



Political Parties and Democratic Governance In Nigeria

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Abstract

The intricate relationship between party politics and quality of democratic governance has triggered the complex discourse in the global political space, Nigeria in particular, the effects of the two interdependent concepts affects the performance of one another raising questions of governance deficit and consequent failure of social contract of the third world democratic parties. This work underscores the complications between party politics and democratic governance in Nigeria, lacking comprehensive democratic credentials amongst our political leaders. This paper seeks to answer the question of whether party politics fosters or hinders democratic governance in Nigeria. It is intended to draw a nexus between internal party dynamics and poor governance in a democratic system of government using the theoretical tool of Group Theory. The methodology adopted is qualitative, research as a guide to the study. The study unveils the transactional nature of party politics as antithetical and dysfunctional to democratic governance at all levels of government in Nigeria. Embedded within the drama of partisan politics, is a regime of patronage politics that is essentially opposed to all norms, values, and prevailing tenets of democratic governance. The paper recommends the accentuation of the purpose, and functions of political parties; it should be well defined and deeply rooted in the people with the hope of improving the system.

Keywords: Politics, Governance, Political Parties, Democracy, Democratic Governance.

I. INTRODUCTION

Political parties are major tenants of a democratic system of government which invariably means that the strength and effectiveness of political parties in a democracy are directly proportional to the degree of success such system enjoys. It is perhaps appropriate to liken the relationship between political parties and the sustenance of democratic rule in a particular society to that which

exists between the umbilical cord and a foetus (Yagboyaju, 2012). Political parties are at the heart of examining the health of any form of democracy. For example, Orji (2013), asserts that 'to talk about democracy, is to talk about a system of competitive political parties. Their roles and activities are critical in any assessment of democratic practice (Momoh, 2013). This study however, which is focused on party politics, is concerned with the internal dynamics of political parties and its impact on democratic governance in Nigeria.

Nigeria practices a multi-party system, housing over 18 duly registered political parties with others in the law courts over their legitimacy having been deregistered by the independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for failing to meet the requirements for registration as a political party in the country. Despite this plethora of political parties, the country since her transition to democratic rule in 1999, have seen political power domiciled mostly in one political party known as the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Nonetheless, in 2015, power shifted hands to another political party known as the All-Progressive Congress (APC) till date. This saw the ruling party (PDP) becoming an opposition party up to date. Although there were other political parties in the country that held power at State and Local Government levels, the PDP and the APC dominated the political scene.

In recent years, the country has witnessed the rise of a third force in party politics known as the Labour Party (LP), and the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) which are also in contention for a place at the seat of power probably in the future when the nation would hold her national elections. From the brief background, it is safe to say that though Nigeria is a multi-party state, we saw the major contenders in 2023 elections in Nigeria, where four (4) political parties mentioned above were the highest vote's scorer. Our interest, however, lies in the inter-play of political parties and how that affects governance in a democracy. Competitive party politics and the electoral system are expected to deepen and consolidate democratic transition. Though Nigeria witnessed a successful



transition in 2023, the country still grapples with electoral malpractices, internal party wranglings, electoral violence, and inability to deliver on electioneering campaign promises. None of the literatures reviewed in this paper was able to link the poor state of governance in Nigeria to the internal dynamics of party politics, this paper therefore seeks to draw a link between internal party politics and poor governance in Nigeria. It will also examine the role of political parties in a democracy vis-à-vis the roles played by political parties in Nigeria, with particular focus on the two dominant political parties in Nigeria, the APC, and the PDP.

II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

▪ **Political party:**

A political party is an association of people with similar interest(s) and common purpose. The interest(s) and purpose shown by them revolve around the objective of using the party to acquire power, share in the exercise of power or take control of government (Yaqub, 1992). Similarly, as defined by Paki and Inokoba (2006, cited in Ajisebiyawa A.S. and Masajuwa F.U., 2016), political parties are organized instrumentalities through which citizens not only attempt to influence, but also control and determine the type and direction of public policies and programs, including the general allocation of resources. In a simple term 'Political party is an organization that recruits and campaigns for candidates seeking election and selection into public political office. The above definitions of political party imply that it is a political organization to which people voluntarily belong to capture political power and they develop their rules and guidelines based on their philosophies or ideologies. Democracy is impossible without political parties and even pressure groups.

▪ **Democratic Governance**

According to World Bank Report on Sub-Saharan Africa (1989, cited in Aleyomi, 2014) Governance is defined 'as the way power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development'. Democratic governance, on the other hand, refers to a democratic mode of exercising power and performing functions by established institutions to achieve developmental goals (Ibietan & Ajayi, 2015). Democratic governance can be understood in terms of the elements it constitutes. It is in line with the constitutive elements of democratic governance that the National League of Cities (2008 cited in Ibietan & Ajayi, 2015) defined the concept as 'the art of governing a community in participatory,

deliberative, and collaborative ways. Jega (2006) listed the constitutive elements of democratic governance to include the following.

- i. Representation: People having the freedom to choose their representative through periodic free and fair election.
- ii. Participation: People being involved in the processes of policy formulation and policy Implementation and in the general management of public affairs.
- iii. Responsive and Accountable Governance: Delivery of service to the people and communities in a manner that creates utilitarian value i.e., policies of government bringing happiness to the greater number of people.
- iv. Egalitarian Society: Equality before the law, rule of law, constitutional regime, fairness, economic and social justice.
- v. Transparency and Accountability in both public conduct and in the management of commonwealth (public resources).

The attainment or elusiveness of these elements in a political system is simply a measure of its democratic stature. In revisiting basic questions concerning the values and nature of democratic governance, the concept is approached by emphasizing two main major pillars of the liberal democratic tradition; citizen participation in the determination of government itself and in decision making processes; and a rights 'platform' that supports and protects the role of individuals in the governance process. This explains to a large extent why democratic governance is defined by Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and Office for Democratic Institution and Human Rights (ODIHR) as a 'system of government where institutions function according to democratic processes and norms, both internally and in their interaction with other institutions. According to these organizations, key principles of democratic governance are political pluralism, institutional accountability and responsiveness, active civil society, human rights, the rule of law and democratic elections.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts group theory as its theoretical framework. A group according to Bentley (1980) is a pattern of process involving mass of activities and not a collection of individuals (cited in Arowolo & Aluko, 2012). The group emerges from frequent interaction among its individual members that is directed by their shared interest. There is role for individuals as well as rules that govern each member of the group. Bentley



argued that politics is a group affair, and that governance or election matter is a competition among various units against one another for power.

Group theory has other adherents like David Truman, Robert Daniel, Grant McConnell, Theodora J. Lewis, Earl Lathans among others who contended that power is a diffused instrument among many interest groups competing against each other. The adoption of this theory as a yardstick to examine party politics and democratic governance in Nigeria is simply because of the interplay of forces and struggle for power among various political parties in Nigeria. In other words, the theory was adopted because institutional approach may not be appropriate for political analysis because they are static as against political organizations that are dynamic and full of activities. The adoption of group theory therefore, would help us to properly examine the roles of political parties in democratic governance in Nigeria.

III. Methodology

The research methodology adopted is qualitative, research used to guide the study. The study utilized secondary method of data collection from newspaper publications, scholarly research publications, government circular, government gazette, text books monograph and journals.

Types of Political Parties in Nigerian

There are two main political parties in Nigeria which can also be refers to as elite parties because they are ruling Nigeria inter-changeably with a lot of deceives to the Nigerian masses: They are; Peoples Democratic Parties and All Progressive Congress. However, today, there are 28 registered political parties in the country apart from these parties mentioned: The Social Democratic Party, Independent Democrats African Peoples Alliance, Democratic People Party, Labour Part, Mega Progressive People Party, Unity Party of Nigeria, Democratic Peoples Progress, Kowa Party, New Nigeria People Party, Hope Democratic Party, United Progressive Party, African Democratic Congress, New Nigeria Peoples Party, National Conscience Party, Citizens Popular Party, Independent Democrats Action Alliance, Accord Advanced Congress of Democrats, United Democratic Party, Alliance Congress Party of Nigeria, All Progressive Grand Alliance, Fresh Democratic Party, People Party of Nigeria, People for Democratic Change, Advanced People Democratic Alliance & Peoples Democratic Movement.

THE ROLE AND THE FEATURES OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN A DEMOCRACY

Enemuo (2015), Oji (2014) described political parties as 'central organs in any democratic setting'. They asserts that strong and viable parties are 'prerequisite to an enduring democratic culture'. For them, party politics based on principles of equity, representation, diversity, and choice is important for democratic governance. Similarly, the critical link between political parties and sustainable democratic governance reinforces what Odo (2015) refers to as 'non-negotiable imperative of strong political parties as a protection for the survival of democracy'. For Komolafe (2010), political parties do not only exist for electoral purposes, but they also perform other duties such as advocacy, research, mobilization, policy formation, education, and concept contestation. Komolafe asserts that political parties serve a variety of purposes in most countries, including promoting opposing ideologies, organizing issue-based campaigns, involving the government in policy debates, and bringing up topics for formal public deliberation. According to Komolafe, opposition parties "create alliances and develop working partnerships based on proximity of ideas" to give a counterbalance to the party in power. Going by the above roles of political parties as avowed by Komolafe, one can argue that political parties in Nigeria are probably created from a different stock that is at variance with what constitutes the practices of an 'ideal' political party. This is because political parties in Nigeria appear to believe that their only role is to acquire political power and hold on to it by any means necessary; and one of such means would be to stifle opposition parties, Ayila (2006). In alignment with the above statement Mbah (2007) argued that political parties in control of power usually plant moles and disruptive elements in opposition parties to create instability and render them ineffective to compete for power. They may also engage in character defamation and other ungodly acts against opposition parties to cease power.

Writing on the crisis of party politics in Nigeria, the Political Bureau (1987, cited in Shehu, 2012) emphasized thus; 'party politics is poisonous, it is the politics of war not peace, of acrimony and hatred, mudslinging, not of love and brotherhood, of anarchy and discord, not of orderliness and concord, it is politics of cleavages, divisions, and disunity and not of co-operation, consensus, and unity; it is the politics of hypocrisy and patriotism, it is the politics of rascality, not maturity, of blackmail and near gangsterism, not of constructive honest contribution'. This characterization of political



parties in Nigeria shows the abysmal nature of party politics in Nigeria which is at variance with western democratic practice where people join and identify with political parties based on their political beliefs, and ideology, with freewill for constructive criticisms of the government of the day.

THE COMPARISM OF PARTY POLITICS AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA AND SOUTH AFRICA

Omotola (2010) listed three issues that present themselves in leadership, which are relevant in the analysis of party politics and democratic governance in Nigeria. The subdivisions includes; Leadership Ascension, Leadership Operation and Leadership Succession. Leadership Ascension implies the means and methods of aspiring to and eventually gaining political leadership positions. Other scholars like Rotberg, (2014) espoused this further by describing the roles that political actors vested with state authority play at each level of transition in leadership, which also forms the hub of this discourse. One of the core roles of a political party is to elect office holders under a given label, whether the election is flawless or flawed (Patz, 2010). In western tradition, dissimilar to common practice in South Africa where democracy wobbles, political parties train and prepare candidate for elective positions and observe internal party democracy in the selection of candidates for president, governor and other elective positions other than imposition of candidates a prevailing Nigeria cases. Importantly, political parties undertake voter education/sensitization, and go further to mobilize, recruit/employ and compensate those that work for them. While we may argue that political parties in Nigeria play some similar roles. Fagbadebo et al., (2014) have emphasized that political parties in Nigeria are more visible in internal rivalry among members, scheming to scuttle opposition, impose candidates, and compromise electoral process (Fagbadebo et al., 2014). The negative manifestations of these acts by Nigerian political parties as canvassed by Fagbadebo et al., evidently metamorphoses into vote buying, and monetization of electioneering processes as reported during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria and recently in Kogi State governorship election. Such acts by political parties negate the principles and tenets of democracy and ridicule the integrity of the electioneering franchise in Nigerian state.

The desire to gain control of government is the overall goal of any political party, thus, ascension to leadership through party politicking in Africa and Nigeria is such that requires lots of

influence, intrigues and means on the part of the candidate or their godfathers that wield such needed influence. In other words, it is capital intensive to partake in elections, especially in Nigeria, where the process is both contentious and competitive.

The Nigeria's democracy is threatened by undue monetization of party Processes and party politics in Nigeria is for money bags. The unfortunate thing is that 63% of the nation's population live under extreme poverty (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). In a country where N30,000 naira only minimum wage has not been implemented and many states are unable to pay their workers till date, pegging nomination forms for political office at exorbitant prices amounts to disenfranchisement of well-meaning citizens who have the dream of serving their country. The outrageous fees imposed by these parties undermine democratic participation. Besides the above, issues of disqualification, suspension and expulsion across party lines accompany this fierce competition for party tickets. It shows either a deliberate ploy or policy of exclusion in electioneering at the party level where they impose some candidates because of monies that have exchanged hands, to the displeasure of other members sidelined or short-changed in the process. It is therefore safe to say that, only those with money or those that have godfathers as sponsors can contest election. Thus, the process of ascension to political office is normally a serious gambit affair that incubates and triggers election vices such as hooliganism, thuggery, blackmailing, backbiting, fighting, maiming, and killing, character assassination and other unconventional means to outsmart the opponent.

In an ideal democracy, leadership operation is seen in the functions and functioning of the organs of government, including the legislature at both national and sub-national levels i.e. executive, legislatures and judiciary. The Press remains the Fourth Estate of the Realm that monitors and reports the activities of the branches of government without bias. However, Nigeria currently suffers predicaments of having a ruling political party in government that controls majority members both in the legislature and in the executive even the judiciary, thereby whittling down the roles of political parties in opposition. Where this is the case, the party in power mismanages political leadership; it makes development programmes a secondary concern and apparently elusive. Cole (2022) emphasized that political parties are formed to aid in nation-building and serve as a forum for citizens and politicians to collaborate on national



development. He added that Nigeria's numerous political parties have thus far been unable to achieve their primary goals of advancing the society's development.

THE CHALLENGES AND EFFECTS OF PARTY POLITICS ON DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

It is saddening to note that instead of finding ways of contributing to the development of democracy in the Nigeria State, the political class have been known to constitute menace that worsen democratic governance in the nation. Since 29 May 1999, when the fourth republic took off in Nigeria, politicians have not been unable to bring reasonably good governance to the country as expected. These are reflected in poor standard of living, huge unemployment, poor power supply, poor security, economic inflation, poor medical facilities, poor standard in educational infrastructure, and other social infrastructures. The challenge of service delivery, infrastructural deficits, and qualitative life for citizenry among others demonstrate that the expected democratic benefits have not been delivered (Ibietan & Ajayi, 2015).

In this section, the study discourses factors that constitute challenges to democratic practice and the effects of party politics to democratic governance in Nigeria. Different scholars (such as Chinedu 2022, Adamu 2015, Obah-Akpowoghaha, 2013, amongst others) highlighted godfatherism, tribalism, ethnicity, nepotism, sectionalism and even regionalism among others as barriers to achieving democratic consolidation in Nigeria. This study adds to the discourse by asserting that the political environment is not conducive for electoral officers to do their job. Electoral officers, who are supposed to be neutral, have been found culpable to have compromised their neutral positions during elections for personal aggrandizements. Some electoral officers have also alleged threat to life and intimidation by politicians who want to get hold of power by all means.

Asides the above, Obah-Akpowoghaha (2013) argued that political primaries are conducted based on selection and not election; emergence of candidate are usually through imposition by political godfathers or unfair processes, a reality which is often inconsistent with the party's constitution, causing some party members to defect to other parties. The years 2007, 2013, 2014, 2019, 2023 till date for instance witnessed increased cross-carpeting of politicians from one party to another due to internal party conflicts and candidate imposition. In 2013, seven aggrieved PDP

governors formed a splinter group known as N-PDP; and they later decamped to the APC. In 2014, former governor of Kano State, Mallam Ibrahim Shekarau decamped from APC to PDP. In Sokoto state, former governor of the state, Attahiru Bafarawa also decamped from APC to PDP in 2014. Atiku Abubakar, a former Vice president, also decamped from PDP to APC and returned, and the list is endless. Towards the 2023 general election, there was also massive decamping of some governors and members of the national assembly from the APC to PDP and vice-versa. A comprehensive detail on political cross-carpeting of politicians in Nigeria has been captured in Chinweuba, G. E. (2019). An Intra party conflict affects governance and distracts the government in power. It leaves little room for quality governance as attention would be given to resolving party issues rather than focusing on the provision of quality projects and better living conditions for citizens.

Furthermore, those that emerges from lopsided primaries (candidate imposition) after winning elections only seek to advance their self-centred interests and those of their godfathers, families, tribes, and loyalists further entrenching nepotism and polarizing the state. In such a situation, it becomes difficult to initiate policies and projects that are devoid of sentiments based on party affiliations, kinship, or loyalty at the detriment of the generality of the people. Justifying this line of argument, Osabiya, (2015) asserts that political appointees divert funds meant for the public to their private coffers and give preferences and unmerited favor to sponsors, godfathers' friends and families at the expense of the masses. According to (Adamu, 2015), the problem of greed, corruption, and absence of internal democracy among party elites in Nigeria has made politicians not to have focus. Chinedu (2022) asserts that the politics of godfatherism makes politicians turn their attention from sustainable development to satisfying the whims and caprices of their political godfathers. This condition only deepens the state of undemocratic practices in Nigeria and further impoverishes the masses. We have seen this play out many times in governance. For instance, if a governor assumes office, usually one of his first lines of action would be to fire all those appointed by his predecessor, and sometimes retract actions taken by his predecessor. This is not because the former appointees were unqualified, or the actions put in place were unproductive; it is simply to reward his cronies and discredit his predecessor especially if the latter is from a different political party. With such reality, it becomes difficult to get



objective actions and policies that are people-centred rather than self-centred.

Additionally, because of how these candidates emerge, it leaves little room for accountability to the people as they owe their allegiance to their political sponsors. Lack of accountability and transparency breeds corruption and this is the story of governance in Nigeria. For instance, the over two decades of democracy has witnessed years of looting public treasury at the local, state and national levels of government. Out of 36 state governors from 1999-2022, 24 have been indicted for looting their state treasuries (Nnochiri, 2019). Chinweuba, (2022) argues that ‘‘Governance in Nigeria is full with sentiments, incoherent and non-inclusive policies, government lip-service, corruption, tribal and party consciousness’’. Because candidates who emerge owe no allegiance to the people, their nonchalance and high handedness in governance reflects in disregard for service to the people manifested in neglect for provision of quality education, welfare of citizens, and outright disregard of the rule of law, amongst others. Those in positions of authority have remained indifferent to the plight of the poor, the hungry and unemployed. Instead, they are obsessed with siphoning the fortunes of the country, hence social injustice, corruption; poverty and insecurity have brought untold hardship to the people. The desired national transformation of the country is still a mirage despite the abundance of human and material resources, which should have ordinarily translated into a buoyant life for the citizenry. The greatest threat to democracy and good governance in Nigeria has thus been party politics hinged on candidate imposition, nepotism, and monetization of the process which breeds hostile political environment for national development (Odo, 2015).

Another challenge to democratic practice and governance in Nigeria as identified by Olu-Adeyemi (2020) is the electoral system. It is known from history that turbulent elections have been a source of political crisis in Nigeria and controversies surrounding elections have serious potential to undermine the legitimacy and stability of democracy. The late president Umar Musa Yar’Adua acknowledged the need for reform of the Nigerian electoral system and made it an integral part of his seven-point agenda. Goodluck Jonathan, a former president, recently criticized the National Assembly by asking that the contentious Section 84 of the new Electoral Act be removed (Vanguard, 2022). This serves as a reminder of some of the challenges to Nigerian democracy.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the perspective of group theory, it was vividly observed that the mechanism for candidate’s emergence in Nigeria is to a great extent exclusive of the input of the masses. This no doubt has led to the recycling of political actors, and when new candidates emerge, they are merely representing the interest of a political group (godfathers) thereby maintaining the status-quo of social relations between political elites and the people.

These dysfunctional social relations with regards to governance could be checked if political leaders are recruited through an open process that is encompassing of the masses. This could be achieved in an environment of matured political culture where there are free, fair and credible elections, and the political actors view themselves as public servants rather than masters. For this to be achieved the political system must be de-monetized, political education enhanced through functional basic education, and the economy well improved so that people do not get into politics because of idleness or viewing it as a quick means of wealth acquisition. Since political parties constitute functional institution for political recruitment in a democracy, it is important to accentuate that the functions, purpose, and structures of political parties should be well defined and deeply rooted in the people with the hope of improving the system. This implies that political parties must effectively perform the function of political education of its members among others, building and sustaining internal democracy under the supervision of an independent electoral body which would aid and reflect stable interparty activities.

This, no doubt would provide the foundation for an enduring democracy that would be appreciated by all and sundry. Politics in Nigeria is very attractive in terms of incentives, and this is one major reason why many politicians are desperate to take up positions. If politics is made less attractive and politicians are paid much less, it might discourage many from engaging in illicit vices to attain power. There is need to reform political financing. The Nigeria political system needs to be overhauled because where incumbency, godfatherism, electoral fraud and other barriers are important determinants of electoral outcomes in Nigeria, it will be difficult to make progress as a nation.



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