The Role of Political Parties in Democratic Stability in Nigeria

Abubakar Abdullahi¹, Abubakar Isah Baba² and Yahaya Umar Namahi³

¹²³Department of Public Administration, The Polytechnic of Sokoto State, Sokoto

Abstract

The paper argues that, political parties are essential features of democratic stability in societies for the fact that, they formulate political policy agenda, select candidates conduct election campaigns and monitors the works of their elected representatives. Party’s serve as a link between citizens and government, consolidates development through a well-defined economic programme. They also provide leadership training to members and generate national awareness and help to galvanize opinion in time of national referendum. For parties to effectively and efficiently perform the above functions, they have to meet certain criteria such as autonomy, complexity and coherence. Parties should also be able to develop and maintain a strong party organization with depth and breadth necessary for the operations and the degree of institutionalization of the party as indicated by its historical roots, longevity, survival and continuing supports. In the Nigerian case, the paper argues that, proper organization of political parties and system are lacking, and that, party structures are established mainly on ethnicism, squabbles. The paper also made some recommendations there in.

Keywords: Political Parties, Democratic Stability, Party Structures.

Introduction

Political parties are organizations that mobilize voters on behalf of a common set of interest, concerns, and goals. In many countries, Nigeria inclusive, parties are expected to play a crucial role in the democratic process. They are to formulate political and policy agenda, select candidates, conduct election campaigns, and monitor the work of their elected representatives. Political party’s link citizens and government, provide a means by which people can have a voice in their government. They consolidate development through a well-defined economic agenda; parties mitigate divisions in society, provide leadership training to members, provide philosophical or ideological direction for both its membership and the society at large. Political parties also help to generate national awareness and help to galvanize opinion in time national referendum. This paper is therefore designed to find out the extent to which political parties in Nigeria perform these function. To do this the paper is divided into six parts. Part one is this introduction, part two is the conceptual clarification, part three traces the historical origin of political parties in Nigeria, part four focuses on the roles of political in democratic stability in Nigeria, while part five concludes the paper.

Conceptual Clarification

Political Party: According to (Kura 2011), political parties are organization whose members have values, ideas and aspirations in common and at least participate in the organized contest struggles for political power. Sortari (1976; 63), sees a political party as any political group identified by an official label that present at elections and is capable of policy through elections (free or non free), candidates for public offices. To (Lemay 2001), political party refers to any group of politically active person outside a government who organize to capture government by nominating and electing officials who thereby control the operations of government and determine its policies. Dudley 1968 argues that parties are formal organizations which compete through the electoral process to control personnel and policies of government. This definition cor-inside with the one provided by Edwud as cited by Ogundiyi, 2009, that political party refers to any group however loosely organized seeking to elect government office holders under a given label. Having seen what parties are, less look at the concept of democratic stability.

Democratic Stability: The concept of democratic stability is synonymous with legitimacy, especially if legitimacy is conceived as the belief in the moral rights of a regime to govern. Therefore, the ingredients of these moral right that a regime enjoys are inherent in the concept of democratic stability. According to Osaghae 1997, “the premise of democratic stability is that what sustains government and ensure stability is voluntary support or consent of
the citizens rather than reliance on coercion” to that extent therefore, there is a correlation between democratic stability and legitimacy. Democratic stability implies the view that government is a product of the will of the people and derives its legitimacy from the people consent. Thinks therefore ensures that the people willingly support the government given that the government is not arbitrarily foisted on them. In a reciprocal manner, the government carried out programme that are in line with the interest of the people. Diamond (1999) sees democratic stability as the process of achieving broad and deep legitimating such that all significant political actors believe that popular rule is better for their society than any other realistic alternative they can imagine. It also connects the act of reducing the probability of the breakdown of the system to the point where democracy can be said that it will persist. In a similar vein, Mishler and Rose (2001) maintained that a defining feature of democratic regimes is that they depend for their survival and effective functioning on the public’s willing acquiescence and support. Democratic stability, therefore, presupposes “the people have, at any given time, the government which they choose and that, being rational beings, they are most likely to support a government which represents and pursues their interest”

Historical Development of Political Parties in Nigeria

Party politics in Nigeria as right pointed out by (Aleyomi, 2013), is associated with the pattern of colonial governance in the state. It could be recalled that decolonization as envisaged by the British in what later became the Nigerian state was viewed as a gradual process of constitutional transformations that would give greater freedom to the Nigerian people in form of participation in governance through partyism before the attainment of political independence. Thus, the nature and pattern of party politics during colonialism was to a great extent determined by the constitutional concessions permitted by the British Colonial System. For instance, while the 1922 Clifford constitution gave birth to the first political party in Nigerian known as the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) in 1922, party politics in the state was restricted to just two cities; Lagos and Calabar. The implication is that party democracy during this era was restricted to two cities, and even the cities. Franchise was restricted because of property qualification coupled with the fact that they system was purely one party system. However, shortly before the 1946 Richards constitution, party democracy was widened with the birth of the Nigerian youth movement (NYM) in 1934. As a result, Nigerians in the two cities of Lagos and Calabar had the opportunity of choice between the NNDP and the NYM. With the operation of the 1951 Macperson Constitution, the Action Group (AG), the Northern People’s Congress (NPC) was registered and they became a major player with the NCNC in the march towards Nigerian independence (Adigwe, 1997). At the dawn of Nigeria’s political independence in October 1, 1960, several manners of political parties have emerged. In the first republic, there were parties like National Council of Nigeria Citizens (NCNC), National Party of Nigeria (NPN). Great Nigerian Peoples Party (GNPP), Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), People Redemption Party (PRP) and later the Nigerian Advance Party (NAP), which was later registered in 1982, were formed in the second republic (Oshaghae, 1998: Omotola, 2010). Nigeria had social democratic party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC) during the abortive Third Republic. The country once again returned to multiparty democracy in 1999, following the transition inaugurated and successfully completed by General Abdulrsalm Abubakar. Initially, three political parties the People Democratic Party (PDP), the All peoples party (APP), later the All Nigerian People Party (ANPP), and the Alliance for Democracy (AD) were registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). 36 by December 2002, the number of registered parties rose to thirty, while an additional three political parties were registered in January-February 2006. Today, Nigeria has well over fifty registered political parties (Omotola, 2010). As the country is approaching the 2015 elections, some Political Parties (CPC,AD and ACN), have merge to form the All Progressive Congress (APC) which was registered at the last quarter 2013.

The Role of Political Parties in Democratic Stability

In most countries that have attained higher degree of political stability and economic prosperity example North America, Western Europe and some parts of Asia, political parties played a vital role in democratic stability. This roles may includes among others, parties serving as temporary custodian of national interest, that is for instance a careful study of the article of association of democratic party and the Republican party of the United State of America, conservative or labor party in Britain, or Congress Party of India shows clearly that, membership of the party and tickets are only conferred on these who
seek to promote national harmony rather than separatist tendencies (Tinubu, 2009).

Political party's helps in national political socialization process by highlighting to members what they consider should be the nation’s goals and objectives. Parties also consolidate democracy through the aggregation of interest. They form order out of chaos in the quest for political power. Parties seek to advance various interests of members within a platform while at the same time harmonizing these interests to achieve a common purpose. For example, it is not uncommon to find different tendencies under the umbrella of a party, like under the American Republican party there are anti-abortion crusaders, liberal conservatives, religious rights among others, yet the differences have not in any way threaten the stability and base of the party, which could affect the stability of government (Tinubu, 2009). Political parties helps consolidates democracy through a well defined economic agenda which are subjects to popular debates and on the basis of whether it gets or does not get national acceptance. Parties mitigates divisions in the society by seeking to bring people of different ethnic, cultural and religious affiliation together particularly in plural society like India. Furthermore political parties provide one of the best platforms for national mobilization. They provide a link between the government and the people. Parties help sell and propagate government policies and programme. They provide the easiest rallying point in a period of national emergency. Through their wider networks, they get national messages across easily than any other pressure group. They easily generate national awareness and help galvanize opinion in time of national referendum. Parties are also expected to perform the role of opposition or more appropriately serves as watch dog over the ruling party. Having seen some of roles parties played in advance democracies, it is now pertinent to have a glance to the Nigeria situation to see if at all these are obtained.

The Nigeria Experience

As stated earlier in this paper, the first set of political parties are Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), Nigeria Youth Movement (NYM), the influence of these parties does not extend beyond their immediate environs (Ibadan and Lagos), however, following the provision of Richard constitution, more parties emerged which National council of Nigeria and the Cameroon, (NCNC), Action Group (AG), the Northern people’s Congress (NPN), the Northern Progressive Union (NEPU), and the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), these parties were mainly ethnic based and all drew most of their support from their enclaves. Although they exhibit considerable harmony, yet the parties still witnessed internal strives as well as inter party rivalries. However these parties led Nigeria to national independent and subsequently formed the government in their respectively regions. (NPC North, NCNC East, AG West) Dudley, 1968. It is therefore pertinent to note that, the parties in first republic witnessed bitter internal wrangling within the parties as well as bitter rivalries and conflicts among them. The tensions and mistrust among these parties generated into political crisis which eventually led to the collapse of the first republic and first military intervention in Nigeria’s politics and eventual break out of civil war (Ogundiya, 2010).

Five political parties were registered in the second Republic, National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP), Nigerian People’s Party (NPP), People Redemption Party (PRP), and Nigeria Action Party (NAP). History repeat itself due to the fact that the parties followed the same pattern in terms of formation and other trivial considerations. That is to say, the politics of suspicion, ran cur and manipulation repeated itself which led to another military takeover in 1983 and for good sixteen years that followed, Nigeria never again experience democratic rule until 1999 (Ogundiya, 2010).

Nigeria also witnessed the creation of two political parties through fiat during the period of General Ibrahim Babangida’s Administration, these were national republican convention (NRC), and social democratic party (SDP), and they also exhibited some level of internal wrangling and rivalries. In fact no other republic exhibited to a large degree both intra and inter-party squabbles more than the fourth republic. The republic started with three political Parties Peoples Democratic (PDP), all Peoples Party (APP letter ANPP) and Alliance for Democracy (AD) the party’s letter rose to thirty in 2003, and fifty in 2007 elections. Some parties also emerged during the 2011 elections. Just of recent, All Progressive Congress (APC) came into being as result of merger between some parties (AD, CAN, and CPC). The republic has also recorded bitter and acrimonies struggles within parties as well as violent inter-party relations (Umar, 2007).

Almost all the parties in Nigeria have little or no ideological basis or clear cut manifestos; they comprises of strange bed fellows who are not
compatible in many respects, their priority is to contest offices. Make many unfulfilled promises after elections, and try to secure the support of every section of the population in order to capture the presidency and the National/state houses of assembly and local government chairman ship.

Furthermore, Nigeria parties lack discipline. This is because parties represent a number ob interest, so its house of representative or senate to vote against a bill sponsored by the president who belongs to his own party, or see a member of a party dragging his party hierarchy or fellow party members to court for selfish and personal reasons. Example of such cases includes Atiku Abubakar former vice president, Charles Soludo, former CBN Governor, etc. who took PDP to court just to allowed them contest for president and governorship elections.

Although some of the parties have national spread, they develop many abuses. The control of party organization at the federal, state and local government levels by God fathers and money bags and their small cliques is a common feature of Nigerian political system. They claim to be professional politicians and manage elections for their selfish interests and distribute offices among their followers for their support in winning elections. A very good example of this is the struggle of power in APC in Adamawa, Kano and Sokoto stat over’s who control the party between new and old members of the party. Another ugly face of parties in Nigeria is their lack of organization. That is, they are notable to organize themselves into a formidable opposition to check the excesses of the ruling. For instance, the parties are unable to team up in the 2003, 2007 and 2011 elections to fight the people’s Democratic Party (PDP), instead some members of a party including governors and members of representatives and senators decamped from their parties to join PDP, example includes Isah Yuguda of Bauchi, Dakin Gari of Kebbi, Aliyu Magatakarda of Sokoto states.

Conclusion

The paper has examined the role of political parties in democratic stability in Nigeria. It argue that ideally, political parties are building blocks of stability, considering the important functions they carry out, it also reviews briefly Nigeria’s political terrain from the immediate pre-independence period, showing the flash points of political crisis and instability in order to underscore the need for the intervention of political parties. The study reveals that, the Nigerian political parties has failed in ensuring democratic stability as experienced in advance democracies, due to lack of organization, discipline, inter/intra-party squabbles, greed as well as pattern of formation.

The paper therefore is of the view that, for Nigerian to perform effectively and efficiently towards democratic stability, the following has to be taken into consideration; the need for dedicated and truly nationalistic leadership at all levels, socio-political reengineering, and social mobilization as bases for building elite consensus on crucial national questions. When achieved reforming Nigerian parties for greater productivity can be attained. The use of ethnic, region, and religion bases for political formation and contest should be totally discouraged.

All parties should have party structure that is highly institutionalized. The notion of party institutionalization may be invoked to cover a wide range of features, including, a party’s autonomy from others actors or a self-acclaimed or anointed leader. This will democratize the extent of its internal organizational development, and the extent to which supporters identify with the party and view it as an important actor (Randall and Svasand, 2002).

There should be ideological commitment and transparency in party financial administration ideology often plays some role in shaping parties’ organization decisions. This can be seen most clearly in parties whose organizational forms are closely linked to their ideological identities. All party members must be aware and observe the party financial guidelines. This will prevent kleptocrats from hijacking the party. The imposition of candidates into any elective position by parties should be abolished. The right of every member must be respected and preserved. Consensus candidature and selection and selection must be played down at all down at all level. Candidate’s emergence must be given constitutional backing instead of substituting such person for candidates of selective approval (Aleyomi, 2013).

References


