

Interrogating Political Party Institutionalisation In Nigeria's Fourth Republic

Isah Musa Yusuf

Department of Political Science
Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto
Corresponding author isah.yusuf@udusok.edu.ng

Abstract

Even though political parties have proliferated in Nigeria since former head of state Abdulsalami Abubakar successfully handed over power to a democratically elected government in 1999, their character and operations leave much to be desired. They are faced with a plethora of contradictions which negate their roles in Nigeria's democratic project. Some of these challenges include (but not restricted to) lack of ideology, absence of institutionalized parties, manipulation of ethnicity and religion by the elites, political violence, God fatherism and profound lack of intraparty democracy. The paper adopts Mainwaring's dimensions of party system institutionalisation as its framework of analysis. Secondary data were collected and analysed using descriptive analysis. The paper identified ideological deficit, lack of internal party democracy and unprincipled inter and intra party conflicts as constituting serious drawbacks to the institutionalisation of political parties in Nigeria. The work recommends increased organisational vitality through internal party cohesion, strong and focused party leadership and more informed civic education to curb the trend. The political elites must learn to play the game by the rules.

Keywords: Political Party, Party Institutionalisation, Democracy, Nigeria

Introduction

Nigeria's return to democratic rule on May 29 1999 marked a political watershed in the country's history. This is not because it was her first attempt at enthroning democratic rule, but because the transition period was protracted and tortuous. Both Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha who midwifed the transition programmes in the aborted Third Republic nurtured self-succession agenda and failed to liberalize the political landscape. They orchestrated the activities of political parties to suit that intention.

While the political logjam that was precipitated by the annulment of June 12 1993 presidential elections forced Babangida out of power, Abacha sudden demise in June 1998 ended his transition time-table before completion. Even though political parties have proliferated in Nigeria since Abdulsalami successfully handed over power to a democratically elected government in 1999, their character and operations leave much to be desired. They are faced with a plethora of contradictions which negate their roles in Nigeria's democratic project. Some of these challenges include (but not restricted to) lack of ideology, absence of institutionalized parties, manipulation of ethnicity and religion by the elites, political violence, God fatherism and profound lack of intraparty democracy.

Political parties are veritable and indispensable institutions in democratic societies. The roles they play are fundamental to the workings of democracy. These roles include interest articulation and aggregation, ensuring popular participation through their internal activities, electoral participation, political socialization and national integration. By carrying out these roles, political

parties can make inputs to the quest for democratic sustenance. When political parties perform their roles effectively, their institutionalization is assured and by implication, democracy would be sustained. The roles of political parties in democracies can, therefore, not be underestimated. There has been some degree of intellectual reticence on the interface between political parties and the quest for institutionalization in Nigeria. One which this paper to a modest degree will try to tackle.

The critical argument of this paper is that Nigerian political parties have been characterized by monumental defects which negate their potentials to be institutionalized. Their ability to guarantee democratic sustenance depends principally on the readiness of the stakeholder's to reposition them for enviable performance in the Fourth Republic and beyond. The analyses of the themes of this study were done under introduction, conceptual clarification, historical evolution of political parties in Nigeria, assessment of the level of political parties institutionalization in the Nigerian fourth republic and conclusion.

Conceptual Clarifications

A political party is generally defined as a group of individuals working together to achieve common goals by controlling all or part of the government (Epstein 1967; Robertson 1976; Sartori 1976). More often than not, the ruling party dictates who will run governmental institutions and how the societal resources will be allocated. According to Ware (1996:5) " a political party is an institution that (a) seeks influence in a state, often by attempting to occupy positions in government, and (b) usually consists of more than a single interest in the society and to some degree attempts to "aggregate interests". Institutionalisation refers to the process by which political party become established and acquire value and enduring stability (Saliu & Muhammad 2008)

Historical Evolution of Nigerian Political Parties and Their Quest for Institutionalization

This section will chart the historical evolution of political parties in Nigeria through the first, second, the aborted third and now the fourth republics of Nigeria. In Africa and indeed Nigeria before the advent of colonial rule, political party was an alien institution. However, nationalist pressures during that era quicken the pace of constitutional development and in turn stimulated the development of political parties (Coleman 1958). Political parties thus form part of what Ekeh called 'migrated social structure', referring to institutions and models almost literally parcelled from metropolitan centres of the imperial west to Asia and Africa and engrafted new colonial situation emptied their moral content and underlying ethics that sustained them in the metropolis (Ekeh 1983).

Thus the history and evolution of political parties in Nigeria has been undulating just as the quest for democracy, good governance and national integration has been full of various missteps and unfulfilled expectation. In discussing the history and evolution of political parties in Nigeria, Ujo (2000) classified political parties into four generations (Cited in Saliu & Muhammad 2008). The first generation of political parties according to him consists of the pre 1945 parties. These included the Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP) and the Nigeria Youth Movement (NYM) formed in 1923 and 1936 respectively. These parties were localized in their base and their interest covered very narrow and specific policies of the colonial government. This perhaps explains the limited cases of ethnic and tribal politics in this era. While Herbert Macaulay led won, all seats in the legislative council as a result of the introduction of elective principle by the

Clifford constitution of 1922, it was not until 1938 that it was successfully challenged by the NYM.

The second generation consisted of those parties that emerged between 1945 and the end of the first republic. This group, according to this classification was the National Council of Nigeria Citizen, (NCNC) the Northern People Congress (NPC), the Action Group (AG), the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) and the Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU). These parties' major preoccupation was to wrest power from the colonialist, a feat they eventually accomplished. One major flaw that characterized these political parties was their formation pattern and subsequent degeneration into ethnic-based parties and the personalization of their operations by founders. The cultural influence in the formation of these parties undoubtedly played a significant role in this regard. For instance the Action Group party (AG) which emerged as a response to the growing popularity of the (NCNC) in the western region is traced to the pan Yoruba socio-cultural organisation, the 'Egbe Omo Oduduwa' (the gathering of the descendants of Oduduwa). After series of meetings and preparation, the cultural organization on March 1951 metamorphosed into a political party and held its inaugural conference in Owo, a town in the present day Ondo state Nigeria (Mackintosh 1966).

The same is true of the Northern People's Congress which emerged from a cultural organisation called Jam'syyar Mutanen Arewa (Association of People from the North), formed in June 1949. The leaders of the group announced that the objective of the group was to combat idleness and injustice in the northern region. This cultural group eventually transformed into a political party in October 1951 (Dudley 1968). The cultural and ethnic origin particularly of the NPC and the AG consequently generated conflict between them as each sort to protect its regional enclave while they attempted to make electoral inroad into the political base of the rival party, this strategy only served to inflame ethnic hatred and animosity. Independence was however achieved in spite of these rivalries because of a high degree of mobilization of the citizenry to end colonial rule. However, intra and inter party rivalries characterized these parties after independence leading to their degeneration into ethnic pressure groups, a trend that eventually led to the truncation of democratic rule (Yakub 2004)

The third generations of political parties going by Ujo's classification were the parties of the second republic (1979-1983). The constitutional and political reforms of 1975-1979, moved the definition of political party away from a functional notion to a legal-constitutional one. Political parties were defined more in terms of structure than of functions, with emphasis on structural requirements for political party registration such as national outlook and spread, internal organisation or democracy, recognition and registration by an electoral management body. The aims of the constitutional and political reforms that preceded the inauguration of the second republic among other things were to de-personalize operations of political parties, and to de-ethnicise and give them a national outlook (Omoruyi 2002).

The parties of that era included the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Nigeria People's Party (NPP), the Great Nigeria People's Party (GNPP), the People's Redemption Party (PRP) and later National Advance Party (NAP). What characterized political parties of this dispensation was their degeneration into regional parties. Most of them turned out to be reincarnates of the first republic parties. The NPN, UPN, NPP and the PRP were adjudged to be similar both in leadership and orientation to the Northern People's Congress, Action Group, the National Council of Nigeria Citizen and the Northern Element Progressive Union of the first

republic respectively. Intra and inter party rivalries, corruption and the electoral heist perpetrated by the National party of Nigeria (NPN) led to the collapse of the second public (Babarinsa 2003; Joseph 1999)

The fourth generation political parties following Ujo's classification included parties of both the Babangida and Abacha government sponsored and financed parties. The Social Democratic party(SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC). Unlike the earlier parties, became of stringent requirement for party registration and government finding of the parties, ethnic and regional rivalries were not pronounced. The evolution of the two political parties, the Social Democratic (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC), grew out of security and national integration considerations and led to the gradual reduction of ethno-religious and regional politics during that era, as the data from the series of elections held between 1989 and 1993 demonstrated

Omoruyi (2002), posited that the innovation of the two party systems in 1989 introduced some elements of discontinuity between the past and 1989 in terms of origin, composition, leadership selection, funding and the interest they served. According to him it removed the idea of 'founders' and 'joiners', as all were joiners. It removed the idea of owners, as the government financed the operations of the two parties and provided a level playing field for all those who wanted to stake a political career from either of the two parties. For instance the SDP had a Muslim-Muslim ticket in M.K.O Abiola and Babangida Kingibe as its presidential and vice candidates respectively, which clearly violated known balancing act of Christian-Muslim ticket or vice versa, yet Nigerians ignored religious affiliations of the presidential candidate and his running mate and voted for them en masse. Also, none of the two parties of that dispensation could be labelled as either belonging to the south or the north.

The two-party system adopted in the truncated Third Republic effectively discouraged the politicization of religion and ethnicity the twin evil that have bedevilled the polity since the pre independence era. In effect, for the first time in Nigeria's history there were political parties in which no one or group of persons could claim to have founded. The experiment was highly instrumental to the conduct of Nigeria's freest and fairest presidential election of 12th June 1993. Unfortunately the military junta that designed the transition programme never really intended for the experiment to succeed as it annulled the election, and halted the match toward democracy and national integration.

The five political parties registered during the Abacha regime, aptly described by Bola Ige, a frontline opposition figure of that era as "the five fingers of a leprous hand" were designed to fulfill the ambition of Abacha transforming into a civilian president and were dissolve after his demise. The fourth republic has as its take off point after, the death of General Sani Abacha in June 1998. The transition to civil rule programme of the Abdulsalami's administration lasted for only eleven months, the shortest in the country's history and ushered in the fourth republic. Political parties of this dispensation in the words of Nigeria's first executive President, Shehu Shagari "were created in a matter of weeks and prepared for elections in a matter of days" (Cited in Saliu and Muhammad 2008, 163). In other words, parties of this era did not evolve organically to produce a prior long term political association between the various groups and individuals that came together.

This has impacted on their operation and performance such that nineteen years after the return to party politics, with over sixty registered parties, their relevance has remained contested. Even

those that have acquired governmental control have not significantly contributed to good governance and better quality of life for the generality of Nigerians nor have they robustly espoused ideas and ideals aimed at strengthening the fragile nationhood, rather, they have violated every known rule of decency and probity both in the management of electoral processes and in the conduct of the affairs of State. Hence, today political parties mean different things to different people depending on who is assessing their evolution and relevance. Olusegun Obasanjo for example, once described the political party under whose platform he rose to become president the People's Democratic Party (PDP) as "a dynamic amalgam of interest groups held together by, if anything at all, the fact that the party is in power and therefore the strong expectation of patronage" (Cited Anifowoshe 2004, 65).

In the same vein, Bamanga Tukur a former national chairman of the same party was quoted as his party as an amalgam of diverse groups united only by one purpose- to grab power, but not yet fused into a functional political party for development (This Day 2013). These assertions by the national leaders of a party that until recently was in charge of managing the affairs of the country captures the essence of national malaise in Nigeria and partly explains why political parties in this dispensation have not fulfilled their role as institutions for national development and integration. The formation in July 2013 of the all Progressive Congress APC by leading opposition leaders and a splinter group from the PDP who collapsed their respective platforms in order to form a broad based party represents a new phase in the democratic evolution of the country. The new party did not only hold a successfully national congress to elect officers to administer the party, it has succeeded in wrestling political power from the former ruling party in the general elections conducted in March 2015. The successes of these two events especially the alternation of political power at the national level have expectedly generated renewed but cautious optimism in the prospect of not only consolidating democracy but also charting a new course for the development of the country.

Assessment of the Level of Political Parties Institutionalization in the Fourth Republic

This section of the paper will make use of the opinions and writings of scholars and critics of political parties institutionalization in the fourth republic of Nigeria. Mainwaring (1998, 68) defines a party-system as institutionalized when 'actors entertain clear and stable expectations about the behaviour of other actors, and hence about the fundamental contours and rules of party competition and behaviour. The four dimensions of party system institutionalization that he highlights are

- (1) Stability in patterns of interparty competition,
- (2) Party roots in society
- (3) Legitimacy of parties and elections
- (4) Party organization

Using the above framework this section shall attempt to assess the mentioned dimensions in literature review format: Political parties constitute the foundation of democratic government. In every political system, the functions of political parties are: political recruitment of potential candidates into the party membership, interest articulation, interest aggregation; political

socialization. Political education involves the training of political leaders, and political communication. The operations of political parties and politicians since the return to democracy do not manifest convincing prospects for party institutionalization, which is a critical criterion for democratic growth and consolidation. This unfortunate scenario, said to be one of the most crucial and yet least developed democratic institutions, is the political party system. There are currently many registered political parties in the country, most of which are an assemblage of people who share the same level of determination to use the party's platform to get power. As such, it is difficult to identify programmes or ideologies. The structure of the political parties is such that internal democracy is virtually absent. The political parties are weak and unable to effectively carry out political education and discipline.

Party politics in Nigeria, particularly in the Fourth Republic, is faced with a plethora of bottlenecks which negate party institutionalization. The way and manner political parties emerge in Nigeria, especially in the recent period, tend to negate their prospects for institutionalization, and ability to guarantee political stability and consolidate democracy. The activities of political parties that have been operating in the country since 1999 are diametrically opposed to those of the established democratic norms. However, the way they have evolved has no correlation with what we are familiar with in the extant literature. The fluidity and unstable character of their composition portray them as mere of regime change from military governance to civilian rule, and obviously lack the will power to resolve the persistent political issues tormenting the Nigerian state. An in depth examination of the way the Nigerian political parties have performed since the beginning of the Fourth Republic shows that they are incapable of addressing the various problems facing the country.

Since 1999, political parties have been enmeshed in unhealthy competition with one another. Party factions are more in competition with themselves than with another party. The situation is so dismal to the extent that the three major parties that operated between 1999 and 2003 manifested ethnic inclination and regionalist tendencies, which was exhibited in the patterns of electoral prospects. These tendencies make party institutionalization a herculean task. Furthermore, Nigerian political parties have failed to maintain a harmonious relationship at the intra-party and inter-party levels. Intraparty squabbles have always threatened the parties to extinction or caused schism of disturbing magnitude. This situation compelled many of the party stalwarts to defect or remain ambivalent. Such founding members in the people's Democratic Party included the Late Sunday Awoniyi, Solomon Lar, Alex Ekwueme, among others.

The situation was not better in other parties like the Alliance for Democracy. The above level of internal party democracy and party institutionalization has far-reaching implications for democratic consolidation. The problems besetting the country's political parties are so gross to the extent that if they are not remedied, they will not be better positioned to make meaningful contributions to democratic stability and consolidation. Moreover, the implicit pitfalls of the political parties to play politics according to the rules in their internal affairs as well as the larger political entity, have led to the politically motivated killings across political divides. The consequences of such conflicts have been the perennial collapse of the political order, resulting in pervasive instability all over the country and the monumental loss of lives and property. Invariably, the focus of the government and its hard-earned resources has been wasted on conflict management instead of development agenda.

Additionally, one major problem confronting Nigeria's democracy is ideological deficit. Ideology should be the basis for the operation of a party; it should be an instrument for mobilization, conflict management, and identification, and guide the actions and judgement of individuals. Even though Nigerian political parties have programmes from where their ideological disposition could cut distinction between the party programmes of the various political parties and by implication, makes it difficult to pinpoint their ideological differences. The above situation is the reality with the Fourth Republic political parties, unlike the parties of the First and Second republics that were known with a measure of identifiable ideologies.

In the same vein, the pattern and nature of political competition have little or no regard for ideological consideration due to the attitude of the elite and the state. Rather, primordial cleavages becloud the entire process. That is the reason the manifesto of the party that captures power is often relegated to the background, and governance is at the capricious whims of those in positions of authority. The situation has led to political vagrancy, which implies a situation by which politicians defect from one party to another. These portend negative consequences for party institutionalization. Also, the gross exhibition of indiscipline by Nigerian parties is another causative factor that negates party institutionalization. This is evident in the high degree of internal party skirmishes, and stalemate in the parties. The PDP and the All Progressives Congress have experienced these tremendously in the Fourth Republic. This has almost torn the parties into shreds even when the issues involved are such that could have been resolved amicably as members of the same political family.

The impeachment saga of August 2002 and the feud generated by the tenure elongation stalemate, which led to the defection of the former Vice President Atiku Abubakar, are examples of intraparty imbroglio of disturbing frequencies. Hence, party institutionalization is an essential condition for democratic consolidation in the country. The character of party politics makes the prospects of party institutionalization remote. To address this situation, it is pertinent to start with the examination of the character of the Nigerian state. This entails an interrogation of the reasons power acquisition remains central to the conflicts between different groups in the country at all levels. One tenable explanation for this is that power and resources are concentrated in the hands of the Federal Government. There is need for the decentralization and devolution of power at the federal and state units as far as their control over resource allocation is concerned. This can reduce the cutthroat competition for power among the political elite at all strata of governance.

Political parties in the country should strive to meet the dictates for party institutionalization, which are organizational vitality, organizational interdependence, stable factions and integrative community life. They must ensure that there should be a high degree of stability and regularity of party competitions which are relatively lacking. The parties must strive to maintain effective roots in the society to reinforce and stabilize the institutionalized system, establish and sustain effective party organizations instead of their current practices of operating as electoral instruments for the actualization of the interests of personal leaders. This would ultimately enhance their legitimacy among the entire citizenry. (Felix Oladeji 2022 Party politics and institutionalization in Nigeria)

Some of the problems of political parties in Nigeria that have served as hindrance and to the deepening of democracy include the non-institutionalization of political party, weak party leadership, absence of party discipline, little sign of an ideologically coherent party system and a narrow conception of the responsibilities that political powers demands are well acknowledged

in the literature (Simbine 2002). A closer scrutiny of these factors reveals they also largely account for the inability of political parties to serve as agency for national integration in Nigeria. Leadership deficit for instance, is an important factor in understanding the Nigerian predicament. It is a widely acknowledged fact that the progress or otherwise of any society depends largely on the quality of leadership such a society or state can muster. This assertion is true with organizations either public or private and crucially applies to political party leadership. If a political party is imbued with strong and purposeful leadership, such a party will not serve as an effective tool for national integration but will work for the overall transformation of the country.

While colonial amalgamation brought people of different nationalities under a single territorial and institutional framework, the leadership of the country was not sufficiently socialized towards the objectives of evolving a true sense of national identity and commitment to the survival and development of the country. The narrow political ambition and class interest of the political elites who took over from the departing colonialist prevented them from working as united front once independence was achieved and this factor continues to undermine the quest for national integration (Ekanola 2006).

Successive political elite have continually resorted to this time tested strategy of the manipulation of primordial cleavages to further deepen the divisive tendencies among the people. The institution of political party has also remained weak and underdeveloped. Institutionalization refers to the process by which political party become established and acquire value and enduring stability (Saliu & Muhammad 2008). Prolong military rule have stunted the growth of democratic institutions like the legislature and political party. They are often among the first casualties in the event of a military coup. The authoritarian culture of the military now permeates the psyche of politicians and their conduct within political parties.

This has greatly undermined the ability and capacity of the political parties to act as effective pillars of democracy and agents of national integration. Institutionalized parties tend to employ peaceful and democratic means in their quest for power. It is not uncommon in this era to hear party officials boast of their intention to capture particular states during electioneering campaigns. The political parties of the present dispensation have been dominated by retired military officers and ex-service men with a Command mindset, democratization thus carry with it a high dose of military flavor (Adekanye 1999).

Nigeria is currently having her longest spell of democratic rule which has seen the emergency of dozens of political parties; many of which remain so only in name and visible only during electioneering campaigns with the intent of cutting political deals from the more prominent political parties. The above challenge dovetails into the problem of the narrow conception of the responsibilities that political power demands. Nigeria political elites have a pathological conception of politics as the super highway to wealth. In a country where the state controls large resources while the productive sectors remain largely underdeveloped, the state power of patronage is enormous. There is therefore, a high premium placed on political office.

All weapons are deployed into the contest, including fanning the embers of ethno-religious and regional sentiments. The motivation for standing for election is not primarily to serve, but to secure public office and appropriate its benefits for personal and group interest. This patron-client relationship in politics is what Joseph, referred to as prebendalism (Joseph 1999). The debilitating effect of this kind of political practice is the weakening of the capacity of the state to

deliver social goods to the populace. Citizens are then left with no option than to find succor and relief in their ethnic or religious groupings.

The recoil into atavistic enclave has complicated national security challenge with the evidence that over 30 of the country's 36 states of the federation are currently under one form of undeclared emergency or the other. At the base of the problem is the withering strength and influence of the Nigerian state vis-à-vis the rising ferocity of various armed non-state actors challenging the state monopoly of the instrument of coercion. The mushrooming of various violent extremist groups with diverse grievances such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger-Delta (MEND).

Niger-Delta Avengers (NDA), Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra, (MASSOB) Indigenous People Of Biafra (IPOB), and the two most vicious and virulent groups, the Fulani herdsmen and Boko Haram, tells a story of a country reeling under the weight insecurity occasioned by a declining state capacity

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to assess the level of political parties institutionalization in the Nigerian fourth republic by highlighting the evolution of political parties their early struggles, divisions, aims and goals as well as their shortcomings and their areas of success as well as failures in the fourth republic, which brings this paper to the conclusion that while party institutionalization has gained some traction in the past two decades since the fourth republic, complete institutionalization is still a long way off and will require a monumental effort on the part of the coming administrations and citizens of Nigeria.

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