POLITICAL PARTIES AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF A POLITICAL PARTY IN NIGERIA (THE PEOPLES DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PDP) FROM 1999 - 2015

Osabiya, Babatunde Joseph - Lecturer II & Coordinator
B.Sc Degree Programme in Public Administration
School of Management Sciences (SMS)-National Open University of Nigeria (Noun)
14/16 Ahmadu Bello Way- Victoria-Island, Lagos, Nigeria

Abstract: This paper explores an important aspect of Nigeria’s Fourth Republic politics, which is about the role of the PDP (Peoples Democratic Party) in general and that there is a direct relationship between the character and conduct of a country’s political parties and the degree of democratic consolidation in that country. The paper argues that 16 years into this ‘democratic’ dispensation, Nigeria has not scored high when placed in the same matrix with countries that are heading towards stable democracy. In attempting a discourse of this issue, the group theory propounded by Arthur Bentley was adopted as the theoretical framework of the study. The paper further argues that peoples Democratic Party (pdp) as a political parties have failed in their democratic responsibilities of aggregating social interests, representing specific constituencies, and serving as intermediaries between state and society.

I. INTRODUCTION

Democratic governance with its ideal of elective representation, freedom of choice of leaders, rule of law, freedom of expression, accountability among others, has become the acceptable system of government all over the world. It is a form of government in which the supreme power of a political community rests on popular sovereignty.

According to Oyovbaire (1987), democracy as a system of government seeks to realize a generally recognized common good through a collective initiation and discussion of policy questions concerning public affairs and which delegates authority to agents to implement the broad decisions made by the people through majority vote. Thus, in contemporary times, democracy has been referred to as the expression of popular will of the political community through elected representatives. The contemporary democracy, according to Raphael (1976), rests on representative government.

Democratic governance in Nigeria has been a different thing when compared to what is obtainable in other parts of the world. The respect for human right and the rule of law which are the main features of democracy are not visible especially between 1999 and 2007; election rigging and gangsterism is the order of the day that one can hardly differentiate between democratic government and autocracy.

In modern societies, political parties are very essential to political process. They have become veritable instrument or adjunct of democracy in any democratic system. Political parties are not only instrument for capturing political power, but they are also vehicles for the aggregation of interests and ultimate satisfaction of such interests through the control of government. Obviously political parties are crucial to the sustenance of democratic governance.

Agbaje (1999), succinctly posits that the extent to which political parties aggregate freely, articulate, represent and organize determines the level of accountability in public life including access to and use of power as well as political performance. Merkel (1977) outlines the basic functions of political parties to include:
1. Recruitment and selection of leadership personnel for government offices,
2. Generation of programmes and policies for government,
3. Coordination and control of governmental organs,
4. Social integration through satisfaction and reconciliation of group demands or the provision of common belief system or ideology and,
5. Social integration of individuals by mobilization of support and by socialization.

Generally, political parties are very essential to democratic governance. They constitute the central instruments of democratic governance. They provide the means of promoting accountability, collective action, popular participation, inclusiveness, legitimacy and accountability through the integration of their competing principles,
ideologies and goals for eventual control of the government in the state. Political parties are the intermediate institution mediating the affairs of both the people and personnel and agencies that exercise state power.

Historically in Nigeria, political parties seem to be formed along ethnic, cultural, geo political and religious lines. Hence, the activities of government tend to foster primordial loyalties such as ethnic sensitivity and overt projection of other selfish political tendencies. As a result, the political class seem to be bereft of viable political ideology on which the nation’s political future could be anchored. The bankruptcy in ideology and vision has reduced party politics to a bread and butter game, where monetization of political process is the bedrock of loyalty and support. This has eroded the aim of the democratic system.

The task of this research is to examine the role which the ruling PDP has played in the democratic governance of Nigeria’s fourth republic from 1999- till date. The reasons for choosing PDP are since Nigeria’s independence in 1960, it has been observed that Party Politics have been in line with ethnic interests. This was the case, and it was one of the reasons given by the Military, that led to their intervention and rule from 1966 to 1979. They also had to seize the government again in 1983, and ruled again until 1999. The civilian government came to power in 1999 and has been ruling till date. There have been many Political Parties, but PDP has been the ruling Party since then. It is upon this premise that this study will be undertaken to find out whether indeed PDP as a ruling party has been able to contribute to good governance in Nigeria, bearing in mind the attributes of good governance which are Participation, Rule of law, Transparency, Responsiveness, Consensus orientation, Equity, Effectiveness and efficiency, Accountability, Strategic vision.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Nwankwo (1990), political party can be defined as an organized group of individuals seeking to seize power of government in order to enjoy the benefit to be derived from such control. He further opines that a political party exists primarily as an electoral machine for gaining power with coherent philosophy and its deep ideological aim. Therefore, a political party can be summed up as an organized group of people or individuals whose intentions are to control the apparatus of the state if given the opportunity to form government.

Shively (1997) sees political party as a group of officials or would be officials who are linked with a sizeable group of citizens into an organization; the chief object of this organization, is to ensure that its officials attain power or are maintained in power.

Joseph (1979) in his own contribution sees political party as a formal organization whose self conscious primary purpose is to place and maintain in public office persons who will control alone or in coalition the machinery of government.

Heywood (2002) is of the view that a political party is a group of people that is organized for the purpose of winning government power by elections or other means. Heywood points out four characteristic which usually distinguish parties from other groups as follows:

1. Political parties aim to exercise government power by winning political office
2. Political parties are organized bodies with a formal card carrying membership.
3. Parties typically adopt a broad issue of focus addressing each of the major area of government policy
4. To varying degrees, parties are united by shared political preferences and a general ideological identity.

In simple language, a political party is a group of persons bound in policy and opinion in support of a general political cause, which essentially is the pursuit, capture and retention for as long as democratically feasible, of government and it offices. In other words, political party is a group that seeks to elect candidate to public office by supplying them with a label of party identification by which they are known to the electorate. A political party is therefore; at least do three things to its members and lookers:

1. It is a label in the minds of its members and wider public especially the electorate,
2. It is an organization that recruits and campaign for candidates seeking election and selection into public office.
3. It is a set of leaders who try to organize and control the legislative and executive branches of government.

A political party therefore, is a group of people and an organization like other group or organization, except it is distinguished from any other group by its unique objective which in democratic settings, is seeking control of government through nominating its candidates and presenting its programmes for endorsement via the electoral process in competition with other parties.

Duverger (1964) emphasizes that the general development of parties which tends to deviate from the democratic regime and asserts that growing centralization of decision making is increasingly diminishing the influence of leaders upon members on the one hand and strengthening the influence of leaders upon members on the other. Again Duverger, is of the view that we are living in totally artificial notion of democracy forged by lawyers on the basis of eighteenth century philosophical utilitarianism, namely; the conception of democracy as government of the people; by the people providing general happiness for the greatest number. In practice the theory ceases to exist because all government tend to be oligarchic, which shows the domination of the greater number by a few. Therefore, democracy must reflect liberty for the people and for all section of the people. The author is right in
opening up or revealing this obscure aspect of democratic parties for analysis, the principal objective of this work is not to study the social composition of the parties but their doctrines.

In their contribution, Sklar and Whitaker (1963) surveyed the role of Nigerian political parties in political and territorial integration, two key analytical variables postulated by the editors in the introduction. According to them, the emergence of political parties in Nigeria serves as an additional cleavage to integrated political system. The emergence of political parties and their leaders appear sectional in the approach to national issues and unity since their loyalty flow in the direction of their ethnic groups and regions. Ultimately their loyalty transcends that of the nation and therefore, they seem unable to forge an integrated political system.

In their own contribution to knowledge, Coleman and Roseberg (1970) examine the role of political parties in national integration in tropical Africa using the same combination of behaviouralism and structural functionalism as employed by Coleman in his early classes on the background of nationalism in Nigeria. They see the role of political party as instrumental in the functioning and the development of the new African society and the political system of which they are a part. Since Nigeria is part of Africa, Roseberg’s work is of great importance to us in our present research. The two scholars opined that unlike the relatively stabilized national society of the old, more highly developed countries; there is an almost complete institutional vacuum at the central or national level in the new state of tropical Africa.

Agarwal et al (1994); see political party as a voluntary association organized by the persons bound with common interest or aim, which seek to acquire or retain power through the election of its candidate into public office. In modern societies, political parties are distinct from other organizations. They rely on permanent structure and organization with defined offices and roles which enhance their mobilization of supporters. Also they manifest hierarchical order from the grassroots to the highest level of government. More strikingly, political parties seek to put their candidates into public offices through election in order to realize the conscious objectives, which bond their members. Political parties have become essential to the development of political process. They have become veritable instrument of democracy.

In any democratic system, political parties are not only instruments for capturing political power but they are also vehicle for the aggregation of interest and ultimately the satisfaction of such interests through the control of government.

Obviously, political parties are crucial to the sustenance of democracy and governance. As Agbaje (1999) noted that the extent to which political parties aggregate freely, articulate, represent and organize determines the level of accountability in public life including access to and use of power as well as political performance. Ofoako (1983), pointed out that political parties that emerged during the period of the anti colonial struggle, unfortunately were formed along tribal/ethnic lines i.e., the Northern People’s Congress (NPC) Hausa/Fulani, National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) Eastern and the Action Group (AG) Yoruba. The author has it that this has been the trend of party politics which later formed the background of the emergence of political parties in Nigeria’s second republic. Thus, despite all attempts to establish national parties as opposed to the ethnic/regional parties in the second republic nearly all the parties, NPN, UPN, GNPP and PRP seemed to possess some elements of national outlook yet they still reflecting ethnic sentiment. This assertion was supported by James Ojiako’s publication of the result of the 1979 elections which showed how the people voted across ethnic lines. Narrowing down the study to the contemporary trends in party politics in Nigeria and the behaviors of political parties in the present dispensation, we note that in vibrant democratic state, political parties are not seen as mere platform for contesting elections or political appointments rather their function according to MOS Olisa, should include:

Providing political education for their members, Informing members in government offices about public opinion or national issues as well as maintaining a strong ideological base that would ensure its survival in the future elections. After the 1999 general elections, there was glamour for more political parties which the chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission approved (after the verdict of the supreme court for the registration of more parties) for the 2003 elections with the aim of providing a level playing ground for the parties. Still this aim seems to have been defeated by most importantly the late registration of this new political parties. In contemporary times, the main opposition to Abacha’s self-succesion was the G18 which metamorphosed into G-34 and then became the vanguard for the formation of a big pan Nigerian political party. The registration of political parties was carried out by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), three political parties met INEC’s condition – the PDP APP (later ANPP) and AD. Other parties that were unregistered started to merge with the registered ones. Constitutional right groups attributed the failure of the three political parties and the “unholy” alliance that brought about the political parties. This is perhaps why all the parties presently seem to be unsettled and porous. Never the less the PDP hijacked the realm of affairs by winning the majority of seats in the two federal houses, occupying majority of 36 state governments and producing the president of the nation.

According to Lewis (1965), all who are affected by a decision should have the chance to participate in making that decision either directly or through chosen representation. The will of the majority shall prevail. He posited that, in the first definition of democracy, the man who stands for election represent groups with different ideas,
interest or characteristics, and the real contest between these groups. So to exclude the losing groups from participation in decision making, clearly violates the first definition of democracy. He asserts that Europe and France practice class society where single party is appropriate. In Africa and particularly in Nigeria, we have a plural society, which is not just irrelevant; it is totally immoral in consistency with the first definition of democracy. It is also destructive of any prospect on building a nation in which different people might live together in harmony. According to him, the problem with Africa is the principle of plurality which is consequential of differences in tribes, languages, religion, race, in a long tradition of mutual hostility. In fact, people are mutually antipathetic, they are historical enemies.

The democratic problem in a plural society remains the creation of political institution which gives all the various groups a single opportunity to participate in decision making. Therefore, a single party which include a representative of all the various groups and encourage full discussion within the party framework would be superior to a competition for power between parties representing different tribes, race or religion, political party as one of the recent inventions of the human race cannot be avoided in any democracy because the masses are to vote, they have to learn how to cast their vote.

The literature reveals that the relationship between political parties and democratic governance is hinged on the historical development of the party and party structure. However, the sweeping wind of democratization since the 1990s has impacted on political processes and party systems. The existing literature appears to have neglected this aspect of the development of Nigerian political parties. Also we discovered that not much has been written on the role of political parties in Nigerian nascent democracy. This study is an attempt to fill this gap. This study seeks to examine some of the political economic factors of transformation of Nigerian political parties, their roles and how these have impacted on democratic governance in Nigeria.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework adopted in this study is the group theory. The theory was adopted because of the strong view of scholars such as Bentley (1980) who was of the strong opinion that institutional approach should not be used for political analysis as these institutions are static as against politics which is dynamic and full of activities. He argued that politics is a group affair and each group is competing against one another for power. The group Bentley, added, is a pattern of process involving mass of activities and not a collection of individual. The group emerges from frequent interaction among its individual members which is directed by their shared interest. The interest leads to the organization of the groups.

Bentley’s group theory received the blessings of scholars like David Truman, Robert Daniel; Grant McConnell, Theodora J. Lewis, Earl Lathans among others. They saw power as diffused among many interest groups competing against each other. Earl Lathan described a society as a simple universe of groups which combine, break and form coalitions and castellation of power in a restless alteration.

The adoption of this theory as basis for the examination of the role of political parties in democratic governance in Nigeria is as a result of the inter play of forces and struggle for power among different political parties which are formed along various ethnic/religious groups in the Nigerian society which resulted shortly after independence. Political parties were formed along ethnic or sectional line. Therefore, the adoption of the group theory would help us to examine how the roles and activities of Peoples Democratic Party affect generally political activities in Nigeria and in particular democratic governance.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study will employed qualitative approach and as such data was gathered through documentary research. It was backed up with Questionnaires as well as Interview of Key Informants.

Primary data- through interview with notable politicians and administration of questionnaires to party members

Secondary data- through available books, journals, articles, newspaper, publications/ magazines, official government reports and the internet

The research will employs both the qualitative and quantitative methodology and the data will be gathered from both primary and secondary sources. That is, from secondary information such as books, Journals, articles, newspaper, publications/interviews, magazines, official government reports and the internet.

Manheim et al (2008) argued that empirical research can either be quantitative or qualitative as long as its purpose is to characterize real world phenomena rather than to interpret them in some normative context. This argument has been a major influence in the methodology chosen. Another author that influenced the methodology for the research is Nnamdi Azika (1991) who opined that data refer to quantitative and qualitative information. Analysis to him, is the breaking down and ordering of the quantitative information gathered through research (or some means of data gathering), it involves searching for trends and patterns of association and relationships among these data or groups of them.

V. CONCLUSION

This study will add to the body of knowledge on what is required in a democratic system of government and it will enlighten the readers on what constitute good governance as well as what political parties can do to promote democracy in governance especially in Nigeria.
This research work will also promote greater knowledge to students of Political Science, especially those specializing in the fields of international relations, comparative politics, political economy, and political theory as well as the study of national government and politics. It will also promote Inter-disciplinary knowledge in the sphere of the Social Sciences especially Political Sociology, Psychology, and Social-Psychology among others.

This research will aid Nigeria in her democratic journey and also help in consolidating her democratic institutions.

Firstly, it will theoretically increase the existing body of knowledge in the scholarship on political parties-political party is an organization of people which seeks to achieve goals common to its members through the acquisition and exercise of political power and democratic governance- It involves promoting the sustainability of democracy which includes an enduring capacity for: the separation of powers and independence of the branches of government; the exercise of power in accordance with the rule of law; the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; and, the transparency and accountability of a responsible civil service, functioning at both the national and local levels. Particularly in relation to Nigeria. Secondly, the research will practically be of immense value to political leaders and policy makers in Nigeria and will also enlighten and educate the masses on responsibility of parties in democratic governance. And by so doing, it will go a long way in providing practical solution to some of the problems of political parties in Nigeria democratic system. Thirdly, the study will serve as a contribution to the measures to be taken to enhance sustainable democracy in Nigeria. Fourthly, how democratic is PDP as a Political Party and has PDP been able to rise above tribal or ethnic and religious interests and what precise measures has the party put in place to promote good governance in the country. Finally, the study will serve as a motivation for further inquiry in the area of political parties and governance in Nigeria.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

All the political parties need to be re-organized on the principle of all inclusiveness rather than exclusion, Party officials’ needs to be trained to carry out their functions. Critical attention needs to be paid to the political parties as institutions that play diverse but central roles in democratic consolidation. The parties need to be re-engineered from mere institutions for acquiring political power to effective institutions that are capable of structuring, mediating and reconciling societal interests and conflicts. This means that issues of organizational capacity, effective leadership, internal democracy, discipline, institutionalization and personalization, ideological platforms of mobilization and linkage to civil society and the masses have to be tackled. All political parties should practice internal democracy to make them strong, effective and efficient through consistent observance of principles of transparency, accountability, consultation and consensus building in policies and decision making.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

Journals

Conference and Unpublished Materials
News Papers
Adebiyi B and Epia .O. (2005), ,“For PDP, its Confusion Everywhere”’. *Thisday* 18th October.
Internet