Democracy and Political Parties Nigeria: Fourth Republic

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Abstract

This article examines the role of political parties in shaping the democratic process in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. While Nigeria has made significant strides in establishing democratic institutions since the end of military rule, the functionality and effectiveness of political parties remain a contentious issue. The study employs a secondary approach, integrating quantitative data with qualitative insights from political analysts, party members, and civil society actors. Utilizing theoretical framework such as Democratic Consolidation Theory the paper identifies critical gaps in the structure, operations, and impacts of political parties on Nigeria's democracy. The finding reveal system challenges including weak party ideologies, internal democracy deficits, and pervasive corruption. The article concludes with policy recommendations aimed at strengthening political parties to enhance democratic governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: Democracy, political parties, Nigeria, Missing link, Fourth Republic

Introduction

Since the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1999, Nigeria has embarked on a complex journey towards democratic governance. Political parties, as crucial pillars of democracy, play a vital role in representing diverse interests, shaping policies, and ensuing accountability. However, the effectiveness of these political entities in promoting and sustaining democracy in Nigeria has been questioned. Nigeria's Fourth Republic, which began in 1999, has been marked by a fragile democracy and lack of effective political parties. Despite the country's progress towards democratic consolidation, the political party system remains underdeveloped,

hindering the deepening of democracy, this background paper explores the missing link between democracy and the political parties in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Nigeria's democracy has made significant strides since the transition from military rule in 1999.

Methodology

The paper employed the secondary research and library review methods for the study on democracy and political parties: the missing link in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The secondary research method involves the collection and analysis of existing data and literature on the subject under investigation. Thus, in political science, secondary research includes the review the review of government documents, electoral data, academic journals, books, policy papers, and media reports, government documents, electoral data, academic journals, books, policy papers, and media reports, while the library review method, involves systematically searching through academic databases, libraries, and archives to gather relevant literature. This method ensures comprehensive coverage libraries, and archives to gather relevant literature. This method ensure comprehensive coverage of existing knowledge, which is crucial for understanding complex political dynamics. Consequently, both secondary research and library review methods utilized for the study provide historical insights into the development of party politics in Nigeria, helping to contextualize current challenges. The two methods allow for an in-depth understanding of party dynamics, including how they influence and are influenced by Nigeria's democratic processes as materials and literature available through the methods employed helped a great deal, to discover the missing link in the Nigeria's Fourth Republic hence, suitable for the study.

Concept of Democracy and Political Participation

Hicken (2022) states submits that the country has held successful six general elections, and power has been transferred peacefully between political parties. However, the challenges persist, including electoral malpractices, political violence, and lack of a accountability. Nigeria's political party system is characterized by a dominant party, the All Progressive Congress (APC), and a party opposition, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Adigun (2017) states that

the parties lack ideological differences, and their operations are often marked by patronage and clientelism. Party internal democracy is also weak leading to frequent defections of members from one party to the other and severe party crises. The missing link between democracy and political parties in Nigeria is the lack of effective party institutionalization. Fagbadebo and Akinola (2021) state that the political parties are seeing deviating or unable to perform their required roles and duties in a democracy due to frequent internal weaknesses and external constraints. The result is a democratic system that is unresponsive to citizen's needs and lacks legitimacy.

The paper examines democracy and political parties: The missing link in Nigeria's Fourth Republic with a view to analyzing the internal dynamics and organizational structures of political parties in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Theoretical Frameworks

The paper utilized the Democratic Consolidation Theory developed in the late 20th century, particularly in the 1990s by Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan as its theoretical framework. Their seminal work, *"Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation"*, published in 1996, is one of the foundational texts where they explored the conditions necessary for the survival and deepening of democracy, especially in post-authoritarian and post-totalitarian society. The theory emphasized the democracy becomes consolidated when it is accepted as the "only game in town," meaning there is widespread commitment to democratic norms, institutions, and values. The theory focuses on the conditions necessary for democracies to stabilize and prevent a return to authoritarian rule. This, the theory did, through exploring the processes through which democracy becomes stable and enduring. It also emphasizes the role of political parties in institutionalizing democratic norms and practices. Therefore, democratic consolidation theory refers to the process by which a new democracy matures, so that it is unlikely to revert to authoritarianism. Linz and Stepan (1996) who are among its key proponents, argued that democracy becomes "consolidated" when it is widely accepted as the only legitimate form of government, supported by strong institutions, political culture, and civil society.

In the context of Nigeria's Fourth Republic (beginning in 1999), democratic consolidation is critical given the country's history of military coups and authoritarian rule. Despite Nigeria's return to democracy, challenges like electoral malpractice, godfatherism, weak institutions, and poor internal party democracy have hindered full democratic consolidation. Political parties are central to the consolidation process. In theory, they should serve as vehicles for political participation, representation, and accountability. However, in Nigeria, political parties are often dominated by elites and characterized by internal conflicts, lack of ideology, and weak structures. These issues undermine the parties' ability to promote democratic norms, especially during elections. The personalization of power, where party leaders prioritize individual gains over collective democratic development, further stunts consolidation. ID Publications (1996) state that Nigeria's Fourth Republic has seen progress in some areas, such as peaceful transitions of power and growing political engagement. However, the ongoing challenge highlight the need for reforms that address internal party democracy, institutional strengthening, and the fight against corruption to enhance democratic consolidation.

Therefore, democratic consolidation theory utilized for the study is crucial because, it helps in the understanding of the challenges and prospects of democracy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The application of the democratic consolidation theory for the paper also assists in analyzing the transition from Nigeria's military regime or authoritarian rule to democratic governance or civilian rule and the role of political parties in this process. This theory sheds light on the factors that hinder or facilitate democratic consolidation, such as institutional development, political cultural, and elite behaviour. By applying democratic consolidation theory, it enables the paper assess the resilience and quality of Nigeria's democracy, including the performance of political parties. Thus, the application of democratic consolidation theory becomes necessary and suitable for the study, because it helps in identifying areas of improvement and strategies to strengthen democratic institutions and practices in Nigeria.

Constraints of Political Parties in Nigeria Fourth Republic

a. **Internal Party Democracy Deficit:** One of the primary factors that have impeded the effectiveness of Nigerian political parties is the lack of internal party democracy. Albert (2020) states that political parties in Nigeria are often dominated by political godfathers or influential elites who control decision-making processes, particularly, in the selection of candidates for primary election or appointment into public office. This autocratic control over party affairs has stifled open competition and marginalized grassroots members, preventing the development of participatory and democratic party structures thereby hindering its effectiveness in Nigeria.

b. **Ethnic and Regional Polarization:** Nigeria's multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition has historically shaped its political landscape. Nwankwo (2019) posits lines, rather than national interest. This has not only led to the marginalization of minority groups but also entrenched a system where party loyalty is built around ethnic affiliations rather than ideological commitments. The political class frequently exploits these divides to garner votes, which in turn undermines national unity and the effectiveness of political governance.

c. **Corruption and Political Financing:** Another significant barrier to the effectiveness of Nigerian political parties has been the pervasive issue of corruption. Abdulrashed (2021) laments that during elections, after and in governance many political parties are since to have been plagued by corruption, often using illicit funds to finance political campaigns, and personal interests. This monetization of the political process marginalizes credible candidates who lack financial backing and gives undue influence to wealthy individuals and organizations that provide these funds in exchange for political favors.

d. **Lack of Ideological Focus:** Many Nigerian political parties lack clear ideological orientation. Abdulrasheed (2021) submits that most of the major political parties have similar policy agendas and do not offer distinct choices to the electorate. This ideological bankruptcy stems from a political culture where party loyalty is driven by personal ambition, patronage, and immediate material benefits, rather than long-term policy or governance visions.

e. **Electoral Violence and Insecurity:** Human Rights Watch (2019) states that electoral violence has been a recurring issue in Nigerian politics, affecting the credibility and legitimacy of political parties. Politically motivated violence, often orchestrated by party loyalists or thugs, has resulted in the loss of lives, suppression of voter participation, and widespread fear during elections. This culture of violence undermines the democratic process and erodes trust in the electoral system.

f. **Weak Electoral Institutions:** The effectiveness of political parties is also linked to the weakness of Nigeria's electoral institutions. Onyekpe (2021) states that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has faced numerous challenges, including allegations of partiality, logistical failures, and an inability to curb electoral fraud in all the elections held in Nigeria from 1999 till date. These institutional weaknesses have allowed political parties to exploit the system, further eroding confidence in democratic governance.

The Missing Link in Democracy Nigeria's Fourth Republic

Yagboyaju (2011) submits that the Nigeria's Fourth Republic, which has witnessed seven general elections (1999, 2003, 2007, 2015, 2019, and 2023), is yet to show profound and positive visible evidences of a true democracy. This is because, the citizens and the society are still bereft of critical basic infrastructures as no community in the three (3) geo-political zones of the state could boast of steady and regular electricity supply, quality and good pipe borne water, health care and well equipped primary and secondary schools in their communities. The individuals that were voted for did not represent the interest of the people and constituencies they ought to represent but are seen busy doing everything to satisfy the interests and aspirations of the political godfathers that appointed them (not elected). This is very disappointing as conflicts, discouragements and crisis of development became the order of the day.

Orji (2013) declares that the three main registered political parties in the Fourth Republic e.g., the People's Democratic Party (PDP), All Peoples Party (APP) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD) were characterized by poor structures, weak in organization of internal party elections and inadequate membership support for

the leaders. In fact, the appointed or elected representatives were busy buying and driving bullet proof cars, building mansions in choice locations, keeping many girlfriends and marrying more wives while their constituents are crying of hunger and poverty in the communities/. In fact, school fees of their children and those yet unborn are paid in advance (off front), to the detriment of the common citizens and the society. The supposed people's representatives in government could hardly deliver on the mandates they represented. The institutions of government exist also to showcase corruption and maladministration as they are not able to delivery quality durable goods for the benefits of man and the society. The country is crawling towards development and true democracy.

Aleyomi (2013) states that the political parties are not doing what is expected of political parties in modern democracy as they are not firm to reach and implement the parties' policies and decisions owing to the influence of the money bags, godgathers, ethnicity and religion which reigned and dominated the operations and practices of the political parties. Everything seems new, no continuity, no competition, they are all coming from a starting point, no one sector of the economy looks fulfilled and needs expansion. All the sectors are struggling to survive after many years of self and democratic rules. It is absurd and total bewilderment that all the elections held within the Fourth Republics were marked with controversies, just as their processes end products encountered credibility and legitimacy crises. Obviously, all of these accounts for the lack of internal democracy by the political parties, and absence of special court to try pre-election matters before a candidate is declared and subsequently sworn in as the winner.

Musa and Deinde-Adedeji (2020) state that the net effect of this undemocratic practice by the political parties seem to have gradually led the ordinary citizens or the people lost hop in the system that replaced the military regime with promises to enhance livelihoods and bring good governance closer to the people. Ikpe (2000) states that political parties especially, the major or ruling political party at the federal level, the PDP, failed to in service and in the principles to uphold the tenets of true democracy. The party could not deliver on its campaign promises in its entirety. The people they led or represent in government are in excruciating pains, huger and poverty, yet their leaders and representatives are living in opulence and

looking good every time as if they are not part to the current economic hardships in the country, they seem less bothered. For instance, in many states of the country especially in Rivers State, the situation was not different as it was recorded that in the Fourth Republic every political party in the state during the period had its primaries conducted with an "anointed aspirant" in many which were later confirmed through dubious and terrible circumstances. Michael (2013) states that it was indeed very sudden that the accredited delegates from the 23 LGAs of the state that were screened to participate in the primary election were all standing o the field, venue of the primaries, when a group belonging to the preferred "anointed aspirant" were seen chanting victory songs, beating drums and granting radio/television interviews for the success of a primary election that was never held yet, the "anointed aspirant" was declared winner. The other groups and their aspirants were astonished and found that they suffered great political ills and decided to challenge the victory of the preferred "anointed aspirant" now declared as candidate and winner in court.

Ojo and Lawal (2013) submit that the opposition groups and their aspirants were hopeful that their prayers will be granted and the court will cancel and reschedule the primaries. To the bewilderment of the protesting or opposition gangs, the prayer was not granted by the court because of extraneous influence from godfathers, ethnicity, religion and the party bigwigs who collaborated to subvert justice and betray democracy in Rivers State in the fourth Republic. Obah-Akpowoghaha (2013) posits that, the performance of democracy in the fourth Republic in all the 36 states of Nigeria has remained poor and unattractive. This was attributed to lack of internal democracy by the political parties during conduct of party primaries and subsequent declaration of candidates and winners for election at the general contest. Disturbingly, twenty two years after the practice of democracy in Nigeria the political landscape is yet to show clear evidences of good governance. The rule of law is mere a pronouncement while, elections and electoral processes are constantly being subverted and the political parties and other important public institutions such as INEC and the Court are manipulated in favor of the privilege few. All unwholesome and nocturnal political practices that occurred in Nigeria's democracy in the fourth Republic have culminated into the present day democracy due to absence of internal democracy in the political

parties. There is also no special Court to try political offenders before declaration of winners at primaries and subsequent swearing-in as winner in an election. This is the missing link in the fourth Republic political dispensation in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The missing link between democracy and political parties in Nigeria's Fourth Republic is a major impediment to the consolidation of democratic governance. Political parties in Nigeria have struggled to institutionalize themselves and play their crucial role in shaping policy, representing the people, and ensuring accountability. The challenges of weak internal democracy, the lack of ideological clarity, money politics, and ethnic divisions have hindered the ability of political parties to effectively contribute to Nigeria's democratic process. To strengthen democracy in Nigeria, political parties must undergo significant reforms to become more instutionalized and responsive to the needs of the people. These reforms should focus on promoting ideological clarity, enhancing internal democracy, regulating campaign finance, and fostering national unity. A vibrant and institutionalized political party system is essential for the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic and for ensuring that democratic governance delivers tangible benefits to all Nigerians.

Recommendations

In order to achieve a vibrant and institutionalized political party system in Nigeria with a view to addressing the missing link between democracy and the political parties in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, the following are recommended.

a. **Promoting Ideological Clarity:** Political parties in Nigeria must develop clear and distinct ideological platforms that reflect the needs and aspirations of the people. A strong ideological foundation will enable parties to mobilize support based on policy proposals rather than personal or ethnic affiliations. This will also provide voters with meaningful choices during elections, enhancing the accountability of elected leaders.
b. **Enhancing Internal Democracy:** Political parties must adopt democratic processes in their internal operations, particularly in the selection of candidates for elections. Party leadership should be determined through transparent and inclusive processes that reflect the will of party members.

This will strengthen the legitimacy of political parties and improve the quality of candidates presented to the electorate.

c. **Regulating Campaign Finance:** To reduce the influence of money in politics, Nigeria must implement stricter regulations on campaign finance. This includes setting limits on campaign spending, ensuring transparency in party funding, and enforcing penalties for violations. By reducing the role of money in elections, political parties can focus on promoting policies and ideas rather than relying on financial resource to secure electoral victories.
d. **Strengthening Electoral Institutions:** The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and other electoral bodies must be empowered to enforce electoral laws and ensure free and fair elections. Electoral reforms should focus on eliminating electoral fraud, vote-buying, and violence. A credible electoral process will enhance public trust in the democratic system and encourage greater political participation.
e. **Promoting National Unity:** Political parties must prioritize national unity over ethnic or regional interests. Parties should work to foster inclusivity and represent the interests of all Nigerians, regardless of ethnic or regional affiliation. This can be achieved through policies that promote national integration and the equitable distribution of resources.
f. **Promoting Inclusive Political Participation:** Promoting inclusivity in political participation involves encouraging greater involvement of women, youth, and marginalized groups in party activities and leadership positions.

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