

PERCEPTION OF THE ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigated how residents of Bayelsa State perceive the role of political parties in the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. Three questions guided the study. The descriptive survey design was adopted. The population of this study consisted of all citizens living in Bayelsa State. The sample was randomly selected among Southern Ijaw, Ogbia, Yenagoa and Sagbama citizens. Convenience sampling technique was adopted. The sample of the study consisted 314 residents of Bayelsa State. A questionnaire titled: "Political Parties and Consolidation of Democracy (PPACOD) was developed and used for data collection. The instrument had a reliability coefficient of 0.58. A simple percentage was used to answer the questions. The findings of the study verified that residents were of the opinion that political parties are not playing the role of consolidating democracy in Nigeria, godfatherism, corruption, electoral challenges and poverty are factors contributing to hindering the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria and that political parties' politics and internal democracy on the democratic process in Nigeria are moderate. Some recommendations were thus made; there should be a drastic reduction in the issue of relevance of godfatherism, there should be transparency in party primaries, there is a strong need for parties to have ideologies, with set out aims and objectives, this will help strengthen the people's belief in political parties.

Keywords: Bayelsa State, Consolidation, Democracy, Perception, Political Parties.

Introduction

Political parties play very critical roles in the democratization of any given nation. Central to the successes and failures of electoral politics is the cardinal and strategic functions of this all important and integral organ of democratization which is core to its development. "The dawn of the Nigerian Fourth Republic has witnessed renewed and sustained activities of political parties, which is the most complex and critical institutions of democracy", Akubo and Yakubu (2014). The consolidation of democracy has been plagued by numerous factors such as; political godfatherism, lack of institutionalization, personalization of political parties, absence of internal democracy within the political parties and incessant party/political violence, amongst others. The party system in Nigeria still seems weak and vulnerable, with no visible signs of adding value to democratic

consolidation. Some vital issues need be addressed, such as organizational capacity, effective leadership, internal party democracy, discipline and institutionalization.

The place of political parties for the operation of modern democratic governments cannot be overemphasized. The world has witnessed a phenomenal shift from authoritarian governance styles to a more flexible democratic system. Political party is a fundamental political institution in the practice of democracy, and as such, the concern of the researcher is the determination of the extent to which political parties in Nigeria, have contributed in the consolidation of our nascent democracy.

Strengthening of democracy seems not to be one of the main concerns of political parties in Nigeria; rather they are more preoccupied with the crude capture of power. They have

abandoned their traditional roles of membership recruitment and mobilization and political education. With the springing up of godfathers, use of uncivil means to win elections, Nigerian political parties have constantly encouraged the de-democratization of the nation. Akubo & Yakubu (2014) captures the scene better when they asserted that “a major feature of the fourth republic is the proliferation of political parties, that primarily do not seek to contest elections, but which are in more ways limited and self-serving in roles and interests”. Though there have been successful transitions of power from the ruling party to the opposition, the system has been impaired by electoral violence, corruption and the constant inability to deliver on the electioneering campaign promises made by these candidates of different political parties, which has in turn led to massive underdevelopment of every sector in the country today. Can we say, in this present political era democracy was consolidated?

Investigating how citizens living in Bayelsa state perceive the role of political parties in the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria will shed light on their views of the functioning of political parties and to provide policy makers and other stakeholders with valuable insights on how to develop strategies to improve the functioning of political parties.

On concept of political party, Nowaczyk (2014) asserted that “Political party is a group of dedicated people who come together, for the purpose of winning elections, governing the people and make public policies”.

Yagboyaju 2013 in Okeke (2015) asserted that “Democracy is as a people-centered system of government that guarantees sanctity of the electoral process whenever the regular popular elections are conducted. Implying that democracy will not only allow mass participation, by

way of encouraging the electorate to participate in the selection of their representatives, but also that it is guided by transparency and accountability in public administration”

On democratic consolidation, Ogundiya (2009) in Adeosun (2014:6) says “democratic consolidation is concerned with regime maintenance and about regarding the key political institution as the only legitimate framework for political contestation and adherence to the democratic rules of the game.” Despite the widespread recognition of the importance of political parties in enhancing democratic consolidation, there is doubt as to whether there can be consolidation of democracy in Nigeria, especially with all the negative issues experienced in the system. Democratic consolidation may be far from being achieved due to some factors pointed out by scholars; godfatherism (Kwasau, 2013), corruption (Ebegbulem, 2020), inequality in the distribution of resources (Iboi, 2017). With these facts, it becomes necessary to enquire how well political parties have worked towards consolidating democracy in Nigeria.

Irrespective of the importance of consolidation of democracy in any given nation, and the seeming slow rate in our country, there seem to be shortage of research examining the role of our political parties in ensuring its workability, particularly within the context of ascertaining opinion of citizens in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. This research gap is significant; hence this study sets out to investigate the role of the dominant political parties in the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria, the factors limiting the political parties’ participation in the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria and the effect of political parties’ politics and internal democracy on the democratic process in Nigeria, as perceived by citizens living in Bayelsa State.

Concerning political parties playing the role of consolidating democracy in Nigeria, Momoh,

(2013) in Akubo and Yakubu (2014) asserted that “political parties in Nigeria are not keen about deepening democracy; they are rather preoccupied with the capture of power through crude means. They have abandoned their traditional role of membership recruitment and mobilisation, and political education. With the emergence of godfathers, owners and joiners, political nomads and the use of uncivil means to win elections, Nigerian political parties have continued to contribute to de-democratisation.

Concerning factors limiting the political parties in the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria, Ebegbulem (2020) listed inadequate security, ethnicism, corruption, poverty and godfatherism as factors hindering consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. Iboi (2017) asserted that for democratic consolidation to gain ground in Nigeria, godfatherism must be totally eradicated, because it has been the major reason behind political violence and corruption since 1999. Dike and Onyekwelu (2018) investigated corruption and democracy in Nigeria and asserted that corruption contributed to Nigeria’s lack of good governance.

Ngara et al. (2014) in Kamaljanova et al. (2019) opined that poverty is a major impediment to democracy in Nigeria. Iboi (2017:7-9) listed lack of accountability (the public sector is not accountable to the people), inequality in the distribution of resources, absence of strong government agencies to enforce laws and rules, corruption and godfatherism as some factors militating against democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Omilusi (2016) asserted that consolidation of democracy is not possible in a system that lacks the principles of equity, equality and fair play. Kwasau (2013) highlighted ethno-religious factor, absence of true federalism, abject poverty, disjointed information, incumbency factor, godfatherism, corruption, security question and multiple electoral challenges as factors hindering consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.

Despite Nigeria’s ability to transit to democratic rule in 1999, the political landscape is still characterized with ethic and religious

divisions and corruption. Political parties that are expected to bring about consolidation of democracy in Nigeria have rather been criticized for encouraging partisan interest over national development and engaging in practices that are undemocratic and failing to promote effective governance. Hence the aim of this study was to investigate the perception of the role of political parties in the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria, specifically the objectives were:

1. to ascertain the role of the dominant political parties in consolidation of democracy in Nigeria
2. to verify the perceived factors limiting the political parties in the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria
3. to verify perceived effects of political parties’ politics and internal democracy on the democratic process in Nigeria.

Research questions

1. What is the role of the political parties in consolidating democracy in Nigeria?
2. What are the factors limiting the political parties in the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria?
3. What is the effect of political parties’ politics and internal democracy on the democratic process in Nigeria?

Methodology

The descriptive survey design was adopted. The population of this study comprised of all citizens living in Bayelsa State. The sample was randomly selected among citizens from Southern Ijaw, Ogbia, Yenagoa, and Sagbama. The sampling technique adopted for the study was convenience sampling technique. This was suitable because only members of the selected local government areas who were available and willing to participate were selected into the sample of the study. The sample of the study was 314.

A questionnaire titled: “Political Parties and Consolidation of Democracy (PPACOD) was developed and used by the researcher. It

consists of twelve (12) closed-ended items. The items were generated using a four-point Likert scale rating from strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) to strongly disagree (SD), with ratings as SA-4, A-3, D-2 and SD-1. The questionnaire has two sections, Section A for demographic data and section B consists of

twelve items to be responded to. The instrument was validated by a specialist in political science and a measurement and evaluation specialist. The instrument had a reliability coefficient of 0.58. Simple percentage was used to answer the questions.

Results

Table1: Descriptive statistics showing role of political parties in the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria as perceived by Bayelsa residents.

S/ N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
1	Dominant political parties play the role of promoting economic development	49(15.6%)	107 (34.1)	97 (30.9%)	61 (19.4%)	2.45
		156 (49.7%)		158 (50.3%)		
2	Dominant political parties in Nigeria consolidate stable democracy	33 (10.5%)	105 (33.4%)	108(34.4%)	68 (21.7%)	2.29
		138 (43.9%)		176 (56.1%)		
3	Dominant political parties play the role of providing ideologies that promote democracy and socio-economic development	38 (12.1%)	100 (31.8%)	109(34.7%)	67 (21.3%)	2.34
		138 (43.9%)		176 (56%)		
4	Dominant political parties serve as a vehicle in attaining peaceful co-existence in the Nigeria society	32 (10.2%)	98 (31.2%)	102(32.5%)	82 (26.1%)	2.20
		130 (41.4%)		184 (58.6%)		
						2.32

Table 1 revealed that 50.3% of the residents were of the view that the political parties do not play the role of promoting economic development in Nigeria. 56.1% are of the opinion that dominant political parties in Nigeria are not playing the role of consolidating a stable democracy. 56% were of the opinion that dominant political parties are not playing the role of providing ideologies that promote democracy and socio-economic development.58.6% are of the opinion that dominant political parties do not serve as a

vehicle in attaining peaceful co-existence in the Nigeria society.

Scoring the political parties in their role of bringing about consolidation of democracy in Nigeria, the residents responses put them on a mean of 2.32, on a scale of 4, where criterion mean is 2.5; thus, indicating that the residents have the opinion that political parties as not properly playing the role of consolidating democracy in Nigeria.

Research Question 2: What are the factors limiting the political parties in the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria?

Table 2: Descriptive statistics showing factors limiting the political parties in the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria

S/ N	ITEMS	SA- 4	A- 3	D- 2	SD-1	Me an
5	God-fatherism has become a factor limiting political parties in consolidating democracy in Nigeria	208 (66.2%)	71 (22.6%)	18 (5.7%)	17 (5.4%)	3.45
		279 (88.8)		35 (11.1)		
6	Corruption is a factor limiting political parties in the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria	197 (62.7%)	86 (27.4%)	22 (7.0%)	9 (2.9%)	3.45
		283 (90.1%)		31 (9.9%)		
7	Electoral challenges are factors limiting political parties in consolidating democracy in Nigeria	115 (36.6%)	121 (38.5%)	49 (15.6%)	29 (9.2%)	2.94
		236 (75.1%)		78 (24.8%)		
8	Poverty is a factor limiting political parties in consolidating democracy in Nigeria	91 (29.0%)	77 (24.5%)	76 (24.2%)	70 (22.3%)	2.51
		168 (53.5%)		146 (46.5%)		
						3.1

Table 2 revealed that 88.8% agree that godfatherism is a factor hindering political parties to effect consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. 90.1% agree that corruption is a factor limiting the dominant political parties from attaining ability to consolidate democracy in Nigeria. 75.1% agree that electoral challenges are factors limiting dominant political parties from being able to consolidate democracy in Nigeria. 53.5% agreed that poverty is a factor limiting political parties from achieving consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. Scoring the political parties being limited by factors such as godfatherism, corruption,

electoral challenges and poverty to be able to bring about consolidation of democracy in Nigeria, the residents responses put them on a mean of 3.1, on a scale of 4, where criterion mean is 2.5; indicating that the residents strongly hold on to the view that all the factors listed contribute to hinder the dominant political parties from consolidating democracy in Nigeria.

Research Question 3: What is the effect of political parties’ politics and internal democracy on the democratic process in Nigeria?

Table 3: Descriptive statistics showing effects of political parties’ politics and internal democracy on the democratic process in Nigeria

S/ N	ITEMS	SA- 4	A-3	D-2	SD-1	Mea n
9	Political parties allow equal participation of all members and groups in the democratic processes of the party to promote the democratic process in Nigeria	59 (18.8%)	97 (30.9%)	93 (29.6%)	65 (20.7%)	2.47
		156 (49.7%)		158 (50.3%)		
10		36 (11.5%)	102 (32.5%)	110 (35.0%)	66	2.29

	Political parties practice equality as an effect of their politics on the democratic process in Nigeria				(21%)	
		138 (44%)		176 (56%)		
11	Political parties provide a platform for inclusiveness as a practice in their politics to promote the democratic process in Nigeria	61 (19.4%)	113 (36.0%)	88 (28.0%)	52 (16.6%)	2.53
		174(55.4%)		140 (44.6%)		
12	Political parties are institutionalized to provide rules and guidelines that define who is eligible to contest in an election to effect the success of democratic process in Nigeria	87 (27.7%)	130 (41.4%)	56 (17.8%)	41 (13.1%)	2.82
		217 (69.1%)		97 (30.9%)		
						2.5

Table 3 showed that 49.7% of residents agree that political parties allow equal participation of all members and groups in the democratic processes of the party to promote the democratic process in Nigeria. 44% agree that political parties practice equality. On the issue of dominant political parties providing a platform for inclusiveness, 55.4% agree that they offer that and 69.1% agree that dominant political parties are institutionalized to provide rules and guidelines to define eligibility to contest elections.

Scoring the effect of political parties' politics and internal democracy on the democratic process the residents' responses put them on a mean of 2.5, on a scale of 4, where criterion mean is 2.5; indicating that the residents have an opinion that political parties' politics and internal democracy on the democratic process is moderate.

Discussion

Role of the dominant political parties in consolidation of democracy in Nigeria

The findings of the study revealed that revealed that 50.3% view that the political parties do not play the role of promoting economic development in Nigeria. 56.1% view that dominant political parties in Nigeria are not playing the role of consolidating a stable democracy. 56% view that dominant political parties are not playing the role of providing

ideologies that promote democracy and socio-economic development and 58.6% view that dominant political parties do not serve as a vehicle in attaining peaceful co-existence in the Nigerian society. This implies that citizens in Bayelsa are of the opinion that political parties are not playing the role of bringing about consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. This agrees with Momoh (2013) in Akubo and Yakubu (2014) who asserted that political parties in Nigeria are not eager about deepening democracy.

Factors limiting the political parties in the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria

The findings of the study revealed that 88.8%, 90.1%, 75.1% and 53.5% agree that godfatherism, corruption, electoral challenges and poverty respectively are factors hindering political parties to effect consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. This agrees with Kwasau (2013) and Iboi (2017) who asserted that godfatherism was a hindrance to consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. The finding also agrees with Kamaljanova et al. (2019) who opined that poverty was a major factor against consolidation of democracy and Dike and Onyekwelu (2018) who asserted that corruption was a factor that deprived Nigeria of good governance. The finding agrees with Kwasau (2013) who asserted that electoral challenges

constitute a hindering factor to consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.

Effect of political parties' politics and internal democracy on the democratic process in Nigeria

The findings of the study revealed that 49.7% of residents agree that political parties allow equal participation of all members and groups in the democratic processes of the party to promote the democratic process in Nigeria. 44% agree that political parties practice equality. On the issue of dominant political parties providing a platform for inclusiveness, 55.4% agree that they offer that and 69.1% agree that dominant political parties are institutionalized to provide rules and guidelines to define eligibility to contest elections.

The finding agrees with Iboi (2017) who states that there is inequality in the distribution of resources (Nigeria has sufficient natural resources, but only a few people in the country are able to get access to the money generated from the resources). It also agrees with Omilusi (2016) who asserted that there is absence of the principles of equity, equality and fair play in Nigerian politics.

Conclusion

The study confirmed that activities of political parties show that they are not really working towards democratic consolidation in Nigeria, and some of the factors emanating from political party activities that seem to forestall the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria include corruption, godfatherism, electoral challenges and poverty. And political parties' politics and internal democracy on the democratic process seem to be practiced only on a moderate level.

Recommendations

1. Relevance of god-fatherism should be reduced drastically to allow the people choose individuals who they feel are the best to represent them, rather than imposing candidates on the people. This would go a

long way to help strengthen the democratic processes.

2. There should be transparency in party primaries.
3. There is a strong need for parties to have ideologies, with set out aims and objectives, this will help strengthen the people's belief in political parties.
4. The issue of internal democracy in Nigerian political parties is one that has not had a conclusive resolve. There is need for parties to put mechanisms in place that will strengthen internal democracy, which will in turn lead to the full development of the political parties in Nigeria.

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