

Corruption, Political Party System and Nigerian Democracy

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Abstract

In every modern society, politics is influenced tremendously by an elite class that projects the political culture which could make or mar democracy, as a result of the activities of the political parties. The adoption of western democracy is a mixed bag of blessing and catastrophes in the body politics of the country. Today it is difficult to reconcile Nigerian democracy with that of the advanced democratic countries. In Nigeria, politics is regarded as a “dirty game” which scare away many people. It has been noted that the level of socio-economic development in the country is significantly related to the nature of politics in vogue.. Political parties are primarily aimed at primitive accumulation of wealth. Hence, “the end justifies the means”. The prevailing election rigging, thuggery, bribery and corruption reflect value degeneration with the attendant instability in the country’s democracy. The purpose of this paper is to examine the nature of corruption and the roles of political parties as they affect the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.

Introduction

Politics is all about authoritative allocation of values in the political system by politicians and those who work with them. The nature of politics is subsumed in the culture of the elite and political parties. Claude Ake (1992) and Ugwu (2008) are of the view that the elite class and political parties that determines how politics should be conducted are indirectly responsible for the level of socio-cultural and socio economic development

of the country. In developed and developing countries of the world, one of the things that every man yearn for in a political society is good governance. Good governance guarantees the common good which Confucius calls “public good”. Aristotle calls it a “good life” and in Nigeria its referred to as “Democratic divided”. This common goods is achieved through the patriotic zeal effort and contribution of very citizen through the enabling condition of the machinery which pilots the affairs of the state. To Aristotle, “public good” or “good life” is the very essence of forming a political society. (Aristotle: 1252:20-29).

Various shades of vices ranging from indiscipline, tribalism licentiousness, ethno-religious violence, arm robbery, embezzlement of public funds, sycophancy, selfishness, avarice, sabotage, election malpractice, oppression, marginalization etc., become regular feature which could mar the roles played by political parties in the consolidation of Nigerian Democracy. The Nigerian democracy when compared with the advanced democratic nations shows a marked departure from what politics is all about.

Professor Claude Ake was right to State that the nature of democratic practice goes a long way to determine the level of socio – economic, culture and value development of country. If one may ask: what is the level of our socio economic and cultural development? What are the underlying values that sustain our democracy? What political direction is Nigeria taking to? Can one exonerate the Nigerian elites and political parties from the democratic miasma that country is passing through vis-avis tribal politics? (Nnoli, (1978). And should the Nigerian factor (corruption) increase to consolidate Nigerian Democracy?

Corruption: Conceptual Problem Antique

Corruption is a social problem (Aristotle 2007). The term “corruption” as a concept in social / classical science do not have a universally acceptance definition. For Brooks, “Corruption is the international misperformance or neglect of a recognized duty or the unwanted exercise of power, with the motive of gaining some advantage more or less directly personal”.

To buttress the definition above, Nkom in his article on “Ethical revolution as an antidote for corruption in Nigeria: The futility of bourgeoils idealism” Posited that “corruption is the perversion of public office, for private advantage” (Quoted by Akpotor 145) and Uduigwomen (2006:202).

Looking at a broader and Operational definition that suits this paper “Corruption is a deliberate act of indiscipline against the legalized moral norms of the state and the Natural law justice, as it affects the realization of the common good of the citizen.

Whereby an individual or a group of individuals, directly diverts or misuse, with the tool of political manoeuvring, the wealth of the state to his/her personal use”. (Asuquo in Unduigwomen 2006:202).

Political Party: Problem of Definition

As Rowe (1969), Curtis (1978), Encyclopaedia Britannica (1980) and Agi (2003) remind us, an acceptable of political party is difficult to attain Alexander Pope cynically defined a political. Party as “madness of the many for gain of the few”, while the English state men Edmund Burke sees party as a “body of men united for promoting by their join Endeavour the National interest upon some particular principles in which they all agreed”. One can safely ignore Pope’s definition for its cynicism and Burke’s because modern political parties are no longer define as a platform where the people have the same ideas. What is more, it seemingly smacks of gender insensitivity.

Eldersveld (1964: 1-23) considered the party from a behavioural viewpoint as a “social group” engaging in “patterned activity”. Epstein (1967:9) on the other hand defined it as “any group however loosely organized seeking to elect governmental office – holders under a given label. And Coleman and Rosberg (1966:41) assert that:

Political parties are associations formally organized with the explicit and declared purpose of acquiring and or maintaining legal control, either singly or in coalition or electoral competition with other similar associations over the personnel and the policy of the government of an actual or prospective sovereign state.

Here, we share the sentiments of Dowse and Hughes (1983:340) when in their commentary they point out that the stress on electoral competition practically rules out “one party” states in this definition but that it begs fewer question and includes most of what we would want to discuss under the term party. This author hastens to point out the since ‘one party’ states seem to be an endangered specie at the close of the twentieth century,

Coleman and Rosbery's definition does adequately as a working definition.

Before we proceed to other related issues note that as Max Weber in (Gerth and Wright Mills 1946) states, "that all party struggle are struggles for political office as well as for objectives goals, and they are a variety of incentives leading to association with a party".

And Sorauf, in his book 'political in the American system' (1964) suggests seven of such incentives;

1. Patronage
2. Obtaining special treatments by the government
3. Career opportunities
4. Economic benefit
5. Personal rewards
6. Ability to wield influence
7. Ideological gratification (quoted in Curtis, P. 153) and Agi (2003:269).

Typology of Corruption

Under this unit, we want to examine the typology of corruption scholarly stated by Syed Hussein Alatas (quoted by James T. Grie). They are seven in Number which are, Autogenic, defensive, extortive, invective nepotistic, supportive and transitive corruptions.

* Autogenic corruption involved just the perpetrator himself. Most at times he capitalizes on the ignorance of others at that given time to excel.

* Defensive corruption arises whenever an individual faces an unpleasant situation and is looking for a way out. This where bribery comes in.

* Extortive corruption is when a person coercively, methodically demands for something in exchange of services.

* Invective corruption involves the act of watering the ground in anticipation of future favour.

* Nepotistic corruption entails unjustified appointment of friends, relations, party sycophants to public offices in violation of the accepted guideline.

* Supportive Corruption involves actions taken to protect the existing corruption. This of course, has become a common political silencer' in the hands of most ruler to close the people's mouth. They make laws of fight corrupt opponents and yet, they themselves are not free from corruption.

* Transactive corruption involves two corrupt minds who will willingly agree to be, partners in crime provided, they are at advantage. Uduigwomen (2007:202).

Corruption, Political Party and the Consolidation of Democracy: the Nigerian Experience

Factually, political parties in Nigeria before 1960, originated as a result of Religious and tribal difference that exist at that time. For instance, political parties like Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) 1922, NYM (1934), NCNC (1944), AG (1950) and NPC (1949).

Amadi (op.cit., Chapter II), makes the point that democracy was here (in Nigeria) long before the British came. He also makes the point that real restraints on rulers were religious (P. 94) and that religion imposed a healthy restraint on leadership. The symbols of justice were respected, and belief in retributive justice was strong (P. 97). All of which is to say that religion then which gave rise to political parties played a considerable role in people – oriented rule and presently in the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.

Uya (2000:5) rightly puts that “there is no gainsaying that the behaviour and performance of the registered political parties like, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). All People’s Party (APP) and Alliance for Democracy (AD), especially their approach to electoral politics are crucial to the survival of Nigerian Democracy. The registered Political parties must not become vehicles for the articulation and implementation of ethnic, religious or regional projects and programmes and they must remain national in scope, coverage and orientation. Additionally, while servings as vehicles for the struggle for power, political parties must also serve as instruments for Nation – building and mobilization in our ethnically plural society.

Notably, political parties, while they vary in many ways, share many functions necessary to the selection and maintenance of orderly government. In fulfilling these functions they simplify the political complexity and make sense” of politics {Rowe; P.69}.

i. The first function is the most viable. The party fist of all gives the candidate a label that serves to introduce him to the voters and to identify his position. Because of this party label the voters are better able to distinguish the candidates.

ii. Perhaps most important, the political party provides a link between rulers and ruled. The party is a channel of expression, both upward and downward, which is crucial to the political management of complex societies. Since the upward flows of communication from ruled to the rulers is relatively strong. Because, the party functions as a vehicle for informing, educating and influencing public opinion.

iii. Parties also serve as important agents of interest aggregation they transform a multitude of specific demands into more measurable packages of proposals.

iv. When in government party leaders are centrally involved in the double task of setting and implementing collective goals for society.

v. Parties also exercise important functions as agents of elite recruitment and socialization. They serve as a major mechanism through which candidates for public office are prepared and selected at all levels, and in particular by which National political leadership is chosen.

vi. Political parties are often the objects of powerful emotional attachment (or antagonism), exerting an important influence upon the opinion and behaviour of their supporters. (Agi 2003:298).

We may regard all the foregoing as positive functions of political parties.

Negative Roles of Political Parties

First they may polarize opinion in ways dangerous to the stability of the political system. Also, the legislative isolation of large parties could mean the effective disenfranchisement of their supporters. Third, the various functions of political parties may clash with the political system. (Ball, 1986:80).

Agi (2003:299) Summarized the negative roles of political parties thus.

Among the first we may list the following authorization and democratic, integrative and representative. Ideological and pragmatic, issue-oriented and client oriented, National and regional; religious and secular, democratic and oligarchic; close and competitive aggregative and ideological;

pluralist or monopolist, confusion and profusion oriented.

Corruption and Political Party: the European Union (EU) Election Observation Report of 2007

Election in every democracy offers the people the opportunity to exercise their franchise. It is also a yardstick to evaluate the behaviour of the elite class and the values upheld in the political system. Although Nigeria has conducted many elections in the past, the April 2007 election offers one opportunity to assess the behaviour of the elite class/political parties with regard to determining the future of democracy in the country.

The entire politics and politicking according to the report fell far short of the standard. Although Nigeria is seen as a democratic nation the government did not show the political will to make the democratic high way better. The 2007 election was not credible because it lacked transparency. There was a high level of fraud. The powers that used money to assist people (Thugs) to rig elections, there was widespread voter disenfranchisement. Many pooling both were opponents to the ruling party had support were denied of election materials. In some cases materials were supplied late after the voters had returned home after waiting in vain.

In many booths thugs hijacked the election materials and stayed in a secluded place to thumb-print ballot papers in favour of their candidates. In some places law enforcement agent like the police, were used to rig election for the ruling party's candidates. The power of incumbency was used to intimidate opponents and their voters in every state. Where the incumbent governor contested every means and resources were deployed to rig election against the opponents. European Union (EU) Election Observation Report of 2007:

The elections were marked by very poor organization, lacked essential transparency; there were widespread and procedural irregularities, substantial evidence of fraud, widespread voter disenfranchisement, lack of equal conditions for political parties and candidates, and numerous incidents of violence.

The report clearly shows that Nigerian politics does not reflect the true nature of Western democracy. Why? Because politicians want power by all means.

What is to be Done?

Let us begin with the basic. Premise underlying this conference and in the words of the past commonwealth secretary general, **Emeka Anyaoky** (1999) that “Nigerians new democratic process and institutions must be strengthened and made to work”. And let us proceed to add that as shown already, historical evidence abounds that political parties any way in the world, plays concrete role in liberation struggles, in the installation of democratic dispensation, and in the consolidation of democracy.

□ First, all registered political parties must never become vehicles for the articulation and implementation of ethnic, religious or regional projects and programmes and that they must remain national in scope, coverage and orientation.

□ Second, while serving as vehicle for the struggle for power, political parties must also serve as instrument for nation building and mobilization in an ethnically plural society.

The absence of well-organized, strong, visionary and purposeful political parties “with the organization depth and durable popular support for democratic effective and legitimacy has been shown to be major cause for the collapse of fledging democracies, especially in Latin America. As is already becoming evident, the behaviour and antics of the political class as well as the internal organization, structure and method of selecting office-holders and funding, which are threats to Nigeria democracy. Similarly, democracy cannot long endure where the conditions for forming or joining political parties and contesting elections are heavily monetized and put out of reach of the middle and lower classes, not the talk of the masses, as is obviously the case in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The beauty and relevance of democracy hinges on creating a conducive political, society and economic environment devoid of discrimination, fear, poverty, diseases and marginalization where every citizen has a stake in the survival of the country; where the basic necessities of life are

guaranteed. A situation whereby the rule of law and fundamental human rights are relegated does not augur well for the sustenance of democracy a bleak future hangs on the future of democracy in Nigeria if politics continues to go anti-clock wise arising from value degeneration in the conduct of politics among the elite class/political parties. Let Nigeria learn from United State of American 2008 election, which produces the generally acceptable candidate Barrack Obama which was indeed free and fair.

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