Role Of Political Parties In Resolving The Challenges Confronting Nigeriafrom 1960-1966

By
Mas'ud Bello, PhD
Department of History and International Studies,
Federal University of Gusau
Zamfara State
Corresponding email: masudbello2@gmail.com &
masudbello@fugusau.edu.ng
08080960466/0814965020&
&
Sani Ibrahim
Department of History and International Studies,
Federal University of Gusau
Zamfara State
saniibrahim@fugusau.edu.ng

Abstract

Shortly after Nigeria attained its independence on the 1st October, 1960 it experienced numerous challenges of Nation-building, this is because, the conquest and imposition of colonial rule with its divide and rule tactics and other attendant consequences has set different ethnic groups in Nigeria at logger beads, mistrust has gained ground in the body polity of the Nation, couple with devastated economy, poor infrastructural facilitates. This informed the need for vibrant political parties in that critical period with good manifestoes to serve as check and balance instrument towards resolving Nigeria's socio-economic challenges with a view to build a strong and prosperous Nation-state became imperative, therefore, this paper will examine the role of 196 0-1966 political parties in providing the required evaluation mechanisms in checkmating the excesses in democratic governance. The paper adopted the use of qualitative data obtained through; primary and secondary sources of information as well as the use of relevant existing literature. The paper finally established the impact of political parties in resolving some crisis of governance in the period under review.

Keyword: *Political Parties, Challenges, Coup d'état, Military intervention, Governance and Democracy*

Introduction

The Nigeria's first Republic lasted between 1960 and 1966 and was cut short when themilitary staged a coup on January 15, 1966 (Richard, 2023). In 1979, General OlusegunObansanjo relinquished power to a democratically elected President in the person of AlhajiShehuShagari, thereby marking Nigeria's second Republic (1979-1983), which ended abruptly when the military junta led by General MuhammaduBuhari (rtd) took over the reins of power on December 31, 1983 (Kadashi, 2023).

The major political parties that contested the second Republic General Elections were Greater Nigerian People's Party (GNPP), National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Nigeria Advance Party (NAP), Nigerian People's Party (NPP), People's

Redemption Party (PRP) and Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) (Maiyashi, 2023). However, the focus of this paper is to assess the role of political parties in resolving the challenges confronting Nigeria in the period 1960-1966.

Definition of Operational Terms

1. **Political party**: is an institution, a body or organisation that coordinates candidates to compete in a particular country's elections. It is common for the members of a party to hold similar ideas about politics, and parties may promote specific ideological or policy goals.
2. **Coup d'état**: is a seizure and removal of a government and its powers. Typically, it is an illegal seizure of power by a military faction, politician, rebel group, military, or a dictator. Dictatorial regimes on boards usually suspenddemocratic constitution during the period of their rule.
3. **Military intervention**: is the movement of troops or forces of military action by troops already stationed in the context of some political issues or disputes. It is locally also referred to as military takeover of Government.
4. **Governance**: is a system that provides a framework for managing organisations. It identifies who can make decisions, who has the authority to act on behalf of the organisation and who is accountable for how an organisation and its people behave and perform.
5. **Democracy**: is a system of government in which laws, policies, leadership, and major undertakings of a state or other polity are directly or indirectly decided by the "people," . The leadership is always elected through the ballots under the platforms of political parties.

Statement of the problem and Significance of the study

Political parties have wide range of roles to play in the sustenance of democratic through checkmating and evaluation of their members representing them in governance (Mahadi and Kwanashie, 1999). Their statutory role transcends beyond the conduct of party primaries. On this premise this paper took into cognizance the paucity of documentaries on the role of political parties in addressing the challenges of governance in Nigeria. To this end this article brings to fore the roles of political parties in promoting national developmental interest and also protect the integrity of political system against outside threats.

Objectives of the study are to:

1. Trace the foundations of political parties in Nigeria
2. Highlight how political have fared in Nigeria
3. To examine the contributions of political parties s in addressing national challenges

Research method

The research examined and used qualitative data through facts emerging from oral interviews. Primary and Secondary sources of information were timely utilised. The research also considered archival literature to obtain relevant documentaries for the construction of the work. Existing literature on party politics were also studied for guide.

Role of Political Parties in Resolving Nigerian Challenges 1960-1966

Political parties are the bedrock of democratic governance. Political parties give its citizens the choice of electing their representative into government from the grassroots to the national level. The major political parties during Nigeria's first Republic were the Northern People's Congress (NPC), the National Council of Nigerian Citizen (NCNC) and the Action Group (AG). Between 1960-1966, political parties served as viable check institutions on the excesses of the ruling and opposition parties, which is one of the beauties of democracy (Mahadi and Kwanashie, 1999). Being always at loggerheads keeps the ruling party abreast and on its toes to govern with credibility and fairness in order to avoid criticism and condemnation. This of course goes a long way in resolving challenges confronting Nigeria during the first Republic, 1960-1966.

In the first Republic, political heavyweights such as ObafemiAwolowo, Sir Ahmadu Bello, Dr. NnamdiAzikiwe, TafawaBalewa, S.L Akintola, Adelabu, J.S Tarka, Aminu Kano and few others helped in shaping the behavioral patterns of the political parties between 1960 to 1966 (Daure, 2015).

Various attempted were made by different political parties to form strong alliances and coalition to seize political control from the ruling parties, albeit, with little or no success. The media is often regarded as one of the pillars of democracy in any society.

Opposition parties sometimes structure themselves to press hard for the implementation of viable developmental agendas of policies. The AG, NPC and NCNC were crucial for government

accountability as they play an important watchdog role and act as a restraint or check on the abuse of government power (Mahadi and Kwanashie, 1999). The first Republic collapse largely due to military interference and the mismanagement of the economy such as widespread corruption and massive electoral fraud witnessed during the general election (Ademoyega, 1981).

The opposition parties articulated an alternative course of action from that being implemented by the government of the day and criticize its action when they see fit. The exercise of opposition power in the legislature is in part of an advertisement to the electorate for an alternative with its own polies and ideals that is achievable through the next elections should voters endorse it (Aborishade, 2013).For examples, the impeachment of Balarabe Musa was a clear ideological incompatibility between the forces behind NPN and the forces behind the PRP. While the forces behind NPN were those of domination, those behind PRP were of liberation and freedom; and thus, the two could not co-exist (Tandu and Muhammad, 2014). Various scholars have attempted to define opposition parties (Southern African Catholic Bishops, 2012). Therefore, as an opposition party at the national political stage, the PRP was expected to protect the rights and interests of citizens, to monitor government performance, and to expose corruption.

The first party to assume the role of an opposition party was the Action Group (AG) led by ObafemiAwolowo in the first Republic. Thepolitical intrigues during that era weakened the AG that held sway in the South West. Eventually, the politics of intolerance, suspicion and bitterness among the major political parties prompted the military to intervene in Nigerian politics on January 15, 1966. A truly democratic system is incomplete without the existence of viable opposition parties (Newswatch Times, 2015). Opposition politics is an ideological stance taken by group of politicians whose party fails to win a convincing majority in the election (Aborishade, 2013).Additionally, opposition parties bring opportunities for representation and participation. Furthermore, opposition parties have the responsibility to stimulate debates with society over political issues and policies, thus allowing society to question the actions and choices of government (Ibietan, 2015).

There was a coalition government at the centre made up of the Northern People's Congress (NPC) and the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC). The combined vote of Members of

Parliament (MPs) of the two parties was sufficient to repudiate any move of censure by the other political party, viz, the Action Group (AG), which represented the official opposition at the centre. The two coalition parties were disparate in terms of social orientation and elite composition, yet there was a common political group for unity. The state was new and there were plenty of opportunities for political patronage. Thus, members of the coalition were not prepared to tolerate circumstances that could provoke any crisis that might put this political opportunity in jeopardy. This was more so in a political atmosphere which construed public offices as an avenue for obtaining wealth as well as self and communal aggrandizement. When eventually a crisis erupted between 1962 and 1963, it was the logical by-product of a situation where the disintegration of the power base of the official opposition Action Group in the Western region provided the dominant party in the Federal coalition (NPC) with the opportunity of an alternative coalition partner to wheat it saw as a 'restless' and 'too demanding' NCNC. This situation provided a unique opportunity for the employment of an ouster clause in the Constitution with significant overtones for the development of the political system. Hitherto, political circumstances had conspired to assure the strength of regional executive as was the case with the coal lion government at the centre. The three major political parties such as NPC, NCNC and A were in firm control of one three regions (North, East and West) that made up the Federation, thus ensuring their political virility at the centre meant that impeachment clauses his respect of regional executives were dead letters since executive malfeasance must first be tabled for redress within the confines of the party platform where it was invariably tolerated or settled. An appeal beyond this court of the floors of the legislature stood the risk of being construed as disloyalty to the party with the possible penalty of expulsion. Also, as it is the normal process under the Westminster Model (and this was true of both Federal and Regional Legislatures) MPs were constrained by certain control mechanism such as the instrument of the party Whip. Thus, recalcitrant MPs was kept in line. Nonetheless, the crisis in the Western region began following a split in AG, the ruling party; one, the official fraction was led by ObafemiAwolowo, party leader and leader of opposition at the Federal level, while the other, a breakaway group and was headed by Samuel LadokaAkintola, Premier of the Western Region, the party's power base.

This motivated the Central Government (NPC-NCNC Coalition) to intervene in its own political interest. Each arm of the coalition was nonetheless at cross purpose in this enterprise. NCNC which was the major opposition party in the Western region saw it as an opportunity to gain control. Its therefore, assumed a benevolent perspective to the attitude of its regional MPs in the West who cooperated with Akintola's fraction of AG to form the United People's Party (UPP), transformed into the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP). The implicit assumption was that either Akintola would recongise his new position as a NCNC, protégé and act accordingly or be removed and substituted with NCNC leadership. Northern People's Congress had a different idea when it used Federal power to reinstall the Akintola fraction (now backed by NCNC-MPs) after a short period of emergency (Ojukwu, 1989; Rimi, 2023). It was that, Akintola should wield the new coalition into a new unit antagonistic or independent both of original AG and NCNC. This option offered the opportunity to cultivate a new coalition partner at the Federal level who would, if successful, give it control of two of the of the three regions that made up the Federation. Therefore, it could launch a serious bid to dislodge NPC at the Federal level. The stakes were high and it was lucky for NPC that Akintola was thinking along the same line and was able to carry the bulk of his new associate with him.

The long-term result was less fortuitous; the Western crisis was the beginning of the political travails of the first Republic which saw its displacement by military rule (Ademoyega, 1981). The important factor, nonetheless, is that ouster clauses were used sparingly in the first Republic and this may well explain why the founding fathers of the second Republic did not attach any special consideration to the impeachment process. Indeed, the sub-committee of the Constitution Drafting Committee on the Executive and Legislature recommended the adoption with modifications of Section 38 of the 1963 Constitution to reflect emphasis on the Presidential Executive Model, in particular, as also the institutions of the President, State Governor and their Deputies (Dudley, 1973). The amended version provided for approval of the motion to investigate the conduct of the President or Vice-President at the Centre (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1985) by at least one-third of the members of the National Assembly (including the Senate and House of Representatives). Before this, the Houses were required to consider the motion for a minimum of seven or a maximum of 14 days on the basis of the report of a joint investigation

committee of both houses which looked into allegations and reported back within three months.

Shortcomings of Political Parties in addressing National Problems

Nigeria's political parties have been plagued by suspensions and expulsions of party members, cross carpeting particularly prior to elections and deep divisions and fractions that have manifested sometimes in violent conflicts (Usman and Abba, 2000). Again, intra-party violent conflicts have been particularly heightened during election periods because of the imposition of favoured and dubious consensus and the swapping of nominated candidates by party chieftains. The absence of equalitarian platforms and the subversion of the will of ordinary party members and delegates in party primaries, have grieved several party leaders, members and underlined numerous defections and cross carpeting.

The opposition of parties were treated with great contempt by the ruling parties and vice versa. Members of opposition parties that join forces with the ruling parties are labeled as traitors and can even be demonized. Nigeria is a heterogeneous country made up of diverse ethnic groups with Christianity and Islam as dominant religions. Additionally, Nigeria was under military dictatorship for almost thirty years at different intervals. These underlying factors seem to have affected the psyche of politicians in Nigeria. In Nigeria's political space, whether the ruling or the oppositions parties, the major decisions which affect the society are taken by the elite, and these decisions usually reflect the interest of the elite rather than the wishes of the majority; the mass of the population are largely controlled and manipulated by the elite, passively accepted the propaganda which justified elite rule. Major change in society occurs when one elite replace another.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Nigerian formally became independent on 1st October 1960, under the NPC-NCNC Coalition headed by AlhajiAbubakarTafawaBalewa as the Prime Minister whiles the Action Group acting as the opposition with Chief ObafemiAwolowo as the leader. Theaction group transformed into Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) in 1980s and served as the main opposition party in the second Republic.In Kaduna state, the NPN was the opposition party against the ruling People Redemptions Party (PRP), while in the Legislature, the NPN had

an overwhelming control. In other words, the PRP was in the opposition in the State Assembly. Therefore, objective oppositions by political should be objective and issue based and should be geared towards bringing in a desired positive change for national development in the country.

One of the beauties of democracy is that political parties should provide an appropriate platform for inclusiveness, because political parties and representative institutions are key in this direction. Political Parties are the main gatekeepers for candidates to participate in elections. Parties therefore have great influence over the degree of people's political participation at local, regional, and national levels. As intermediary institutions, they link the state and civil society, translating the policy preferences of citizens into political action. Political parties and other parties in opposition can put pressure on ruling parties to strictly adhere to party manifestos, election campaign promises and the progressive demand of the opposition parties.

References

Aborisade O (2013). Opposition Politics in Nigeria: A Study of South-West, *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences,* Vol. 10(4)

Ademoyega A. (1981). "Why We Struck: The Story of the First Nigerian Coup", Evans Brothers (Nigerian Publishers) Limited, Ibadan.

Daure B. (2015). "The Pioneer: Sir Ahmadu Bello, Sardauna of Sokoto, Premier of Northern Nigeria", Published by Ahmadu Bello University Press Limited, Kaduna."

Dudley B.J (1973). Instability and Political Order: Politics and Crisis in Nigeria

Federal Republic of Nigerian (1985), "Change in the Constitution" Report of the Constituiton Drafting Committing Containing the Draft Constitution. Vol. 1, Martin Dent West Africa.

Ibietan J.I and Ajayi O.O (2015). "The Governing Elite and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeri: An Appraisal of the Fourth Republic" *Journal of Human and Social Science Research;* Vol. 6 (1).

Mahadi A. and Kwanashie G (1999). Leadership Accountability and the Future of Nigeria, Published by Arewa House, Centre for Historical Documentation and Research, ABU, Kaduna

Newswatch Times (2015). Party Merger: How APC broke 50-year jinx in Nigerian Politics, April 12, 2015, accessed from http:www.mynewswatchtimesng.com/party-merger-how-apc-broke-50-year-jinx-in-nigerian-politics

Ojukwu E.O (1989). Because I am Involved, Published by Spectrum Book Limited, Ibadan

Southern African Catholic Bishops (2012). Opposition Parties Sustaining Multiparty Democracy, Conference Briefing Paper

Tandu K.Y and Muhammad Z. (2014). Balarabe Musa: The Voice of the Masses, Sarumedia Publishers, Kaduna

Usman Y.B and Abba A. (2000). The Misrepresentation of Nigeria, Published by Centre for Democratic Development Research and Training, Zaria-Kaduna

Oral Informants

Name	Age	Occupation	Interviewed at	Date
Abubakar Rimi	75	Politician	Kaduna	11th March, 2023
Sambo Kadashi	71	Politician	Kaduna	11th March, 2023
Tom Maiyashi	68	Politician	Kaduna	9th March, 2023
Umaru Richard	67	Journalist	Kaduna	7th March, 2023