strongly believed that parties have the needed impetus at its disposal to create a sense of political community and efficacy, necessary for national integration. The capacity at the political party disposal includes (i) supporting a new constitutional order in an hour of uncertainty and testing, even in the face of disagreements over specific provisions of the constitution that do not firmly support political integration (ii) By strengthening and maintaining communication and a sense of shared stakes among different groups in the system. (iii) By undertaking recruitment techniques, socialization, and popular education in politics in an informal basis. Political party's adoption of the aforementioned in tackling the presence of the integration crisis in the democratic space would be viewed as an agent that is involved in efforts at enhancing the process of democratic consolidation.

Nigeria's Fourth Republic political parties and democratic consolidation: The journey so far.

In spite of widespread level of political awareness and the increasing number of political parties since 1999, it is heartbreaking to realize that political parties under this dispensation are not able to know their relevance in enhancing democracy in the system. Omoruyi (2007) referred to the fourth Republic political parties as a crop of mere transitional instruments. This assertion is made because: these parties seems to be looking for a role in the democratic arena. It implies therefore, that what is called a political party in the Nigeria Fourth Republic do not qualify to be

addressed as such when compared to those tenable in other democratic climes. It is observed that this party lack sound and distinct programs and ideological stands, this makes their activities to be fluid in nature. They are rather described in many circles as an ethnic cleavages and a formation that has been hijacked by financial barons. Also, what is referred to as political parties in Nigeria Fourth Republic today seems to be mere associations of people that lacks the necessary machinery to compete on the basis of political issues, rather their mobilization of popular forces has been largely driven by ethnic, religious as well as money politics. Deriving from the aforementioned analysis, it is clear that these parties are not strong enough to contribute meaningfully to the democratic consolidation of the system.

In the area of participation, it is observed that these fourth Republic political parties are far from fulfilling its mandated role of engendering effective peoples participation especially on intra-party basis, the hierarchy or leadership of the parties has evolved different techniques aimed at discouraging participation, these method includes, elimination of people without due process from the party primaries through administrative fiats, sponsored thugs or paid security personnel rain violence on party members who are perceived as enemy to the barons and baroness of the parties, bribing of party officials and electoral officers, vote buying among others. These activities are the hand work of the political Barons who finances and subsequently hijack the party structure from the people. Ibrahim (2006) describes this scenario as cohesive national bourgeois in nature. This implies that it is more of a means or channel for sharing the proverbial national cake; a means of patronage among the political elites in the system. Meanwhile the ordinary members of the party have no say on issues relating to the party, that is why it is common to see a crude form of imposition of candidature on the party without recourse to rules that governs succession procedure in each of the political parties. From the above analysis, legitimacy crises are bound to arise; just as we have it today.

Ogundiya (2009) opined that legitimacy crisis arises from the inability of the political party to project the choice of the ordinary members of the political party. That is, legitimacy can only be bestowed on a leadership that enjoys the popular support and choice of the people, the inability and policy failure on the part of those at the helm of affairs at the various party levels to stick tenaciously to rules guiding procedure for succession makes a mockery of the parties and its leadership hence, they are confronted with procedural legitimacy crises both at the party and nation-state levels. The absence of legitimacy of a government makes such to be feeble and unstable. Legitimacy crisis in the past has been part of the reason why the military struck in the body polity of many African, Asian and Latin American states including Nigeria. Legitimacy is therefore one of the potent and strong political elements that drives political party towards enhancing democracy in the system.

Nigeria is a nation-state assumed to portray extraordinary diversity, characterized by a multiplicity of languages, cultures and religious groupings. As observed in the earlier part of the paper, political parties as institutions possesses the capabilities ordinarily within its structure to unite these stated diversities or social forces. Mohammed (2007) argued that, integration is the progressive reduction of cultural and regional influences and tensions which may bedevil the continuity in the process of creating a homogenous political community. Observably, since the inception of the present democratic experience in Nigeria from 1999, political parties have shown no signs of comprehending or appreciating its role as regards engendering national integration and nation building, they seem to be more involved in promoting sectional opportunism, the energies

of the Nigeria fourth republic parties activities are centered on drumming ethnic religious and money bag politics. This is why Omotola (2009) advocated for a redefinition and dedication of efforts and belief in the principles and actions of political parties; that would promote democratic consolidation. This statement implies the obvious, which is that for now the present crop of political parties are not in any way contributing meaningfully to democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The political parties of the Fourth Republic in Nigeria have grown over the years from the initial three to ninety-three at the last count, before the 2019 general elections. The presences of these political parties have also come with a high level of political awareness among the people, despite all this, it is saddening to note that, the multiplicity in political party formation do not reflect on the area of consolidating the country's democracy. The inability of these parties to contribute meaningfully is a shortfall of its failure to engage the four crises of; ideology, participation, legitimacy and integration as earlier stated in this paper. Furthermore, it is expedient to state that, when political parties are formed without recourse to sound and distinct political party ideology and programs, such a political party would certainly lack the impetus and machinery to encourage citizens' participation. This can also result to legitimacy crisis, personalities elected into position on the basis of non-participation on the part of the people, especially those derived from contesting and voting will make the regime suffers acceptance or legitimacy crisis. The corollary of all the above actions can easily lead to the integration crisis in the system. When these actions begin to unfold within the democratic arena, then the system becomes weaker rather than being strong, matured or consolidated. The findings of this paper, therefore, reflect that the numerous political parties in Nigeria Fourth Republic do not contribute through its roles to the consolidation of its democracy.

Recommendations

No doubt that political parties as democratic institutions have a major role to play in ensuring that, the fourth republic democracy is deepened and consolidated. In an attempt to achieve this, some of the recommendations of this paper are as enumerated below;

Party Ideology: It is the strong opinion of these authors that, there is the need for the Independent National Electoral Commission INEC to ensure that existing and newly formed political parties are overhauled and grounded in sound and distinct political ideology. In fact, this should be emphasized as part of the minimum standard and conditionality for party registration in the system.

Political participation: Part of a sound behavioral trait of political parties towards consolidating democracy is ensuring that more and free spaces are provided for citizens' participation in political activities, especially at the party level or intra-party participation. This entails contesting for position and giving the enabling platform to choose those to represent the party. In achieving this INEC should ensure that it monitors the income and expenditure of every political party in the system and emphasis should be placed on all party member financial commitment as a way of financing political parties. With these in place, the era of money bags hijacking the political party would be drastically reduced if not entirely eradicated. This will then give room for mass political participation.

Political Legitimacy: As part of the requirement for achieving democratic consolidation in the system, Nigeria fourth Republic political parties are to ensure that their programs and political behavior, especially in the area of intra/inter party elections are handled with utmost care, taking into cognizance the accepted procedure of leadership succession. The electoral management body again should ensure that parties play the game in accordance with laid down procedure. This is the only way leaders chosen within political parties as representatives can enjoy the required legitimacy and support from members. This is a vital part of this discourse that would ensure democratic consolidation

National integration: Another vital element for achieving democratic consolidation in political parties' role of engendering unity in a multi-ethnic society among other social forces, political parties should not be formed or managed along ethnic, religious or regional lines rather parties are to reflect the multiplicity of these social forces and integrate them. An effective way of achieving this is through the actions of INEC. At the registration of political party level, the electoral body must as a matter of deliberate policy ensure that the parties to be registered meet up with a high level of national spread, through this the parties so registered would become a vehicle for national cohesion or integration which is a salient element for democratic consolidation.

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