Analytical Study of Political Party Systems in Nigeria

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Abstract

Party systems can be identified as patterns of interaction among political parties in electoral, parliamentary and governmental arenas of a given political context. It constitutes important elements of modern democratic system without which there cannot be electoral systems. Hence, it gives room for democracy which Nigeria can boast of in her developmental process.Moreover, many Nigerians support the fact that democracy has come to stay in Nigeria, although among the various types of party systems, the dominant party system in Nigeria is multiparty system. In this present administration of the so called slogan "change" in Nigeria, there is need to review the so called party system and switch to another type which seems to be the most advantageous one. This type of party system is referred to as Two-Party system.Finally, this paper gaudily examines an overview of party systems, the types of party systems, the comparison between multi-party and two-party systems in Nigeria and their impacts on governance, and recommendation of two-party system for Nigeria political system. It further recommends that activities of political parties must not reflect discordant party politics but their formation, choice of leadership, choice of candidates, organizational structure, funding and there must be reflect democratic of principles and the rule of law. This would enhance peaceful, structured political system and the choice of the people will be represented without any form of resentment.

Keywords: Nigeria, party systems, democratization, development.

1. Introduction

Party systems can be identified as patterns of interaction among political parties in electoral, parliamentary and governmental arenas of a given political context. Political Parties are organizations that mobilize voters on behalf of a common set of interests, concerns, and goals (Microsoft ® Encarta 2009). In many nations, parties play a crucial role in the democratic process. They formulate political and policy agendas, select candidates, conduct election campaigns, and monitor the work of their elected representatives. Political parties link citizens and the government, providing a means by which people can have a voice in their government.

Democracy in the developed and developing continents today was given birth to as a result of embracing party systems in politics; Nigeria has chosen democracy as her political administrative principle. Party systems constitute an important and veritable mechanism in the democratization process and democratic governance of any political system is incontestable (Musa Yusuf 2005).

As a mechanism by which the ruling class consolidates its hold on state power however, the nature and function of party systems tend to conform to the interests of the ruling class in the survival of its system of domination. In the attempt to consolidate its hold on state power, the ruling class and indeed the politicians tend to use political parties and party systems to maintain their grip on political power at all costs. This has had serious devastating consequences which are better imagined. Though political parties vary in terms of their structures and functions, whether in the system of bourgeois (conventional) democracy or that of people's democracy, however the way and manner the ruling class and politicians use political parties to get or maintain their hold on power appears to be the same (Musa Yusuf 2005).

In Nigerian political system, politicians see politics as a do-or-die game and thus they play it through the manipulation of political parties which is seriously lamentable. They employ all means at their disposal to "win" power most especially through varying degrees of electoral malpractices and political intimidation. Electoral malpractice is inevitable when there is malpractice in the party systems. In the revolution of "change", all these must be critically looked into and a positive solution should be proffered (Nnoli O. 1992).

This paper gaudily examines an overview of party systems, the types of party systems, the comparison between multi-party and two-party systems in Nigeria and their impacts on governance, and recommendation of two-party system for Nigeria political system.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Historical Overview of Party System in Nigeria

According to Vanguard (2015), the past political history of the country pointed to the existence of viral multi-party systems despite the fact that it was still under British Imperialism. After multi-party system have dominated the political process for about a decade, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) of Herbert Macaulay was strongly challenged by another party, Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) of younger and brilliant minds of the time Dr. Vaughan, Dr. Azikwe, Chief H.O. Davies, Chief Awolowo and others. While the NNDP won Legislative Council seats in 1922, 1930 and 1931, the rival party NYM won in 1938, 1940 and 1941. It

should be recognized that in Lagos and later, in many towns of South-West, Obas and Chiefs were active political participants. In the struggle to extend political franchise in 1930s, the Oba of Lagos, Esugbayi and his chiefs were always seen at the political rallies of the NNDP. Also, the late Oba of Lagos, Oba Adele was a strong supporter of the Action Group through the Area Council Party, while his successor, Oba Oyekan was a supporter of the NCNC and a personal friend of its leader, Dr. Azikwe.

Nigeria's first year of independence, dating from Oct. 1, 1960, was marked by considerable political stability. There were no major changes on the federal level aside from a cabinet reorganization, announced on July 17, 1961. It may be observed that the concept of multi-party system has taken a firm root in Nigeria through earlier experiment in Lagos. However, its rapid growth has been affected by attributes of Nigerian politics which have manifested themselves in diverse directions such as ethnicity, religion, cultism and monetary inducements popularly referred to as stomach infrastructure. Under the multiparty system of this country, the election results have shown neither the victory for a particular political ideology nor the preference for a particular economic philosophy (Vanguard 2015).

The persistence of the multiparty system sets Nigeria apart from most of the emerging West African nations, where the tendency has been for a single nationalist party to absorb other political groups either before or shortly after independence and established a one-party state. The explanation lies largely in the facts that Nigeria is a federation of three widely differing regions, within each of which a single party predominates, and that no party has succeeded in cutting across these regional divisions.

Northern Nigeria is dominated by the Muslim Hausa and Fulani peoples, effective authority still resides in powerful emirs who are resistant to economic and social modernization; the NPC reflects their conservatism. The Ibo speaking peoples predominate in Eastern Nigeria, where powerful chiefs are unknown, and provide the basis of the NCNC. Also, Western Nigeria is the home of the Yoruba people, whose chiefs, wealthy businessmen and professionals control the AG. Western-type education and Christianity have had a profound influence on the two southern regions, and Western Nigeria is by far the most prosperous of the country's three regions, accounting for about 40 per cent of its foreign trade. The coalition government on the federal level between the Northern People's Congress (NPC) and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) remained undisturbed, with the Action Group (AG) in opposition (Microsoft ® Encarta 2009).

3. Regional Politics in Nigeria

Elections held in Northern and Eastern Nigeria in 1961 underlined the trend toward one-party government on the regional level. In Northern Nigeria, elections were held on May 4 for a new House of Assembly, the elected membership of which had been increased from 131 to 170. This was the first time that direct elections to the regional parliament had been held throughout the North, since the 1956 elections to the previous Assembly had been based on an electoral-college system in the rural areas (Microsoft ® Encarta 2009).

All adult males were enfranchised, and a total of 2,263,090 voters (62 per cent of the registered electorate) went to the polls. As expected, the NPC, the dominant party in the previous Assembly, won an overwhelming victory, gaining 160 seats; the AG won nine seats, and the NCNC one seat. In terms of votes, 69 per cent went to the NPC, 14.9 per cent to the AG and allied groups, and 14 per cent to the NCNC and the allied Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU). The results showed the strength of the NPC in the non-Fulani, non-Hausa part of the region, where the AG and allied advocates of a Middle Belt region (designed to satisfy the large concentration of Yoruba in that area of the North) were defeated by the NPC. The NCNC-NEPU alliance, which has always campaigned on a class basis in the big Hausa trading cities, also fared badly (Microsoft ® Encarta 2009).

In Eastern Nigeria, elections were held on November 16, and once again the NCNC emerged triumphant. Of the 146 seats contested, 106 went to the NCNC, fifteen to the AG, five to the Dynamic Party, and twenty to independents. In Western Nigeria, where elections were held during 1960, the opposition to the dominant Action Group is somewhat stronger. But when the Mid-West becomes a separate region, as is expected to happen early in 1962 in order to satisfy the Benins and some of the Niger Delta tribes, the AG will be unassailable in the Western Region, whereas the NCNC is likely to dominate the new region (Microsoft ® Encarta 2009).

Other political developments during 1961 included the incorporation of the former Northern Cameroons (area 17,500 sq. mi., pop. about 760,000), which had been part of the British-administered UN trusteeship of the (Northern and Southern) Cameroons, into Northern Nigeria as Sardauna Province. This occurred on June 1, in accordance with the results of the UN-supervised plebiscite held there during February; given a choice between union with Nigeria and with Cameroun, 147,296 voters chose Nigeria, while 97,659 chose Cameroun. The new province was not immediately represented in the federal parliament or Northern Assembly, since this required an amendment to the constitution (Microsoft ® Encarta 2009).

However, in Nigeria, sustainability and stability of democracy is a key factor to development which seems threatened as a result of insecurity challenges in politics arising from regional or ethnical politics. Nigeria

has been a country that has institutionalized electoral democracy but has failed to uphold the political and civil freedoms essential for liberal democracy.

La Palombara, J. and Weiner, M. (1966) describe that political party system consists of all the parties in a particular nation, the laws and customs that govern the behavior of the people. There are three types of party systems:

1.   Multi-party systems
2.   Two-party systems
3.   One-party systems.

Multi-party systems are the most common type of party system. Parliamentary governments based on proportional representation often develop multiparty systems. In this type of electoral arrangement, the number of legislative seats held by any party depends on the proportion of votes they received in the most recent election. When no party gains a majority of the legislative seats in a parliamentary multiparty system, several parties may join forces to form a coalition government. Advocates of multiparty systems point out that they permit more points of view to be represented in government and often provide stable, enduring systems of government, as in most of contemporary Western Europe (where every system, including Great Britain, has at least three and usually five or six significant parties). Critics note, however, that multiparty systems have sometimes contributed to fragmentation and political instability, as in the Weimar Republic in Germany (1919-1933), the Fourth Republic in France (1946-1958), and Italy after World War II (La Palombara, J. and Weiner, M. 1966).

In a two-party system, control of government power shifts between two dominant parties. Two-party systems most frequently develop when electoral victory requires only a simple plurality vote, that is, the winner gets the most votes, but not necessarily a majority of votes. In such a system, it makes sense for smaller parties to combine into larger ones or to drop out altogether. Parliamentary governments in which the legislators are elected by plurality voting to represent distinct districts may develop party systems in which only two parties hold significant numbers of seats, as in Great Britain and Canada. Advocates of two-party systems believe they limit the dangers of excessive fragmentation and government stalemate. However, in the United States, which separates the powers and functions of government between executive, legislative, and judicial branches, it is possible for one party to control the legislature and the other to control the executive branch. This frequently has led to political gridlock between the Republican Party and the Democratic Party. Opponents of the two-party system also believe that in time the two parties increasingly tend to resemble each other and leave too many points of view out of the political process (La Palombara, J. and Weiner, M. 1966).

A single-party system is one in which one party nominates all candidates for office. Thus there is no competition for elected offices. The only choices left to voters are;

1.   To decide whether or not to vote
2.   To vote "yes" or "no" for the designated candidate.

Single-party systems have characterized Communist Party governments and other authoritarian regimes. They have become much less common since Communism collapsed in Eastern Europe and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) between 1989 and 1991. Surviving Communist states, most notably China, North Korea, and Cuba, do continue to enforce the rule of a single party. International financial pressure has also reduced the number of single-party systems in developing nations. Funding agencies such as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (also known as the World Bank) often insist upon a competitive party system as a precondition for granting loans or aid to these countries. Defenders of single-party systems point out that they provide a way for nations to mobilize and direct the talents and energies of every citizen toward a unified mission or purpose. This advantage appeals to leaders of some nations that possess limited human and material resources. However, single-party systems limit the political freedoms and choices of citizens.

La Palombara and Weiner (1966) devised a typology of party systems starting from the distinction between "non-competitive party systems" and "competitive party systems". The latter were in turn classified depending on whether alternation in power took place or, on the contrary, evidence of party hegemony (domination or supremacy) emerged. What the studies of parties conducted between the 1960s and the early 1980s shared was a common concern not so much with the democratic progress of the countries involved, but rather with their "political development" (Coleman, James and Rosberg, Carl 1966).

The concept of "political development" is quite controversial and no longer as fashionable as it once was. What is relevant here, however, is that it never entirely overlapped with the notion of democratization. Certainly, elements such as "equality" or "participation" were occasionally included among the defining features of political development. Most often, however, it was a different kind of changes that were seen as the essence of political development, including the "differentiation" of political structures, the construction of state "capacities" that would make authority more effective, and the "institutionalization" of organizations and procedures.

4.0 Discussions

4.1 Assessment of Multi-Party System and Two-Party System in Nigeria

In the 1960s, the United Nations and the world were opposing ethnic sectionalism but by the 1990s, the United Nations and the international community had become more flexible to ethnic realities. This interpretation led to the opening of more realities for Africa leading to the breakdown of Sudan and Ethiopia (Akinyemi 2015). Therefore, a two-party system is the possible solution to the common problem of ethnic politics that is arising in Nigeria.

In the 90s, Nigeria operated in two-party system, the two political parties then are;

1.   The Social Democratic Party (SDP)

2.   The National Republican Convention (NRC)

During that time, politics was well defined and made much meaning. It should be noted that it was under the two-party structure that one of the best organized elections believed to have been won by late M.K.O. Abiola took place. The two-party system made it easier for fronting as presidential candidates individuals from the same religious belief. It was then that the SDP floated a muslim/muslim ticket and eventually won the presidential election (The Punch, February, 2015).

For the uninitiated, when one talks about a two-party system, one is referring to a structure or system which allows for just two political parties. This type of arrangement normally provides the electorate a well structured alternative to choose from or to be one of the two political parties. The two-party system makes provision for easy choice to vote. The voters need not to bother too much in making provision for easy because if he is not satisfied with one political party, he can jettison it and think of the second one. In this sort of system, the leaders of the two political parties are in most cases compelled to think of the people because they have one choice which may work in their own disadvantage if they don't perform to expectation. But the extent arrangement where the people practiced multi-party system that offers multiplicity of political parties makes it possible for apparently strange bed fellows forming a political party for the sake of it. In most cases, formation of political parties is done just for pecuniary benefits rather than advancement of democracy (The Punch, February, 2015).

The two-party system will also make for a unifying factor in a highly pluralistic society like Nigeria. This definitely will reduce the level of bitterness, acrimony and division that multiparty system promotes as each region or ethnic group tries to form and belong to political party that represents their primordial interest rather than altruistic and nationalistic interest.

Two-party system will relegate the background ethnic and regional politics that has been the bane of this country. Presently, we have about 36 political parties, with all honesty, how many of these political parties are really impacting on the polity? Here, we are talking in terms of advancing our democracy, mobilizing members, winning elections and affecting the fortunes of the country. Previously, we had about 50 political parties until recently when the Independence National Electoral Commission (INEC) reduced the number by de-registering some of them.

Also, a two party system will enable the electorate have two broad and distinct options. This will of course make the process and choice of candidates on Election Day become less cumbersome and simple as the electorate will be left with the choice of voting their choices under two options.

It must be pointed out here that voters encounters challenges, for instance, if there are more than two party logos on a ballot paper, the voters who are of aged will find it difficult to locate their desired party logo but if when in two-party system, the aged voters will not face such difficulty because the two party logos will be clearly drawn.

Although, those that are against two-party system are passed off that in such an arrangement, citizens will be left with just two options belonging to the political parties. Also, they are of the view that during election, voters will be left with two choices to cast their votes. As such if they are not satisfied with the two political parties, what will they do? They would be left with no choice. It is believed that during voting is the confusion and difficulty of choosing the candidate of their choice particularly among the illiterate voters. On a typical election day, voters are often faced with 30 options on the ballot papers. Some voters get confused on which on which logo their preferred candidates belongs, despite the voting education and training carried out by INEC officials, they still get confused. This will not be the case with a two party system where the emblem of just two parties will be displayed.

To a greater extent, two-party system will most importantly address the vexed issue of rotational presidency that has been agitating the minds of some Nigerians. One of the challenges of our sovereignty, unity and oneness as a country is the perceived marginalization by some sectors of the country. Their grudge is predicated on the fact that their region has not produced a president of their ethnic extraction. With the implementation and practiced of two party system, this will be addressed. How this will be achieved is that rotational presidency will be a major electioneering point as those areas that has not produce a president will use it as a major campaign issue and before one knows it, the issue will be addressed as the electorate may switch

loyalty to any political party that will make them realize their ambition.

Another troubling question that antagonists of two-party system still ask is the one that borders on whether or not it is normal for a pluralistic society like Nigeria to be restricted to just two political parties, and the answer to that is that if two party system will bring about much sought after unity and stability, so be it. To buttress this point is the fact that world democracy such as the United States of America and United Kingdom are virtually practicing two-party system. In United States, there are Republicans and Democrats, and for decades they have been performing well and power alternatives between the two parties (The Punch, February, 2015).

In an event that occurred when one of the political party did not perform well, it will be voted out. Also, in the UK, there are Conservatives and Labour parties. Over the time, the British have been voting in and voting out these political parties depending on the situation of things on ground. Two-party system may be the panacea Nigeria urgently needs to advance its democracy, stabilize the polity and usher in breath of fresh air.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper recommends that two-party system is the solution to enhance efficient electoral process in Nigeria. The following below would be realized if two-party system is adopted by Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC):

1. It will solve the common problem of ethnic politics that is arising in Nigeria.
2. It will reform electoral process and restore public confidence in electoral process.
3. It will create efficient healthy party politics. This is because political parties will conduct their activities in a democratic manner and within the democratic environment such that the best candidate will be voted for, inside the party and not imposed or nominated before such candidate will compete with other party.
4. A political party may not be there for decades, hence there will be constant change depending on the level of efficiency of the dominating party.
5. A candidate who loses elections will relinquish power gracefully and peacefully to the other party. In this case, dignity will be of utmost priority.
6. Election corruption will be checked. Equality and rule of law will survive regardless of the outcome of elections. There will also be reduction in the chances of unruly behavior of the politicians before and during election exercise.
7. Political parties will equally respect and recognize legitimacy, fairness, effectiveness and hose checks and balances mechanisms involved in the conduct of elections. This would greatly reduce the eruption of crisis and electoral violence.
8. Two-party system will enhance intellectual enormity, competition and critical thinking in leadership such that whoever voted to represent a party must possess high standard of intellect. In this case, there will be enough room for intellectual competition in leadership.

Suggested questions for future research

1. Can two-party system prevent Nigeria from disintegrating as a country into three countries representing the three major ethnic groups?
2. Disintegration of Nigeria: Is it the best option in other to enhance socio-economic and political development?

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Biography

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