POLITICAL PARTIES AND CONSENSUS BUILDING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA: 1999-2015

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Abstract: There is no doubt that political parties are indispensable institutions to the operation of democratic governance in any polity. This paper explored into an essential aspect of Nigeria's political parties in contemporary period, which is, consensus building towards sustainable democracy in the country. From a descriptive perspective, the paper argued that for political parties to contribute towards the attainment of sustainable democracy in contemporary Nigeria, there is need for consensus building among the political elite and between them and the masses in the society coupled with party discipline, institutionalization and transparency. From this, some research questions were posed, viz: How have Nigerian political parties fared with regards to consensus building conducive to sustainable democracy in the country? What measures could help facilitate society-wide agreements by Nigerian political parties? The paper noted that Nigerian political parties have not measured up when examined against these parameters. A cursory assessment of the activities of political parties in the Nigeria's fourth democratic republic revealed that they lacked commitment to consensus politics capable of engendering sustainable democracy in the country. To this end, the paper recommended among others, that the political parties should be transparent in the selection of candidates for the various elective offices as well as avoid imposition of candidates on the masses. Moreover, political parties must be typically institutionalized, internally democratic, disciplined, and free from godfathers influence.

Keywords: Political party, political identity, consensus building, election, sustainable democracy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Political parties are the vehicles through which candidates are elected for the different state offices in modern-day democracies. In effect, political parties constitute a fundamental political institution in the actualization of democratic regime; hence, the concern of scholars in the determination of the extent to which political parties in Nigeria has contributed to the consolidation of its nascent democracy. This is more so because the role of political parties in the emergent political experiments in the country has raised more questions than answers. The roles of political parties in a democracy are always trivialized – simply charged with fielding candidates for elective positions, campaigning for these candidates, canvassing for votes from the masses and getting their candidates elected to form government. This simple understanding of the roles of political parties in the course of democratic consolidation is insufficient in the true conception of its relevance in any democratic setup.

Going by the general conviction that political parties' objectives are all about acquisition of power through electoral process, promulgation of interest of a group and control of government must be applicable in well-structured society with established political culture. It is vital to look beyond this in discussing what political parties are all about in Nigeria. Vibrant and well-resourced political parties play a very crucial role in the sustenance of democracy as they ensure not only a smooth transition of power but also enhance rapid socio-economic growth. As asserted by Bagehot (1963), party organization is a vital principle of a responsible government.

The nature, behaviour and performance of political parties and the nature of party relations with other parties, groups, and even the state have consequences for the nature of governance, integration, stability and security within a democratic polity. Put differently, the character and tendencies exhibited by political parties has implications for democratic sustenance in a country. The political party is a critical, formal, institutional, organizational and mobilizational player in the political process particularly in relation to power, democracy, governance, governments and economy (Ikelegbe, 2013:4-7). By implication political parties therefore provide the vital linkage between government and the governed and vice versa as well as between the elites and the masses through some form of consensus building. This informed the focus of the paper.

This paper sought to examine the positive and negative aspects of political parties in advancing consensus building and its implications for sustainable democracy in Nigeria between 1999 and 2015. In pursuit of this core objective, the paper starts with some conceptual and theoretical discourse on political party, followed by a consideration of the linkage between political parties and democracy. Next the paper identifies and explains some of the negative and positive elements of consensus building and then provides a critical analysis of the attempts to adapt Nigerian parties to the goal of achieving political consensus, drawing insights from both constitutional and practical experiences as well as the constraints thereto, and proffers useful suggestions on how to reposition Nigerian parties for greater productivity in the country's desire and quest for political consensus.

2. POLITICAL PARTY: A CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL DISCOURSE

It is deemed appropriate to begin the discussion of the concept of political party with Weber's (1977) observation that political parties live in a 'house of power'. That is, the most important thing about political party is political power. Classically, a party is defined by Schumpeter (1975) as a group whose members propose to act in concert in the competitive struggle for power. Similarly, Heywood (2011) conceived a political party as a group of people organized for the purpose of winning government power, by electoral or other means. These definitions have painted only the egocentric picture of political parties and their members' selfish desire and pursuit of political power. While this is quite appropriate, the mere fact that power will be exercised in the public domain, and supposedly in trust for, and in the interest of the electorate and the state, especially in a democracy, then a moral connotation should be implied in the definition of political party.

In view of above, the definition offered by Eminue (2005:329) appears more comprehensive because it captures the essence of a political party by balancing responsibility for the tasks of government against the benefits that political power gives the party members. For him:

A political party is an organization of individuals, a large majority of whom have broadly similar idea about the nature and functions of government, pursue broadly similar ideology and organize themselves to obtain political power and control governmental machinery with all its advantages and responsibilities, and in the overall interest of the State. It is association of individuals that engages in electoral and other *competitions* with its counterpart(s) for control of the personnel and the administration of government.

A similar contemporary definition by Rienow (1957:111) has it that "a party is a body of citizens joined together that they might elect to public offices some of their members and thus carry into effect a programme which they believe to be in the best interest of the national, state or local community".

From whichever perspective one wishes to look at the political party, a party must have some kind of ideological background expressed in the form of ideas, thoughts or principles. This ideological background of a political party serves as a mobilizing vehicle; mobilizing support in terms of party membership and supporters within the electorate. It is the ideological standpoint of a party that guides it in the choice of the pattern for implementing political, social and economic policies when it grabs power. Also, it is ideology that differentiates one party from the other. No two parties can share exactly the same ideology, taking cognizance of goals delineation and implementation strategies.

The party system is indispensable to the operation of democracy in modern states. Since direct (ancient model) democracy is impossible in virtually all modern states, its substitute, representative democracy is made easy and workable through the existence of the party systems. As Odegard (1961:130) put it:

Political parties help to meet two strongly felt needs which have to be satisfied if democracy is to prove successful. First, the party provides an agency through which people who wish to influence the course of public policy in the light of common interest may organize their strength and take effective steps to win control of the government. Second, the party undertakes to run the government in a way that keeps faith with the interests of the voters who have placed it in power.

Flowing from the foregoing is the pluralist theoretical underpinning, that political parties have a responsibility to present candidates for elections, with the primary aim of capturing political power for the furtherance of the common good of the citizens. This responsibility becomes much more challenging, tasking, and arduous in plural societies where it is often difficult to build societal consensus on critical national questions. As Barongo (1987:67) pointed out:

Pluralist democracy rather than disperse and balance political power in society actually encourages the acquisition and monopoly of power by a few individuals and groups and provides grounds whereby the stronger group of individuals pre-empts and dominates public policy.

In this context, political parties, especially in plural societies such as Nigeria, should provide a formidable platform for consensus building on crucial national issues. In such settings, political parties have an instrumental central role to play by identifying, politicizing and representing social divisions, including ethnicities, religions, classes, and geographies. It is for this reason that it has been contended that perhaps, more than any other factor, the success of democratic consolidation in a country is contingent on the effectiveness of political parties in structuring political conflict (Mainwaring, 1988; Omotola, 2010a). But this is seldom the case in some democratic states, especially in Africa. From a comparative African perspective, studies have shown that political parties falter in the representation of social groups (Randal, 2007) becoming, instead, tools for the promotion of neo-patrimonialism and violence (Gyimah-Boadi, 2007).

3. POLITICAL PARTIES AND DEMOCRACY: A FUNCTIONAL LINKAGE

Political parties, as Eminue (2005) rightly stated, irrespective of their types, have certain features in common: they are hierarchically organized; they are programmatic (they always have "action plan" for promoting the general welfare and ushering in good life for all); and they recruit personnel for the Government. Besides, political parties have often been credited with a variety of functions which make the institution indispensable to the operation of the democratic system. These functions can be grouped into operational three levels: electorate-related functions, government-related functions, and linkage-related functions (Randal and Svasand, 2002). *Parties' electorate-related functions* entail political representation, expression of peoples' demands through interest articulation and aggregation, and the simplification and structuring of electoral choice. They also include the integration of voters into the system through political education and mobilization. *Government-related functions* include making government accountable by effectively implementing party policies and exercising control over government administration. Moreover, in-between the government and the electorate, political parties play a *linkage* or mediatory role. They do this by aggregating and channelling public interests as well as recruiting and training political leaders (Agbaje, 1999).

In support of the foregoing functions of political parties, Reilly (2008:2) postulated what he called the "deeper, systemic support of political parties that helps to make democracy work effectively" or put differently, establishes the linkage between political parties and democracy. According to Reilly (2008:3-4) this is possible as political parties:

(a)   Mediate between demands of the citizenry on the one hand and the actions of the government on the other, aggregating the diverse demands of the electorate into coherent public policy.

(b)   Make effective collective action possible within legislatures. Without the predictable voting coalitions that parties provide, there would be chaos as legislative majorities shifted from issue to issue and vote to vote.

(c)   Provide a link between ordinary citizens and their political representatives; parties are also the primary channel of democratic systems for holding governments accountable for their performance.

It should be noted, however, that the discharge of these tasks is not a given. Much depends on the degree of institutionalization of the political parties with respect to organization, discipline, internal democracy, and cohesion. As pointed out by Mainwaring and Zoco (2007), when these elements are lacking, political parties are likely to be reduced to mere formalities just to fulfil the sense of righteousness, but democracy exists in such circumstances without real political competition. When an atmosphere of this nature prevails, parties become deficient and ill-equipped to cope with their responsibilities. In these circumstances, various interest groups may be tempted to develop alternative devices to channel

their demands, including grievances, not only within the parties but also throughout the entire system. The end result, if not mitigated in time, will be an overloading of the system with more than it can shoulder at one time, resulting in the weakness of the system and possibly the breakdown of political order and stability. This is partly why there is growing worry over political parties as a destabilizing force, or even as a threat to the consolidation of democracy, in some democracies, mostly those in transition.

Obviously, under tempting situation as painted above, political parties will exhibit a range of characteristics that undercut their ability to deliver the kind of system benefits on which representative politics depends. This is more so, because, according to Reilly (2008:4):

(a)   they are frequently poorly institutionalized, with limited membership, weak policy capacity and shifting basis of support;

(b)   they are often bound around narrow personal, regional or ethnic ties, rather than reflecting society as a whole;

(c)   they are typically organizationally thin, coming to life only at election time;

(d)   they may have little in the way of a coherent ideology;

(e)   they often fail to stand for any particular policy agenda;

(f) they are frequently unable to ensure a disciplined collective action in parliament, with members shifting between parties; and

(g)   as a result, parties often struggle to manage social conflicts and fail to deliver public   goods   and   thus   to promote development.

The point, is that political parties can provide a basis for societal conflict or consensus depending on its organization, internal discipline, coherence, and understanding of democracy. In this regard, Beek and Sorauf (1992) has asserted convincingly that whatever their direction, whether as sources of conflict or consensus in a society, political parties have crucial roles to play as makers of democratic government. In effect, modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of parties. That is, it impossible to imagine a democracy without political parties (Schattschneider, 1942). Hence, the higher the level of their institutionalization, the more the system benefits in terms of political stability and vice versa.

Democracy is a system of rule in which the people have the right to participate in governing, particularly through choosing those to govern them in free, fair, regular and periodic elections. Election is the greatest hallmark of democracy because it portrays its three characteristics -participation, representation and accountability - simultaneously. According to Dahl, there are seven cardinal characteristics of liberal democracy:

(i)   Control over government decisions on policy is vested in elected officials.

(ii)   These elected officials are chosen in free, fair and frequent elections.

(iii) All adults have the right to vote in the election of officials.

(iv)   All adults have the right to contest for elective offices in the government.

(v)   All citizens have the right to express themselves without the danger of being punished by government.

(vi)   Legitimate existence of alternative sources of information and the right of citizens to use them.

(vii) Citizens have the right to form independent associations including political parties and interest groups.

Notably, attributes 1 to 4 cannot be attained without the intervention of political parties. Political parties are the vehicles through which candidates are elected for the different state offices in modern-day democracies. But the unfortunate thing is that these attributes are amenable to what Sandbrook (1996) calls technical fixes. These are covert and sometimes overt manipulations which portray only the outward forms of democracy, while being riddled internally with fraud. In this case, elections are not conducted according to laid down procedures and rules; partisans do not obey the rules of the electoral game; political campaigns become militarized; the referees or umpires become interested partisans and players; while the spectators or the voters become willingly recruited foot-soldiers. Once manipulations of the electoral processes are involved, democracy becomes jeopardized, and not amenable to consolidation.

A consolidated democracy, as put by Linz and Stepan (1996), is a political regime in which democracy as a complex system of institutions, rules, and patterned incentives and disincentives has become entrenched behaviourally, attitudinally and constitutionally. That is, democracy, no matter the prevailing socio-economic and political conditions, continues to enjoy the support of the majority of the people who believe that every political change must follow the democratic procedure, and that all conflicts must be resolved according to established norms and rules. Democracy then becomes the only game in town because it has achieved broad and 'deep legitimation', according to Diamond (1999), such that all significance political actors, at both the elite and mass levels, believe that the democratic regime is better for their society than any other realistic alternative they can imagine. This clearly manifests in unquestioning acceptance of democratic procedures, which fosters a reduction in the uncertainty of democracy, regarding not so much the outcomes as the rules and methods of political competition. In Nigeria, greater attention is paid to the outcome than the rules and methods of political competition.

4. ON THE ISSUE OF CONSENSUS BUILDING

Consensus building otherwise referred to as collaborative problem solving is a conflict-resolution process used mainly to settle complex, multiparty disputes. According to Susskind (1999), since the 1980s, it has become widely used in the environmental and public policy arena in the United States, but is useful whenever multiple parties are involved in a complex dispute or conflict. The process allows various stakeholders (parties with an interest in the problem or issue) to work together to develop a mutually acceptable solution. Like a town meeting, consensus building is based on the principles of local participation and ownership of decisions. Ideally, the consensus reached will meet all of the relevant interests of stakeholders, who thereby come to a unanimous agreement. While everyone may not get everything they initially wanted, consensus has been reached when everyone agrees they can live with whatever is proposed after every effort has been made to meet the interests of all stake-holding parties.

Consensus building is important in today's interconnected society because many problems exist that affect diverse groups of people with different interests. As problems mount, the organizations that deal with society's problems come to rely on each other for help - they are interdependent. The parties affected by decisions are often interdependent as well. Therefore it is extremely difficult and often ineffective for organizations to try to solve controversial problems on their own. Consensus building offers a way for individual citizens and organizations to collaborate on solving complex problems in ways that are acceptable to all. Consensus building processes also allow a variety of people to have input into decision-making processes, rather than leaving controversial decisions up to government representatives or experts. When government experts make decisions on their own, one or more of the stakeholder groups is usually unhappy, and in the US system, they commonly sue the government, slowing implementation of any decision substantially. While consensus building takes time, it at least develops solutions that are not held up in court.

In addition, stakeholders always possess a wide range of understandings or perceptions of a problem. The consensus building process helps them to establish a common understanding and framework for developing a solution that works for everyone (Gray, 1989). The process also fosters the exploration of joint gains and integrative solutions and permits stakeholders to deal with interrelated issues in a single forum. This allows stakeholders to make trade-offs between different issues, and allows the development of solutions that meet more peoples' needs more completely than decisions that are made without such widespread participation. Consensus building is employed to settle conflicts that involve multiple parties and usually multiple issues. The approach seeks to transform adversarial interactions into a cooperative search for information and solutions that meet all parties' interests and needs.

5. POLITICAL PARTIES AND CONSENSUS BUILDING IN NIGERIA: THE NEGATIVE DIMENSIONS

Consensus means wide and broad-based agreement between parties involved in a particular enterprise. There are two levels of conceptualizing consensus. First there is the primary consensus which occurs when the agreement reached is the only agreement existing between the parties. There is also the secondary consensus where there is fundamental agreement such as law, order or statute governing the enterprise in question, and the consensus required here is about the operation of some aspects of the agreement for which an amendment of the fundamental law is not desirable.

Given the above paragraph, and considering the issue under study, this paper is concerned with secondary consensus. This is because there are fundamental laws - the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and the Electoral Acts, 2010 - in existence covering the formation and operation of political parties, and the processes of nomination and election of candidates into the various offices of the state. Thus, every other agreement or consensus must be in line with the

Constitution. The constitutional provisions covering the enterprise in question may be faulty or inadequate, yet it is illegal and improper to circumvent the constitution via an imagined or real consensus without first amending the constitution legitimately. It is an incontrovertible position in jurisprudence that a legitimate law, no matter how bad remains the reference point as far as the matter in question is concerned; no other agreement supersedes it. The only exception is if the consensus in such a matter conveys absolute advantage on all the parties without even one person suffering a disadvantage. Indeed, consensus by its very nature implies unwritten and undocumented agreement; without detailed specification concerning implementation, and, hence, will not fail to bestow disadvantages on some of the parties at one stage or another to engender discord.

Again, the secondary level of consensus has both positive and negative connotations. For a clearer perception, it is obvious to begin a detailed analysis of this paper from the negative perspective: consensus that does not support the constitution and democracy. First, democracy is known to be a system that allows for competition between parties and individuals wishing to hold state offices. This means that there is no room for unopposed or consensus candidates; all the candidates must emerge from the competitive process. No matter how popular a candidate is, no matter the number of youth organizations, women groups, traditional rulers and leaders of thought endorsing him or her, the popularity and consensus must be demonstrated at the polls. The Option A4 of the still-born Nigeria's Third Republic had this so beautifully highlighted that even if one were the sole candidate, one still needed to have a majority of 'yes' of the electorate over 'No'. If it is real, the supposed popular candidate will come out victorious at the polls. In this situation, no candidate or party will cry foul; no person will claim that he or she would have won if voting was done, whereas, such a person would have actually lost with ignomiy. Any consensus that eliminates contestation between political parties to produce candidates for any political office is detrimental to the building of consolidated and sustainable democracy. The situation, in which candidates are threatened, blackmailed and actually coerced to step down for other candidates described as consensus candidates, is insalubrious to the practice of democracy.

In the same vein, the situation in which the political bosses and the godfathers arrogate to themselves the absolute right of picking candidates for all the offices, from the local government to the national levels, without the involvement of party members amounts to dictatorship. The case of Chris Uba and Chris Ngige in Anambra State aptly brings to fore the dangers inherent in allowing godfathers to select candidates for elective positions. As captured by Akanmode (2003: 23) and Ojewale (2003:24), after installing Chris Ngige as his stooge, Chris Uba boasted in self- congratulations:

I am the greatest of all godfathers in Nigeria because this is the first time one single individual has single-handedly put in position every politician in a State – the State Governor and his Deputy, three Senators, 10 of the 11 members of the House of Representatives and 29 out of 30 members of the State House of Assembly. I (paid to) put politicians there, and therefore have the power to remove any of them who does not perform up to my expectations anytime I like.

Soon after Ngige won the governorship election, his godfather insisted on nominating all the Commissioners, Special Advisers and Personal Assistants, Principal Secretary, ADC, Chief Detail, Secretary to the State Government, Chief Driver and Chief of Staff in the governor's office. Resistance by the governor resulted in serious conflict which culminated in the abduction and subsequent impeachment of the governor. This was a clear case of dictatorship on the part of the godfather. Democratic ethos therefore demands that people (politician of influence) should not stay at the capital city to determine who the candidate for a particular elective position from councillor, chairmanship, governorship, States Houses of Assemblies and National Assembly memberships should be. The proper practice is to let the party members of the wards or constituencies select who they want, and in final election let the electorate choose their candidates without outside interference or any sort of imposition of candidates on them.

Furthermore, where community leaders align with the interest of a particular party, and in the process compel their communal members to vote for only that party, is undemocratic. They claim the sole right to determine the interest of their people and speak for them even in private matters. This often leads to intra and inter communal conflicts, especially during and after elections. There is the general belief in the Nigerian political arena that when a community has its sons and daughters in government, it stands a good chance of reaping government patronage. Thus, when one community perceives that another community has blocked the chances of its candidates entering government, conflict of violent nature may erupt.

Finally, in a multi-party state with the single member plurality electoral system like Nigeria, consensus candidate for any office is contemptuous. Again, this happens mostly at the communal level where communities chose a particular candidate from a particular political party and intimidate other candidates to step down. Unanimous support by the

Council of Elders and the entire community is not an appropriate way to demonstrate a candidate's popularity in a democracy, but rather, winning in a competitive election is. Without competition, the democratic process is subverted and abused; this reduces the value of democracy.

6. POSITIVE DIMENSIONS OF POLITICAL PARTIES' AND CONSENSUS BUILDING

What has been discussed so far in the preceding section is not a condemnation of consensus in democracies, but rather it is a rejection of the negative dimensions of consensus politics. Indeed, consensus is integral to liberal democracy; for democracy to stabilize there must be value consensus between the various parties and between the various societal groups that constitute the electorate. There must be society-wide agreements on the political processes among the elites and between elites and the masses. Both the elites and masses must agree at the behavioural, attitudinal and constitutional levels that democracy is a desirable system, which must be nurtured and protected to survive in accordance with the laid down rules in the Constitution and other legally enacted statutes. This is the positive connotation of consensus; the form of consensus that is supportive of the constitution and democracy. This is the type of consensus politics that party members and the Nigerian leaders must indulge in.

In order to attain positive consensus in the Nigerian political arena, the leaders and members of the political parties must operate within certain basic principles, such as:

(i)   Party leaders and members must overtly and covertly respect and abide by the provisions of the Constitution governing intra and inter-party elections. The provisions of the Constitution and Electoral Acts are very clear; they do not need additional procedures. Parties and candidates must therefore agree between them to respect and abide by these electoral rules and procedures. 'Carry-go' and other forms of electoral malpractices and frauds must be discouraged.

(ii)   Selection of candidates for all state offices must be done by party members according to the rules of the party constitution. Candidates should not be imposed on the members by the party leaders and godfathers. Unopposed and electorally undemonstrated consensus candidates are undemocratic interjections into the political system; they should be jettisoned.

(iii) All parties must agree to allow the votes of the electorate to determine the outcomes of electoral contests for all the offices. Again, there should be no contrived or otherwise unopposed or consensus candidates.

(iv)   All parties must agree, and devise ways and means of enforcing the agreement to conduct political campaigns peacefully. Supporters of one party must not obstruct the campaigns of another party. Violent methods of campaigning should be vehemently opposed by all the political parties.

(v)   All candidates and parties must, as a result of the fairness and freeness of the election, abide by the results of the elections. The spirit of sportsmanship should be cultivated; the loser should readily accept defeat and congratulate the winner. This, of course can best happen if the election was conducted freely and fairly. Free and fair election must not be taken for granted; it must not be assumed to have been done. Like all matters relating to justice, it must be done and seen to have been done by all interested parties and stakeholders.

7. SOME ROADBLOCKS TO CONSENSUS BUILDING IN NIGERIA

The distressing condition of Nigerian parties are deep-rooted such that they cannot, in their present circumstance promote positive political consensus capable of engendering sustainable democracy in the country. This is attributed to a number of factors. In the first place, as pointed out by Omotola (2009), Nigerian political parties suffer from "poverty of ideology". Ideology should serve as the roadmap for party operations, provide it with a veritable tool for mobilization, conflict management, and identification, and serve as a prescriptive formula, that is, a guide to individual actions and judgments.

Although Nigerian political parties do have manifestoes from which their ideological leanings can be gleaned, such manifestoes have always proved to be insufficient in reality for obvious reasons. For one, there are usually few differences in the manifestoes of most parties, making it difficult to differentiate among them ideologically. This is particularly the case with parties under the Fourth Republic, as parties of the First and Second Republics could easily be identified with some form of specific ideologies. Similarly, the form and character of political contestation in Nigeria, usually informed by the character of the state and the elite, give little or no consideration to ideological dispositions. Rather, forces of identity such as ethnicity and religion assume dominance. It is not surprising, therefore, that when one

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party captures power it tends to govern on the basis of the whims and caprices of the power holder, not so much by party manifestoes. Opposition parties behave in similar fashion. This explains the ignominious pattern and trends of political vagrancy in Nigeria's political system. As Okosi-Simbine (2005:24) pointed out:

While political vagrancy, a condition whereby politicians cross-carpet from one party to another, is not inherently bad, it becomes a liability when the shift is not informed and based on ethical and philosophical considerations. In such situations, it can lead to the 'confusion of political followership, constricts development, if not completely destabilize(s) the political process,' with heavy tolls on democratic consolidation. The problem here is that Nigerian parties pretend to be what they are not, thereby creating some form of electoral and democratic confusion in society. This problem is most acute in terms of structuring the voter's choice, but could not have been different in the face of political uncertainty.

Moreover, the preponderant manifestation of gross indiscipline among Nigerian parties represents another explanatory factor for the lack of consensus building in Nigeria. The level of indiscipline of the parties is best exemplified by the high rate of intra-party squabbles, often to the point of irreconcilability. The inability of the parties to effectively resolve internal differences, which should have been treated as "family affairs," is apparent. The PDP have experienced such at different times under the present democratic dispensation. A good example was the inability of the ruling PDP to internally resolved the August 2002 impeachment crisis, the height of legislature-executive face-off under the Fourth Republic, despite its near absolute majority in the National Assembly. It took the intervention of third parties, both domestic and foreign, to arrive at a compromise between the contending parties (Omotola, 2006). The Obasanjo-Atiku saga over tenure elongation and succession politics for the most part of 2006-2007 provide another striking example. Atiku mobilized his supporters to bring down the tenure elongation bill earlier sent to the Senate by President Obasanjo in a bid to secure a third term in office. The latter's success led to his temporary expulsion from party and as Vice President respectively - a decision the VP contested in court challenging the powers of the President to sack him from his job as Vice President and his subsequent defection to the Action Congress (International Crisis Group, 2007).

The situation has been complicated by the absence of internal democracy within the parties. This is exemplified by the fact that party primaries have been reduced to mere jamborees, where executive decisions are vetted. The attempt to rebuff such measures by aggrieved party stalwarts has most often resulted in internal crisis. For example, presidential aspirants from the South had to walk out of the ANPP convention in Abuja in 2003, arguing that the candidature of General Mohammed Buhari had been settled before the convention. The same was the issue in the PDP, when other aspirants alleged that an arrangement was made in such a way that gave Obasanjo, the then incumbent president, an edge over and above others (Omotola, 2003). Again, the 2005 PDP national convention was said to be a typical case of convention without choice, whereby the presidency using state resources, ensured the return of the incumbent party officers, particularly their cronies, at all levels. Such practices were so widespread that in most states, local governments, and wards, opposition elements within the party were totally rigged out of contest. The process of nominating party flag-bearers at various levels of governance in the 2007 general elections, especially the presidential and gubernatorial elections, provided the worst case scenarios. Candidates who triumphed in party primaries, but who were not the godfather's favourites, had their names substituted within the electoral body. Notable examples include Rotimi Amaechi of Rivers State and Ifeanyi Ararume of Imo State (Omotola, 2007; 2010b).

Furthermore, elite factionalization has been central to the problem of consensus building. This perhaps derives from the character of the Nigerian State and politics, where the "discovery" of the state has almost foreclosed other channels of development, particularly community development, through self-help projects. As champions of their respective ethnic groups and interests, the elites compete for power, though pretentiously. When their pursuits are threatened for whatever reason, it does not matter to elites anymore whether they belong to the same political party. The pull and push effect of the struggles has potential to weaken party institutionalization and solidarity. Nigerian parties have been victims of such pull and push forces since the emergence of the Fourth Republic.

8. CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE DESIRED CHANGES

The success of any proposed consensus depends on the behaviour of the ruling party and the dominant party in the national and the state level. The onus, therefore, is on the All Progressive Congress (APC) as the ruling party in collaboration with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to ensure that every election that is conducted in Nigeria and indeed the States is free and fair. If the APC controls over 80% of the States in terms of political power, then it must be ready to take 80% of the praises and blames for good or bad governance and politics. Its position as the

ruling party at the national level, coupled with the capacity to manipulate the distribution of largesse and patronage, can easily emasculate political competition, as was the case with Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) between 1999 and 2015. In political science literature, distinctions are made between a one party system and a dominant one party. The one party system is more or less a dictatorship; there is no competition because by law, no other party is allowed to operate. On the other hand, a dominant one party can exist in a two or multi-party systems. The situation is that one party dominates in the winning of elections to be in control of government over the years. This was the case of the Liberal Party in Japan, the Congress Party in India, and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in Mexico. The situation has changed in these countries and all the dominant parties have lost grip on power and their dominance of the political arena. In Nigeria, the PDP in 1999 was a party having a majority that enabled it to form the government. But in 2003 it moved up to be the party with absolute majority. Again, in 2007 it achieved the position of a dominant party which it occupied till 2015. Whether it achieved this position through credible performance or fraud is immaterial at this stage, rather, the important thing is, it was this position that bestowed the responsibility of guaranteeing the survival and consolidation of democracy in Nigeria on the PDP more than any other party, until it lost power and the position in 2015. It should be noted that a dominant party operating with emasculated opposition, where elections are not free and fair, is not different, characteristically, from a one party dictatorship. Naturally, the development of democratic values and consensus building is impossible in a situation of one-party dominance, which normally results, with the attendant crisis of leadership succession. For this reason, and in the interest of democracy, the followings must be considered:

(i)   Between 1999 and 2015 the PDP remained the dominant party in Nigeria and the prevailing line of thinking was that any candidate presented by the party will win; hence aspirants were more interested in the party nominations than in elections. This is where party bosses struggled to present their candidates against popular choices. In which case, the requirements of intra-party competition for the various positions were eliminated in the interest of the party bosses and the godfathers. This in most cases gave rise to serious legal tussles between the godfathers' imposed candidates and the aggrieved popular aspirants. The APC and other parties must avoid this pitfall in future elections. For instance, between 2016 and 2018, cases were still in courts concerning who were the legitimate candidates in some of the elections. The Supreme Court in particular was inundated with cases proceeding from the Elections Tribunals and Courts of Appeal from aggrieved contestants over wrongful substitution or declaration of unqualified candidates. Notable among the cases were those of Yahaya Bello vs James Fadeke over the Kogi State Governorship seat; Atai Ali Aidoko vs Isaac Alfa over Kogi East Senatorial seat; Senator Abubakar Dandali vs Alhaji Shuaibu Isa-Lau over Taraba North Senatorial seat; Hemen Hembe vs Dorothy Mato over Vadeikya/Konshisha Federal Constituency of Benue State; Chief Victor Umeh vs Senator Uche Ekunife over the Anambra Central Senatorial seat as well as Bassey Albert Akpan (OBA) vs Bassey Etim (Bafil) over the Akwa Ibom North East (Uyo) Senatorial seat among others. Contesting in court who was duly elected between two candidates of different parties is bad enough, but contesting who had the right to represent the party after the elections have long been concluded is embarrassingly fraudulent. What this portends is that, no party in Nigeria, including PDP, the acclaimed largest party in Africa, was transparent in the handling of the selection of their candidates for the various offices, from the presidency to the councillorship positions.

(ii)   The ruling party must resist the temptation of enticing strong candidates and members of the opposition parties through the distribution of state largesse. Other parties do not need to die; if they are weak, democracy weakens; if they die, democracy dies. One of the strongest indices for measuring the sustainability of democracy all over the world is the strength, vibrancy, freedom and responsibility of opposition parties. This is important because, as Crotty (1993:665) put it, "democratic government is unlikely and may not be possible in the absence of competitive political parties. Orderly government, much less a democratic polity, cannot exist without some form of stabilized party representation".

(iii)   Again, the ruling party should resist the use of state security apparatus to intimidate supporters of opposition parties. The PDP as the party in power (1999-2015) had easier access to such resources than other parties. The temptation was always there to use it, but if the leaders are serious about democratic consolidation, then such temptations must be openly resisted by the present APC government.

(iv)   All the parties must discourage excessive exuberance of their rank and file and supporters in the society, which may lead to violent clashes with supporters of other parties. Many of the cases of electoral violence are engendered by undue excitement of the ordinary members without the support of party leaders. However, this caution is more important for the APC and other parties which controls the States because the ordinary members of the party may conclude that since their party is in power, anything they do to promote the electoral cause of the party, even if it is illegal, will be acceptable, and that they will be protected by the powers of government. All categories of members should be thoroughly warned about this before, during, and after elections, especially as the election year (2019) is fast approaching.

Further to the above, it must be noted that democracy with consensus will continue to elude Nigeria if the mass of the voters remain objects of manipulation rather than active participants in the electoral process. The masses must have relative autonomy in democratic participation; political elites must create areas of inviolable autonomy for them. The masses do not seek to be involved in the nominations of candidates; that area belongs totally to the party leaders. However, when the candidates emerge, the rights of all the party members, in the case of party nominations or the general voters, in the case of general elections, must not be violated. Political elites must not assume that the masses do not know how to vote and so should be manipulated out, or coerced or even directed to vote in a particular way. Politicians and their agents should not go to the grassroots to influence how the masses cast their votes on the days of election. When this happens, it is usually accompanied by intimidation, bribery, violence and other vices. Even if the masses are ignorant when making their choices, they should be helped (politically educated) to increase their capacities for more effective democratic participation, not to be manipulated or coerced. When politicians, party leaders and the rank and file have a consensus on matters concerning proper conduct of, and participation in elections, then consensus democracy and politics of inclusion in Nigeria could be taken for granted.

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