Political Parties, Party System and Leadership Recruitment in Nigeria Since Independence in 1960

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Abstract

This paper is based on political parties, party system and political leadership recruitment in Nigeria since independence. The objective of the paper is to trace the political history of Nigeria from independence particularly in the area of political leadership recruitment, outline the failures recorded so far and make suggestions for improvement through appropriate reforms by Nigerian political parties. It elucidates on the important roles of political parties and the relevance of party system in political leadership recruitment in a democratic political system. It espouses such concepts as political parties, party system, political ideology, political culture and political maturity in relation to political leadership recruitment and formation of governments in a democracy. It adopts historical and sociological approach to capture and chronicle the various attempts made by Nigerian political parties in recruiting credible political leaders for the formation of governments and the many times they have failed in the process from the first republic in 1960 to the fourth republic in 2015. It observes to date that inter-and intra-party crisis is yet to come to an end and more than any other reasons, has gone a long way to affect the functions and responsibilities of political parties as veritable tools for political leadership recruitment. In view of the above, the paper suggests some reforms which if carried out, may strengthen Nigerian political parties as veritable tools for effective political leadership recruitment.

Introduction

According to Neumann (2008) and Wordu (2011), a political party is an organisation of society's active political agents who compete for popular support with another group or persons holding diverse views. By this Similarly, a political party is an organisation that nominates or presents candidates to stand

Political party, party system, leadership recruitment, political ideology, political culture, manifesto, democracy, zero party, one-party, two-party, multi-party, good governance, democracy, liberalism, capitalism, marxism, communism, political change, political socialization, political reforms.for election in its name and seeks to have or place representatives (leaders) in government. The primary objective is that political parties seek to organize themselves, to dominate the organs of government and ultimately to provide governmental and political leadership. In the same vein, political party can be defined as a group of people who share the same ideas and ideology about the way the country should be governed. A political party can also be viewed as a group whose members act in concert to win the support for leaders who seek to govern (Jinadu, 2011; Schwaz and Lawson, 2005; Ryan, 2010).

Political Parties and the Leadership Recruitment Process

From the above definitions, political parties seek to control the government by presenting, sponsoring and supporting their members who seek elective or political positions in government. In addition, the internal mechanism of political parties espouses the following; organisation standards, institutional capacity, internal democracy, leadership recruitment, socio-economic and political ideologies, manifestoes and programmes, funding and campaigns, structured electoral process and eventual control of government. Therefore, political parties should be well organised, disciplined and capable to drive the process of leadership recruitment, democracy and good governance (Wordu, 2011; Wordu, 2012).

Another typical way or example of how political parties can shape or pattern leadership recruitment process is the selection of party candidates. Political parties use different methods to determine or select candidates or recruit leaders for offices contested in a general election. According to Hopkin and Bradbury (2006), some of the types of party leadership or selection process are highlighted as follows:
* by a single individual who creates a political party as a vehicle for his or her own political views;
* by a small elite party group, either by formal vote or apparent consensus.
* by the party members of a legislature particularly in parliamentary systems;
* by party annual convention, conference or electoral college as in non-parliamentary systems;
* by ballot of the whole or total party membership;
* by party (delegate) primaries at various levels from ward, local government, state and federal or national levels; and
* by shadow elections otherwise known as 'open' or 'wide open' primaries which are held in which any one, regardless of party affiliation, may vote.

Political Party System

The democratic system encourages the establishment of political parties or party systems which exist in different form or variety. According to Dode (2010) and Omodia (2010b) there are four major party systems from which a country can choose the one to adopt as highlighted as follows:

* zero party system refers to a situation where there is no political party. It features only individual candidates for an election. It is sparingly used. It was adopted in Nigeria in the early 1990s at the local government level during the military era (Babangida Administration);
* one-party system allows for only one party to exist legally as was with the erstwhile USSR, that is the defunct communist party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). It is usually monopolistic of state power and autocratic;
* two-party system allows for two parties to exist legally as in the third republic in Nigeria or only two dominant parties which are important in influencing the alternation of political power as in the United States and United Kingdom; and
* multi-party system gives no legal restriction as to the number of political parties that are permitted to exist. It may also allow for independent candidates to vote and be voted for during elections. Aside from the aborted third republic, Nigeria is a good example of multi-party system with above fifty political parties as at year 2013.

However, it is a misconception that a party system automatically exists, once there is a political party or a multiple of political parties, it must be clarified that the party system cannot simply be reduced to a 'number game'.

Political Culture

The thrust of this paper is to establish the 'relevance' of political parties in relation to leadership recruitment and formation of government in Nigeria. This naturally leads to the roles, functions and objectives of political parties. Also important and vital to note is how these 'relevant' political parties relate to one another in terms of co-operation and consensus or conflict and polarization as well as the factors that account for them. This also leads to the issue of political culture. Therefore it could be said that the existence and relevance of political parties, how well they perform their functions, the nature of political climate, the level of political maturity attained and the political culture under which they operate will go a long way to facilitate good governance, democracy and the democratization process in Nigeria (Yagboyaju, 2012). It is also to be noted that the basic functions of political parties according to Ihonvbere (2009) include the following:

* recuitment and training of leaders;
* development policy platforms;
* searching for and presenting the best aspirants and candidates for office;
* regulating the conduct of office holders;
* conducting research on political party, political education and political development;
* encouraging socio-economic and political discourses; and
* subscribing and committing openly to the sustenance of democracy in every regard.

Political Ideology

Apart from serving as instruments for political recruitment and selection of candidates for elections, political parties are also instruments of political communication, enlightenment and education, political socialization, political change and stability, interest articulation and aggregation and political ideology. Some political parties based their political and election campaign programmes on an ideology such as liberalism, capitalism, marxism, socialism, or communism, as in the liberal democracies of the West. However, political parties in Nigeria take broad inspiration from a group of related ideologies without specifically embracing any one of them (Dode, 2010).

While ideology is a set of basic beliefs about the political, economic, social and cultural affairs held by the majority of people within a society, 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 (APS, 2012). It is therefore imperative for a political party to have a political ideology that will distinguish it from others in terms of socio-economic and political views and approach in solving societal problems.

In addition to political ideology, how political parties relate with one another is very vital. The political atmosphere or culture under which they operate and the existence of an impartial umpire to monitor their activities are very germane to effective leadership recruitment through free and fair election in particular and democracy in general.

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Political Parties in Nigeria

As analysed in general terms above, political parties can be defined in structural or functional sense. However, they have generally been defined more in the functional than in the structural way as in the liberal democracies of the West (Europe and North America). It has been pointed out that political parties do structure electoral choice by presenting the electorate with a choice of candidates; they help to decide on the formation of governments for a fixed number of years; and they provide a medium through which the accountability of the executive and the legislators to the electorate is exercised through periodic elections under a two-party or multi-party system (Jinadu, 2011).

Apart from the above, the basic function of political parties include identifying and training of leaders; developing policy platforms; presenting the best aspirants and candidates for office; regulating office holders, conducting research on party politics and political development; encouraging public discourses; and committing openly to the sustenance of democracy (Ihonvbere, 2009; Yagboyaju, 2012). In addition, the functions of political parties include political socialization and recruitment; interest articulation and aggregation; political communication and enlightenment; political education, research and development (Omodia, 2010b).

The above-mentioned functions are the ideal or the theory, the reality is much more different in Nigeria due to the constricting effect on the choice of the electorate as a result of contradictions such as oligarchic and undemocratic tendencies in political party organisations as well as market imperfections and structural distortions in the economy. Jinadu (2011) also alluded to the fact that the reality is different from the ideal or theory even in some liberal democracies of the West.

If the ideal differs from the reality even in the liberal democracies of the first and second world countries, how much more of the third world countries of which Nigeria is one. This is however not an excuse for the oligarchic and undemocratic tendencies of Nigerian political system. Nonetheless, this is to explain the imperfections and contradictions that affect political parties in the Nigerian political system from the colonial period till date.

To analyse the Nigerian political parties, therefore, a historical sociology approach will be adopted political in order to capture and chronicle the developmental circumstances which molded the character of the Nigerian political parties. The historical and sociological approach otherwise termed as historicism is aimed at delving into the developmental history and circumstances of political parties in Nigeria. The approach takes into cognizance, the colonial experience (particularly the colonial origin, the various anti-colonial movements and the delayed but gradual enlargement of the suffrage); changes in the social structure (the rise of the educated elite, the decline of the traditional chieftaincy authority, and the emergence of the military as a ruling class); and federalism (Jinadu, 2011).

Therefore, the origin of political parties in Nigeria was colonial and their developmental activities were anti-colonial. This could be explained to mean that political parties began during the colonial era that spanned between 1922 and 1960. They developed and spread out as anti-colonial agents or forces by the nationalists. Therefore, it could be said that the nature and pattern of political parties during colonialism was to a great extent determined by nationalist struggle for self-rule and gradual constitutional concessions and transformations permitted or granted by the British colonialists from non-representative government through representative government to responsible government to independence (1922-1960).

Between the period of 1922 and 1960, the following political parties were established; the Nigerian National Democratic Party (1923), the Peoples Union (1923), Union of Young Nigerians (1923), the Nigerian Youth Movement (1937), the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroous (1944), Action Group (1951), The Northern People's Congress (1951), the United National Independence Party (1953), the United Middle Belt Congress (1955), formed by the merger of the Middle Belt League (1950) and the Middle Belt People's Party (1953), Bornu Youth Movement (1956), the Dynamic Party (1955) and the National Democratic Party of Nigeria and the Cameroons (1958) (Jinadu, 2011).

Between 1922 (Clifford Constitution) and 1946 (Richards Constitution), party politics was restricted to only two cities of Lagos and Calabar and the franchise was limited to property qualification, thereby creating uneven political culture and development. By 1951 when Macpherson constitution was introduced to usher in the period of responsible government, the Action Group (AG), Northern People's Congress (NPC) were registered and they became major players with National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC) in the build up to Nigeria's independence (Omodia, 2010b). They eventually worked together to achieve the objectives of acquiring of political power and attaining independence for Nigeria.

Apart from the colonial experience, that is, the colonial rule and the opposition to it by the nationalist movement which served as the foundation development circumstance of political parties in Nigeria, another developmental circumstance is the country's emerging social structure at independence and beyond. The social structure was in the form of social cleavages such as class, religion, language, ethno-communal, rural/urban divide, ideology and educational levels. As explained earlier, the early part of the colonial period reflected the dominance of nationalist movements a combination of the middle (petty-bourgeois) and working (proletariat)

class. As the country moved towards independence, the social cleavages began to creep in. This led to the formation of political parties from ethno-cultural organisations or with the support of traditional rulers and traditional institutions, such as AG in the West (Yoruba) and NPC in the North (Hausa/Fulani). NCNC that used to be national in out-look gradually became sectional and associated with the East (Igbo). This tendency combined both regionalization and ethnicity and greatly affected the development of political parties in Nigeria.

Thus, the first republic showcased a party system that predominantly projected NPC, AG and NCNC as the political vanguard of the North (Hausa/Fulani), West (Yoruba) and East (Igbo) respectively. However, at some point in the first republic, federalization became necessary particularly between 1962 and 1965. To win federal elections, it became necessary for the political parties to come out of their ethno-regional shells and become national in outlook and to seek alliances particularly with minority ethnic group-based political parties outside their regional base as a strategy for electoral success. The struggle for federalization and electoral success at the national level from 1962 led to declaration of emergency rule in the Western Region, the creation of Mid-West-Region in 1963, 1963 census controversy, and political party alliances before the 1964 regional elections and 1965 federal elections between NCNC and AG on one hand and NPC and NNDP (rump of AG and NCNC) on the other hand. The crises that ensued led to the fall of the first republic. Thus, the political parties failed in their functions, responsibilities and in contributing to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria's first republic, particularly in the area of leadership recruitment. The first republic collapsed essentially because of the intense and unhealthy inter - and intra - party competition arising from the monumental electoral fraud and malpractices which characterized the republic and which also destabilised the system (Chizea, 2004, Dode, 2010).

In order to overcome the problems that led to the collapse of the party system and the first republic, the military brokered transitions in the country from 1976 to 1979 for the second republic and 1987 to 1999 for the aborted third republic and the fourth republic. The military attempted to engineer political parties with national out look through a number of structural or organisational requirements; create a conducive environment for free, fair and credible elections; facilitate internal democracy within the political parties; engender a new political culture through a new-breed of politicians; emphasise issues-based or ideology-based political parties and de-emphasise the personalization of political parties. Unfortunately, the emphasis placed on structural definition of political parties by the military did not work as expected. Consequently, the objectives of the military reforms were not fully achieved. However, if the 1976-1979 military reforms did not completely remove the old divide of the first republic from the second republic, the post 1987 and 1999 political parties reflected a clear break from the political parties of the first republic (Jinadu, 2011).

As earlier pointed out, there was no clean and clear break between the political parties of the first republic from the second republic except that in the second republic, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) made attempts to recruit political elites from different parts of the country that actually influenced the political fortune of the party. All the remaining four political parties were ethnic and regional based so to say. They were the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), Nigeria People's Party (NPP), Great Nigeria People's Party (GNPP) and People's Redemption Party (PRP). Just like the political parties of the first republic, they failed in their functions, responsibilities and in contributing to the consolidation of democracy. The political leaders did not allow a conducive environment to exist, where a system of competitive party politics can thrive. Thus, the second republic, once more, collapsed on 31st December, 1983 because of the oligarchic and anti-democratic practices of the political party leaders (Chizea, 2004; Dode, 2010). The 'do' or 'die' approach of political party leaders during the 1983 general elections was nothing to write home about. The political parties once again failed woefully as veritable instruments for political leadership recruitment.

The transition programme for the aborted third republic was brokered by General Ibrahim Babangida's military administration which inaugurated a forty-six member political bureau in 1987. He also inaugurated a constitution drafting committee that produced the 1989 constitution (which was never used) and electoral laws which allowed for two political parties. They were the National Republican Convention (NRC) and Social Democratic Party (SDP) which came by government imposition. The Babangida administration made the two parties to be people-centred. This was said to have accounted for the success of the 1993 election keenly contested by the two political parties and adjudged to be the best election so far conducted in Nigeria. However, for reasons best known to General Ibrahim Babangida, the election was cancelled and a puppet government was installed before he finally stepped aside from office. This was how the third republic and its two-party system came to an abrupt end (Omodia, 2010b).

In less than six months, the interim government installed by General Babangida was overthrown by General Abacha who commenced another round of transition tailored towards the achievement of his self-succession plan. Under the new transition plan, eighteen political associations applied for registration as political parties, out of which the following five were registered; the Congress for National Consensuses (CNC), the Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN), the Grassroots Democratic Movement (GDM) the National Centre Party of Nigeria (NCPN), and the United Nigeria Congress Party (UNCP). Unfortunately, Abacha died in June, 1998

before the completion of the electoral and transitional process for his self-succession as the sole candidate for the five parties which were very weak and easily manipulated by Abacha at will, without any resistance. The political parties were not democratically managed and could not have served the purpose of any meaningful leadership recruitment or any tenet of an enduring democracy, if Abacha had not died (Dode, 2010).

The conception of party politics in the fourth republic was based on the view which emphasises that political parties are the strong pillars and instruments through which credible leaders can be recruited and democracy can be cultivated, entrenched and consolidated. In view of this, General Abdusalam Abubakar who took-over the reins of government dissolved the five political parties registered by the Abacha regime and cancelled all the elections that were conducted. A fresh transition programme was put in place and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was set up. It initially granted provisional registration to nine political parties to conduct the 1998 Local Government election with a condition to grant full registration to any party that scored at least 10% of total votes cast in 24 states. After the election, the following three major political parties were fully registered; Alliance for Democracy (AD), All Peoples Party (APP) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and they contested the 1999 general elections. Both AD and APP featured one presidential candidate for the 1999 presidential election. In the first phase of the fourth republic (1999-2003), all the political parties apart from Alliance for Democracy were national in outlook. However, more political parties became sectional with further registration of political parties. By August 2002, another three political parties namely United Nigeria Peoples Party (UNPP), National Democratic Party (NDP) and All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) were registered. In December, 2002 the number of registered political parties had risen to 30 (Chizea, 2004; Omodia, 2010b).

Ideologically, none of the political parties can lay claim to any guiding principle or political or economic belief. They were like groups of political adventurists and strange bed fellows without a common vision for Nigeria. This negates the basis of political parties. As soon as some of these political parties won elections at the federal and state levels in 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011, they became far-flung from the people. The political parties abandoned their functions and responsibilities as the political leaders (those in power) abandoned the people's interest for their selfish interest. Opposition parties were so weak that they could not effectively challenge the political parties in power or rise to the occasion of providing alternative government to the electorate. The opposition parties are fast becoming weaker and more fragmented while those in power are waxing stronger (Chizea, 2004; Dode, 2010). There was even the fear that the PDP government at the federal level was pursuing a secret agenda for one-party system, until very late in 2012 and and very early in 2013 when opposition parties such as ACN, CPP and ANPP merged to form APC with the hope to give PDP a run for its money in future elections.

In view of the foregoing, the fourth republican political parties could not be said to be on equal footing and operating from a level-playing ground. Between 1999 and 2011, party politics of the fourth republic was not competitive. Consequently, political parties and the nation's democracy could not be consolidated and stabilized. Without proper consolidation and stabilization of democracy, the citizens cannot enjoy effective representation, the electorate cannot be properly organised or mobilized, and political participation cannot be well-structured and enhanced. The fourth republic parties, apart from PDP and the newly registered APC, are not only weak and fractured, they are fragile and uninstitutionalised. Therefore, they have failed in their functions and responsibilities particularly in leadership recruitment. This is one of the reasons why it has continued to be difficult for credible and transformational leaders to emerge in Nigeria.

The first and second republics collapsed because of ethnically based and ethnically focused political parties, characterized by intense inter-and intra-party conflicts and avid corruption. It appears the fourth republic may hit the rock, if nothing is done to reform the political parties. Urgent steps must be taken to reverse this negative trend and turn the political parties into veritable instruments of political leadership recruitment and democratic consolidation (Dode, 2010). Between 2012 and 2013, the ruling, PDP almost disintegrated into two ('new' and 'old'). Even in 2014, as at the time of writing this paper, the internal crises still linger on and this may spell a great doom for the political party as we approach the 2015 general elections. In the last quarter of the year 2014, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Alhaji Aminu Tambuwal, a PDP Stalwalt decamped to APC as a result of the ripple effects of internal crises within the PDP. Even the APC is not left out in the political storm that engulfed political parties in Nigeria. When the APC was newly registered, there was excitement that an alternative platform for effective political leadership recruitment had finally berthed. Unfortunately, with the current happenings, the end to the internal wrangling among the major political parties in Nigeria is yet to come. This has gone a long way to affect their functions and responsibilities in Nigeria particularly as veritable tools for political leadership recruitment.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Flowing from the above analysis, it would be suggested that the number of political parties be reduced to a minimum of two and a maximum of three for them to be well strengthened and be made more competitive.

Another important issue is to ensure that internal democracy is well entrenched and practised by the two or three political parties as recommended. This will involve and include credible party congresses, conventions and primaries. Apart from internal democracy, the political parties must be properly structured, organised and managed from ward to national level. The political parties must be mass or people oriented and ensure the involvement of the masses in political leadership recruitment as the basis for acceptable and enduring democracy in Nigeria. There must be party discipline and cohesion which can only be achieved through strict adherence to the letter and spirit of party rules, regulations and constitutions as well as the principles and practice of democracy worldwide (international best practices).

Above all, there is the great need for a truly independent, assertive, aggressive and proactive electoral or regulatory body to monitor and regulate the operations and activities of political parties including finances, political campaigns and adherence to their own rules and regulations as well as to conduct free and fair elections among them. Unless the above-mentioned reforms are carried out, political parties in Nigeria may not be able to serve as veritable tools for effective political leadership recruitment.

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