Political Parties and Ideological Fluidity in Nigeria Since 1999 Till Date: Any Hope for Democratic Consolidation?

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Abstract.

The transition from all forms of authoritarianism to liberal democracy universally is anchored on participatory democracy so as to make life meaningful for a vast majority of the world population. Unarguably, there exists a symbiosis between political party and democratic consolidation. The articulation and aggregation of interests towards good governance fall within the purvey of political party. However, the ideological leaning of political parties occasioned by incessant carpet crossing by Nigerian politicians put to questioning the credentials of these parties to nurturing democracy. The paper examines the nexus between political party and democractic consolidation. The work attempts an historical appraisal of political parties. It dismisses the performance of political parties since 1999 to date. It concludes by making some useful recommendations. It relies on secondary source of data.

Keywords: Political party, ideology, democratic consolidation, national interest, political culture

Introduction

Political parties as far as Nigeria is concerned should be the life wire of democratic sustenance unlike some other democracies where independent candidature holds sway. This is why a political party is taken "as a useful index of the level of political development" Joseph Lapalombara and Myron Weiner, 1966[1]. Put differently, Omodia, 2010[2] submits that the structure and operation of party politics tend to serve as measuring rod for determining the fragility or otherwise of democratic systems. That a situation where political parties are poorly structured to perform articulative, aggregative, communicative and educative function, such a system is likely going to be associated with poor political culture which tends to make the democratic process so fragile. Conversely, in a situation where political parties are well structured to perform the above functions, such a system is often associated with participant political culture which tends to ensure a stable democratic process Almond and Verba 1963[3].

Political parties in Nigeria are not divided strictly on ideological lines. But they can be classified on the basis of their public posture and appeal. This lack of clear ideological divide is not in itself a negative attribute nor is it peculiarly Nigerian. It must be seen within the context of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural society whose diversity makes political liberalism a national political imperative Chudi, 1996[4]. In Nigeria, despite the challenges in our current democratic drive, it is incontrovertible that the experience since 1999 till date is the longest in Nigeria's political annal. It is therefore trite to encourage certain thinking that would help in deepening democracy. The import of this is to avoid the mistakes of the past with chequered political history. Ogunbiyi, 2013[5], gave a prognosis thus:

> One of such tendencies is Institution building. A good number of the crisis being currently experienced in the system is a reflection of the faulty nature of democratic institutions in the country. Non adherence to the principle of internal democracy is partially responsible for the stalemates heating up the polity.

One of the sterling qualities of democracy is its participating tenet. Rather than adopting oligarchical postures in their affairs, political parties need a tilt towards institutionalizing their modus operandi.

The relationship between political parties and democratic consolidation can find solace in the Holy Bible in the Book of Matthew 16:18[6]:

> And I say also unto thee, that thou art peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

The question now is: can we beat or chests in Nigeria that good governance and democratic consolidation can be built on political parties? Events later in this work may help in finding an answer to the puzzle.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework: The need for conceptual and theoretical framework stem from the fact that concepts and terms in the social sciences discipline are ambiguous in meaning and controversial due to differing angles and perception.

Despite the write-ups on political parties, which has also acquired the distinctive name stasiology, that is, the study of political parties, as a subject, there still exist contentions amongst political scientists on the best way to defining a political party. A political party is 'a social group' defined by Simon, 1962[7] as a system of interdependent activities characterized by a high degree of rational direction of behaviour towards end that are objects of common acknowledgment and expectation'. Edmund Burke[8] sees political party as 'a body of men, united, for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest upon some particular principles in which they all agreed. The above perhaps have a tilt towards ideological leaning. It exposes national character of political party and de-emphasizes sectionalism. While glossing over capturing political power, a major task of a party, it gives insight into party formation, a recipe for promoting national interests.

Indeed, modern political theorists appreciate the fact that for any association to be described as a political party, it must have a clearly stated ideology (whether capitalism, socialism or welfarism) [8]. This may be what MacIver, 1964[9] has in mind when he views political party "as an association organized in support of some principle or policy which by constitutional means it endeavours to make the determinant of government".

Summarily put, Osaghae, 1982[10] says political parties are associations that serve, both as interest and pressure groups performing, the important functions of recruitment of political actors, mobilization of the citizenry and provision of choice alternatives for the populace organizing and campaigning for votes.

The term "ideology" was born in the highly controversial philosophical and political debates and fights of the French Revolution and acquired several other meanings from the early days of the First French Empire to the present. The word was coined by Antoine Destutt De Tracy in 1796 Kennedy, 1979[11]. An ideology is a set of opinions or beliefs of a group or an individual. Very often ideology refers to a set of political beliefs or a set of ideas that characterize a particular culture. Capitalism, communism, socialism and Marxism are ideologies [12]. Political ideology is a belief system that explains and justifies a preferred economic and governmental order for society, offers strategies for its maintenance or attainment and

helps give meaning to public events, personalities and policies [13]. In social studies, a political ideology is a certain ethical set of ideas, principles, doctrines, myths, or symbols of a social movement, institution, class, or large group that explains how society should work, and offers some political and cultural blueprint for a certain social order. A political ideology largely concerns itself with how to allocate power and to what ends it should be used. Some parties follow a certain ideology very closely, while others may take broad inspiration from a group of related ideologies without specifically embracing any of them. Political ideology has two dimensions:

1. Goals: How society should work.

2. Methods: The most appropriate ways to achieve the ideal arrangement.

An ideology is a collection of ideas. Typically, each ideology contains certain ideas on what it considers to be the best form of government (e.g democracy, theocracy, caliphate, etc), and the best economic system (e.g capitalism, socialism, etc). Ideologies also identify themselves by their positions on the political spectrum (such as the left, the centre or the right), though this is very often controversial. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ideology[14]

At this juncture, it is important to give a brief insight into the concept of democratic consolidation. Originally, the term "democratic consolidation" was meant to describe the challenge of making new democracies secure of extending their life expectancy beyond the short-term of making them immune against the threat of authoritarian repression of building dams against eventual "reverse waves" Ojo, 2006[15]. However, the list of democratic consolidation (as well as the corresponding list of "conditions of democratic consolidation"), has expanded beyond all recognition Beetham, 1994[16]. It has come to include such divergent items as popular legitimating, the diffusion of democratic value, the routinisation of anti-system actors, civilian supremacy over the military, the elimination of authoritarian enclave, party building, the organization of functional interest, the stabilization of electoral rules, the routinisation of politics, the decentralization of state power, the introduction of mechanisms of direct democracy, judicial reform, the alleviation of poverty and economic stabilization in the words of Andreas, 1998[17]. Democracy may be sustained only when we believe that it is capable of withstanding pressure without abandoning the electoral process or the political freedom on which it depends, including those of the dissent and the opposition [18]. Definitely, this will also require a depth of institutionalization reaching beyond the electoral process itself.

Iron law of oligarchy which is a political theory, first developed by German sociologist, Robert Michels in his 1911 book, political parties is adopted as a theoretical framework. It claims that rule by an elite, or oligarchy, is inevitable as an "iron law" within any democratic organization as part of the "tactical and technical necessities" of organization. Michels used anecdotes from political parties and trade unions, who supported democratic reforms to build his argument in 1911. Michels particularly addressed the application of this law to representative democracy and stated: "It is organization which gives birth to domination of the elected over the electors, of the mandataries over the mandators of the delegates over the delegators. Who says organization, says oligarchy". He went on to state that "Historical evolution mocks all the prophylactic measures that have been adopted for the prevention of oligarchy". Michels stressed that the official goal of representative democracy of eliminating elite rule was impossible, that representative democracy is a façade legitimizing the rule of a particular elite, and that elite rule, that he refers to as oligarchy, is inevitable. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ironlawofoligarchy[19]

Historical Appraisal of Nigeria's Past Republics: Political parties in a complex society like Nigeria cannot regard themselves simply as exponents of an interest, class or ideology because they are largely agencies that give effect to the compromises by which a conciliation of interests take place [4]. That Nigerian political party operates within a "liberal framework" account for an easy movement of political actors from the left to right, right to centre and right to left as the case

may be. Chudi opcit[4]. Subscribing to the liberal formulation, the American scenario is encapsulated by John F. Kennedy in his book profiles in courage, when he said:

> The two-party system remains not because both are rigid but because both are flexible. The Republican party, when I entered congress was big enough to hold for example both Robert Traft and Wayne Morse and the Democratic side of the senate in which I now serve can happily embrace, for example, both Harry Byrd and Wayne Mors*e" John F. Kennedy*[4].

Nigeria depicted an ethnically tripodal arrangement in the First Republic- the three major parties of the First Republic, the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC), the Action Group (AG) and the National Convention of Nigeria Citizens (NCNC). Inspite of any ideological posturing, they were essentially tribal parties, articulating the positions of tribalism [4]. The AG and NPC were tribal groups that metamorphosed into political parties while the NCNC which began as a national party ended up a sectional party. In 1957, following the outcome of the 1954 general elections, the NPC, NCNC and AG which won the election in that order formed some kind of a unity government. Then the 1959 elections were held and no party secured a clear mandate, so some form of coalition was inevitable. The NCNC opened discussions with the NPC and also with the AG. The AG on its part was discussing also with NPC. In the end, what emerged was an NCNC/NPC alliance. This alliance was not due to ideological incompatibility nor was the collapse of the NPC/AG talks due to ideological incompatibility. It was the result of a complex game of ethnic and sub-ethnic maneuvering with each group distrustful of the other .[4]

By 1964, a clear pattern had emerged. Two broad coalitions, one progressive and the other conservative, were formed for the purpose of the 1964 elections. The Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) made up of the NPC and Akintola faction of the AG, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP). The United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) made up of the NCNC, the AG which was in alliance with the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) of Joseph Tarka and the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU). This scenario was re-enacted/replayed in the second Republic with some realignments. The interplay was aptly put by Nzongola, 2000[20] thus:

> They are mostly electoral coalitions put together to satisfy organizational criteria laid down by transitional authorities, rather than groups that have grown organically with a clear cut and long term political project or vision for the society.

In this republic, the conservative NNA fused into a single political party, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN). The party was founded on the imperative of national unity anchored on the policy of zoning and rotation. In its fold were progressive elements like the UMBC led by Tarka, NCNC elements like Dr. Chuba Okadigbo, C.C Onoh, NEPU Elements led by Aminu Kano who later pulled out to form peoples Redemption party (PRP) and some elements from the AG like Anthony Onahoro and S.G. Ikoku who left with Aminu Kano to form the PRP but rejoined NPN in 1982. The progressive had formed four different parties, Great Nigerian Peoples Party (CNPP), Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP), PRP and Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN). By 1983, they had formed a progressive coalition the Progressive Peoples Party (PPP), in a futile attempt to wrest power from the NPN [4].

The aborted Third Republic witnessed the emergence of centrist parties. Thirteen political associations sought registration from the National Electoral Commission (NEC). The People Solidarity Party (PSP), Nigerian National Congress (NNC), Liberal Convention (LC) and Peoples Front of Nigeria (PFN) were the four main associations. The PSP represented the

progressive, the NNC, a re-incarnation of the NPN, represented the conservatives, while the Liberal Convention and Late General Yar'Adua's peoples front formed the power at the centre. This development was aborted by the creation of two political parties by the government – the Social Democratic Party (SDP), and the National Republic Convention (NRC)[4]. The NEC Chairman, Humphrey Nwosu, claimed and rightly too, that the manifestos of all political associations studied clustered around the centre of ideological spectrum "a little to the left and a little to the right". NEC was mandated to use the manifestoes already submitted by the 13 associations to synthesize two manifestoes for the SDP and NRC. This observation was obviously correct, but the decision to create two parties based on this observation was a serious error of judgment on the part of the military. There were political forces, which were neither progressive nor conservative, not to mention the fact that the government ought not to have created the parties by military fiat in the first place [4].

The consequence of this forced marriage manifested greatly in the capacity of the parties to foster cohesion and became clearly evident in the aftermath of the annulment of the June 12, 1993 election.

Experience from 1999 till Date: If political developments in Nigeria are anything to go by since the return of democratic structures in 1999, an unprecedented development which has continued to shape the system has continued to occur but for widespread defection to parties other than those that brought political figures to power and another is the formation of coalition to topple the ruling party, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Agabus, 2013[21]. Suffice to say, of the major political parties, (PDP), the All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), the Alliance for Democracy (AD), the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), the Labour Party (LP), the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), Progressive Party Alliance (PPA), the All Progressive Change (APC) and sundry other parties are diametrically opposed to the political parties of the First and Second or even Third Republics. None has been constant with its manifestoes if at all there are, instead there has been fluidity and constantly mutating parties interest(s). This has given room for dissatisfaction, distrust and crass betrayal. Agabus [21]. Their manner of origin did not fit into what we know from literature. The reason is that scholars of Nigerian political parties would want to know to what extent are the political parties that evolved since 1999 capable of providing alternatives political order to the military in the minds of Nigerians? This is a legitimacy question, which is yet to be resolved in their operation since. Second is the crisis of integration. Scholars would want to know what extent has political parties that evolved since 1999 approximated the federal union. This is political integration question, which will be dealt with in this section. The third one is the crisis of participation. Scholars are interested in the extent to which the political parties that evolved since 1999 met the needs of those who want to participate in the political process. Omoruyi, 2001[22]. The snag with these political parties is that they could not meet Joseph Lapalombara's test that a political party is so called, if there is an inter-generational transfer of political affiliation. This is because there are many studies that link stability of any democracy to the inter-generational transfer of political affiliation Lapalombara, 1974[23]. As rightly pointed by Claude Ake[24], our politics was "dissociated from issue of ideology and social forces. "Political parties were created, abstracted from social realities – "they belonged to everyone in general and to no one in particular and thus constituted anarchy of ambitions". A strand of the above is exemplified by Adeniyi, 2013[25] while examining the PDP imbroglio that "the umbrella was designed to give shelter to a finite number of persons, notably the man holding it (Bamanga Tukur) and the one for whom it is meant to be covering (President Goodluck Jonathan). All other renegade passengers can exit into the rain in their trench coats". In the words of Gbadegesin, 2013[26] " the interest that brings people together has not always been that which they can sell with honesty to the citizens and the virtue of the political party, to articulate the foremost interests and aspirations of citizens, has not always been the motivating factor for a good number of contemporary political parties. The political party has been turned into a business organization where the pecuniary interests of the leadership are dominant; but they are able to access political

power and keep it because of their ability to manipulate the citizenry". The leadership problem has been a perennial issue with the PDP since inception with countless number of chairmen exiting the position in questionable manners thus culminating in internal wrangling. Recently, the squabble between the PDP and the so called "NEW PDP" attests to this which bothers neither on party accountability to people nor faulting the governance style but on occupying strategic positions within the party hierarchy. The factionalization of APP, APGA and CPC calls for worry. It was AD and ANPP merger in 1999 to face the PDP. The foundation being laid now is almost APC mega arrangement to confront the monstrous PDP. Nigerians immediate reprieve for the socio-economic squalor they found themselves is hinged on the growing popularity of the APC. However, the purported rescue mission of the APC is debatable. The recruits into the party's fold are politicians of diverse origins, who were suspicious of each other before now, mainly coming from the much criticized PDP. The furore generated by the defection of some governors in and out of PDP, 37 members of the House of Representatives, former vice president Atiku and others is no eureka. The uniting intention and ulterior motive may be their undoing. The question now is: Will it not be old wine in a new bottle? The belief of the electorate in these emerging structures will be put to test in less than a year. The outcome of the process will usher in another chapter in Nigeria's democratic drive.

Conclusion and Recommendations

 The interplay of events in the political landscape of Nigeria raises fear of bleak political future and that democratic consolidation as well as good governance seems unattainable in the nearest time. However, comparative studies have shown that Nigeria's case is not beyond redemption. As exclaimed elsewhere Joelistik.blogspot.com[27] "the political class has always remained bereft of viable political ideology on which the country's political future could be anchored. This bankruptcy in ideology and vision has reduced political parties to a bread and butter game". It is pretty difficult to place political parties in terms of origin, structure, organization and function. Rather than serving as springboard for consolidating democracy, what obtains is that the personal interests that bring their membership together cannot be reconciled through consensus because of human nature that is egoistic and acquisitive to paraphrase Gbadegesin, opcit[26]. Drawing from the experience of Mali, Vengroffs,1993[27] argument becomes relevant. He asserted that "the degree to which a party system is able to meaningfully contribute to the political process is related to the existence of several factors: the development and maintenance of strong party organization with the depth and breadth necessary for their operation, and the degree of the institutionalization of the party as indicated by its roots, longevity, survival and continuing support". Following from above, it becomes inescapable to conclude that key party institutions particularly between 1999 to date, have failed to fulfill adequately their functions. Then what needs to be done?

- Addressing the national question by amending the constitution which the on-going National Conference may do. It must confer ownership on the people and be devoid of the past experiences with no utility.
- Broadening political education targeted at solving lingering political problems, rekindling faith in the political order; and de-emphasizing winner take all syndrome.
- Encouraging the formation of political parties based on clearly spelt out philosophy and ideology rather than on ethnic or sectional interest so that they can conform with the dictates of their manifestoes.
- Making contribution in terms of fund the basis for membership and ownership rather than few wealthy elements hijacking political parties.
- Ejecting internal democracy into intra party programmes and embracing robust inter party relations so as to deepen democracy.

- De-emphasizing the 'do or die" syndrome that is associated with contestation for political offices.
- Truly independent, transparent and unbiased electoral body capable of conducting free and fair elections.
- Implementing sections 223-229 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria bothering on political parties and their management.
- Informing the political class in particular and Nigerians in general that no other country can be called theirs. Patriotism as well as loyalty to the country should be our watchword.

While not boasting that the above recommendations are by no means exhaustible, one may heave a sigh of relief if they are considered and implemented as the recurring problems caused by political parties' management will be drastically reduced and Nigeria will be on the right part. It is in the light of the above that the comment made by the late American President Calvin Coolidge while preaching for restoration of confidence in national institutions in the early part of the 20th century will serve as a point of departure and reference:

> We need a broader, firmer, deeper faith in the people. A faith that men desire to do right, that the commonwealth is founded upon a righteousness which will endure, a reconstructed faith that the final approval of the people is given not to demagogues, slavishly pandering to their selfishness, merchandising with the clamour of the hour but to statesmen, ministering to their welfare, representing their deep, silent abiding convictions Bola, 2009[28].

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