

Machine Politics, Intra-Party Polyarchy and Democratic Recession in Nigeria

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Abstract

The dismantling of autocratic and Aristotelian regimes and dynasties in Africa following the forces of colonialism and later, the independence of greater number of developmental states in post-colonial Africa has swiftly ushered in democracy. As a political entity, Nigeria having gotten her flag independence in 1960 has been influenced significantly by the exogenous forces of democracy and democratization process taking over the world polity as contained in the philosophy of liberalism. But, in as much as the wave of democracy seems to be appreciated, it has been truncated by the post-colonial characteristics of African political demagogues, internal wrangling among elites in the political parties striving to select candidates for their personal aggrandizement at the expense of the mass members of the party. This is believed, affects the entrenchment of democratic values in Nigerian political system. However, arising from the premise of the study, it is the thrust of the paper to investigate how leaders of political parties in Nigeria have been implicated in the selection of candidates, political party decision making and their implications in withering the democratic modulation in the country. The study utilized qualitative method in generating its data, while content analysis was employed. The theoretical frame work of analysis is adequately anchored on the theory of elite as propounded by Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca and Robert Mitchel. The findings of the study have significantly revealed that the inabilities of developmental states to appreciate the dividends of democracy is chiefly attributed to unholy democratic characters exhibited by big party stalwarts while selecting candidates to contest vacant political positions in the country. Therefore, arising from the findings, the paper recommends among others; that political parties should strive for democratic holiness. Hence, there is need to reposition the letters and spirit of its constitution in selection of candidates to fill vacant political positions.

Keywords: *Elitism, Democracy, Godfather, Political Party, Vote buying.*

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Background to the Study

The essence of man in his environment is all about socialization. Right from the stage of wandering band to the present modern society, man has continued to interact with his fellows. The end product of such interactions among men has led to struggle for survival on limited resources of the environment. Politics, it is said, has defined the existence of man in the struggle for power and over limited resources. The struggle for power by man over his fellow has amounted to exercise of influence. This scenario is likened to the dictum of the great political philosopher, Aristotle (384-322BC), that, "Man is by Nature a Political Animal". By this, he meant that the essence of social existence is politics, and when two or more men are interacting, they are invariably involved in a political relationship. In every society, men have continued to struggle to define positions as they tactically attempt to achieve their personal security from available resources. They try to influence others in their social relations to accept their views.

However, following the emergency of developmental state of Nigeria from the colonial and imperialistic regimes, and subsequent gaining of political cum flag independence in 1960, Nigeria has been observed to have been influenced by the forces of democracy and democratization which have been sweeping all over the third and peripheral countries of Africa. However, trapped with the tenets of liberalism, democracy in Nigeria has ushered in the party politics, a vessel to corridor of power, and key to unlock the limited resources of the state. It is argued that in all intents and purposes, democracy is the highest achievements of mankind in social and political relations. It is the product of sweat, toil, creativity, blood and sacrifice of millions of people across space and time in the human struggles for a better life. Therefore, to negate democracy is to negate this struggle, toil and sacrifice and contribution of this struggle to human progress. Equally, a negation of the struggle is a greater social and political progress (Nnoli, 2011:2)

Furthermore, the institution of political party and party recruitment in Nigeria has played out formidable role in the development of the nation-state. According to Omodia (2010), the existence of political party is one of the key political institutions in a competitive democracy. He continued to maintain that political party serves as an index through which democratic governance could be compared in a state in that structure and operation of the party politics tend to serve as a measuring rod for determining the fragility or otherwise of democratic system. Moreover, it is observed that despite the avalanche of roles performed by the institution of political party in metropolis and developed economies, the practice of party politics in Nigeria has taken an off-track. The nature and character of party structure and decision making by party leaders in choosing candidates for political positions has negated the spirit of intra party Polyarchy, thereby enhancing the influence of city-based party bosses. However, it is against this established backdrop that the paper tends to appreciate some

operational concepts, political party recruitment and selection of candidates, decision making and influence of godfathers in ushering democratic recession in Nigeria polity.

Conceptual Clarification

Machine politics

In the recent time, the concepts of politics and machine have attracted plethora explanations from different authors and scholars. This implicates that definitions in the area of machine politics have failed to lend their credence to an easy lens of conceptualization. Thus, politics may be treated as an essential contested concept, in the sense that the term has a number of acceptable and legitimate meanings (Heywood, 2007:4). However, according to Nnoli (2003:7), politics is defined as all activities that are directly or indirectly associated with the emergence, consolidation and use of state power. In his own account, Heywood (2007:5), examined different views of politics as the art of government, public affairs, compromise and consensus; and power and distribution of resources. But, despite varying definitions by scholars, the central theme revolving most of the definitions and explanation of politics hint on the following;

That politics is an activity, arising out of interactions between people or among people and to that extent, public. It develops out of diversity, indicating a wide range of opinions, wants, needs or interests. Its diversities are closely linked to the existence of conflicts. Politics involves the expression of different opinions, competition between rival groups or clash of irreconcilable interest. To that extent, politics is an art of government, the art of administration (Arora, 2015)

However, machine politics is a style of politics in which party bosses control a mass organisation through patronage and the distribution of favours (Heywood, 2007:281). They do this in order to win the mass support of the members of the party and society in general. The phenomenon and position of machine politics in Nigeria has been extended from the activities of party bosses at the national level to the ward level. They wield unimaginable influences couple with their personality cult in organizing forces to wrestle power with others who might stands to their challenge.

Intra-party Democracy

Like every other construct in the field of politics, intra-party democracy has solicited myriad of views and perceptions from scholars owing to their respective scholarship. As popular the concept of intra-party democracy or internal party democracy seems, it describes a wide

range of methods for including party members and faithful in internal deliberations and decisions (Scarrow, 2004). Supporting the above, Ojukwu and Tope (2011), noted intra-party democracy as the management and functioning of political parties and party system based on democratic principles that always reflect in terms of candidate selection, leadership selection, policy making, membership relations, gender, minorities, youths and party funding. The central theme here becomes a clear level playing ground for equal opportunities and participation of the mass members of the party faithful in available positions and decision making.

Literature Review

The review of extant literature in the issues of concern in this paper was done using the thematic approach under the following:

Political Party Organisation and Candidate Selection

In every democratic set up, the functions of political party are not limited to elite formation and recruitment, interest articulation and aggregation but also included mass representation. The organization of party plays an important role in the quest for winning an election and the consolidation of state power. The configuration of power of political party determines who gets what, when and how. This is to say that the arrangement and the structure of party is the corner stone for intra-party decisions in choosing candidates to fill vacant political positions.

However, one of the earliest attempts in investigating internal party democracy undertaken by Mosei Ostrogorski in his writing "*Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties*", maintained that the representation of individual interests had lost to the growing influence of party machine and control exerted by a caucus of senior party figures (Heywood, 2007:280). In most African countries in general, and Nigeria in specific party bosses see themselves as demagogue, and exercise overwhelming influence on the selection of candidates for political positions. There is no doubt that the participation of political parties in Nigeria lack essential internal credos and virtues that conform to international best practices in the developed countries (Norris, 2004). This implies that one of the vital concerns in intra party democracy and Polyarchy is the nomination process that serves as a prism through which power is distributed among organs and factions in the party (Ojukwu and Tope, 2011).

Furthermore, the methods of candidate selection and nomination for primary elections in Nigeria have taken a paradigm shift from the principles guiding the operation of democracy. It has been characterized by shambles and intrigues. The outright imposition and substitution of candidates does not thrive well for internal growth and development of the party. It often leads to political transfer window and mass defection from one political party to the other. However, the inabilities of political parties to manage their structures toward selection of candidates for

election further deepen the likely chances of losing out to other parties. Prior to the general elections of 2015, it was discovered that the inability of the party at the center, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), to manage its house and organized free and credible primary elections from ward level to the national positions affected her potential in winning the presidential election, despite numerous institutions at the disposal of the presidency. The same scenario has led on the defection of political heavy weights and money bags from the ruling All Progressives Congress, APC. For instance, in Benue state, the inability of PDP to organize rancor free primary election for gubernatorial position in 2015, few months before proper elections forced Samuel Ortom to defect to APC, one week before the latter's primary election where he became the flag bearer and won. Also, at the National Assembly, some political opportunists cum politicians utilized the irreconcilable internal wrangling in PDP and got automatic tickets under APC for both House of Representatives and Senate.

Moreover, in the recent time, the rate of internal party crises has not ceased. In Ekiti state, following the unilateral decision of then governor, Ayodele Peter Fayoshe appointing his deputy without due consultation of the party stakeholders and faithful triggered animosity within the party PDP, that affected the party's popularity in the state. It was noted that two months after declaration by the governor for his preference, the chief of staff to the governor resigned and accused the governor of destroying the party. As if it was not enough, the former governor of Enugu state, Barrister Sullivan Chime left PDP the party that made him number citizen in the state for eight years. On a general note, the poor performance of PDP in the 2015 general elections was attributed to faulty organization of the party characterized by big party stalwarts ceding presidential flag to then president, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan. However, the scenario did not augur well with a few party oligarchies from the north who clamored for the completion of the tenure of President Alhaji Musa Yar' Adua who died while in office. The wrongful selection of candidature of Goodluck Jonathan denied PDP its power of incumbency.

Furthermore, the emergency of All Progressives Congress (APC), on 6th February, 2013 with conglomeration of four minor parties; Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) and factional group of Peoples Democratic Party (New-PDP), came together to form APC with sole intent of unseating PDP from power. The APC as a formidable political platform for the 2019 general elections has witnessed serial defections of its major stakeholders and faithful due largely to compromise by the leadership of the party. At the national level, APC has continued to experience sizeable crisis as a result of unholy alliances within it. For instance, there is no love lost between president and the national leader of APC, Asiwaju Ahmed Tinubu. The inability of the latter to appoint sizeable number of ministers and other appointees coupled with failed attempts to produce or even select the gubernatorial candidates of Kogi states and Edo state

respectively has shown the hand writing on the wall that all is not well within APC. The defection of Alhaji Atiku Abubakar from APC to PDP and subsequent his emergence as the standard flag bearer of the party points that all is not well with APC come 2019.

Appreciation of lack of internal democracy of party in selecting its candidates for political positions, Mba (2011) and Adekeye (2017:13), noted that defection has always revolved on members' inability to attain their political ambitions in their present party or platform. The lack of consensus among party stalwarts and fragile party organizational structure lead to:

1. Emergence of formidable factions struggling to control the sole of the party at national and state levels.
2. Outright loss of state and power by political party to another.
3. Creation or formation of mushroom and weak political parties
4. Political unrest and instabilities
5. Reduction of democratic values thereby entrenching democratic recession

Patron-Client Relations and Democratic Recession

The operation of the institution of liberal democracy has keyed Nigeria to the wave of democratization process which has continued to sweep the entire African continent and the world at large. The re-emergence of democracy in Nigeria after years of military interregnum and intervention, political parties were allowed to be formed and contest for elections. Such formation of different political parties and other institutions for electioneering point that Nigeria is ready to follow the global trends in democratization process. However, earliest formation of political parties in Nigeria was not devoid of elites, godfathers and patrons who played very significant role in ensuring that candidates of political party clinch the corridor of state power. This, they did by putting their resources in making sure that preferred candidate or godson succeeds at the party primaries and subsequently, the general elections. Suffice the above; it is worth knowing that there are much godfathers in very many political parties, which although not formed by a single "money bag", nonetheless have a few rich people and godfather exercising significant influences over their affairs, often with conflicting objectives (Jega, 2017:1).

The increasing influence of machine politics and godfather syndrome in Nigeria has in the recent time enlarged its coast. Ab initio, the rate and influence of machine politics was at very minimal level in few states like Anambra, Oyo and Enugu. But, the reverse is the greater spread of machine politics, godfathers and godsons. There is no part of Nigeria where the institution of godfathers has not been clearly pronounced, from elections to local councils through the elections to states houses of assembly, gubernatorial, national assembly and the presidency.

Furthermore, researchers in the field of comparative politics and government have articulated the role political patrons. According to Ugwu, Izueke and Obasi (2013:135), the formation of political parties in Nigeria, following the introduction of Clifford constitution of 1922, led to the formation of Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP), in 1923, National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC), in 1944, Action Group (AG), in 1951 and Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC), in 1951. The leaders of these political parties provided the war chest and financial stands needed for the formation and winning of elections by the party. Accordingly, the elites who claimed the role of godfathers, and political demagogues during elections exercised unflinching influence and support in dictating candidates and positions to occupied (Albert, 2005). However, according to Coleman (1972:273), godfathers of the period (1944-1958), prior to Nigeria's independence in the persons of Saduana of Sokoto, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, Chief Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and Chief Obafemi Awolowo controlled and influenced the choice of candidacy and decision making of their respective parties.

Moreover, according to Nnamani (2004:28) and Edigin (2010: 179), the high credence to the institutionalization of godfathers and machine politics in Nigeria is poverty. Accordingly, poverty makes possible for emergence of godfather; prevalence of this makes it easy for godfathers to rise and take control of political environment through economic bases. Corroborating the above indicates elections being manipulated through financial inducement, vote buying and outright substitution of candidates and rigging of elections through pay-off. The serial activities of godfathers have come to the stage where democracy has been withered and replaced with moneyocracy and dollarization of politics. However, existence of machine politics does not augur well with the nature of fragile democracy in Nigeria. It is important to appreciate that despite the long return of democracy in Nigeria, it has not been deeply rooted in the nation's polity as it has undermined Polyarchy, thereby entrenching democratic recession.

Table 1: Showing How Machine Politics Affected General Elections, 1979-2015

Year	Voter Turn Out (%)	Total Votes	Registration	VAP Turn Out (%)	Voting Age Population	Population	Invalid Votes (%)
2015	43.65	29,432,083	67,422,005	32.11	91,669,056	181,562,056	2.85
2011	53.68	39,469,484	73,528,040	48.32	81,691,751	155,215,573	3.19
2007	57.49	35,397,517	61,567,036	49.85	71,004,507	131,859,731	-
2003	69.08	42,018,735	60,823,022	65.33	64,319,246	129,934,911	6.00
1999	52.26	30,280,052	57,938,945	57.36	52,792,781	108,258,359	1.40
1993	-	14,039,486	-	27.79	50,526,720	105,264,000	-
1979	35.25	17,098,267	48,499,091	44.83	38,142,090	77,841,000	2.00

Source: International IDEA, (2015).

The table above depicts how the activities and influences of machine politics and godfather have reduced the rate of democratic values and practices. It was noted that democratic recession set in due to power play amongst godfathers in various political platforms. The wanton influences of godfathers had scared large number of persons from participating in politics. However, face-validation of the data in the data indicates that between 2011 and 2015 general elections, the number of registered voters reduced from 73,528,040 in 2011 to 67,422,005 in 2015 general elections.

Theoretical Framework of Analysis

A clear contradiction of the Marxian theory of power can be seen in the elite theory which insists that power flows not from the ownership of property but from political and bureaucratic organizations. It argues that politics cannot be properly studied without identifying the ruling class, or the governing and non-governing elites, and measuring their respective roles. Politics being the struggle for power functions within social groups. In this way, elite theory and group theory become intimately related in view of the fact that, both are concerned with power. The basic assumptions of elite theory as captured by Thomas Dye and Harmon Zeigler (1996), include the following:

1. Society is divided into the few who have power and the many that do not. Only a small number of persons allocate values for society; the masses do not decide public policy.
2. The few who govern are not typical of the masses that are governed. Elites are drawn disproportionately from the upper socio-economic strata of society.
3. The movement of non-elites to elite position must be slow and continuous to maintain stability and avoid revolution. Only non-elites who have accepted the basic consensus can be admitted to governing circles.
4. Elites share a consensus on the basic values of social system and the preservation of the system.

5. Public policy does not reflect demands of the masses but rather the prevailing values of the elite. Changes in public policy will be incremental rather than revolutionary.
6. Active elites are subject to relatively little direct influence from apathetic masses. Elites that influence masses are more than masses that influence elites.

However, the central theme of elite theory of power lies in the affirmation that power configuration is basically the configuration of competing and struggling interests organized into groups (Macridis & Brown, 1964). The classical expression of this theory is contained in the works of Gaetano Mosca who superficially seems to follow Marx in his argument that, “in all societies, two classes of people appear- a class that rules and a class that is ruled”. This political or ruling class enjoys legal and factual authority as an organized minority, a situation inherent in all social organizations but one which reaches its highest expression in what is called the bureaucratic state (Alan, 1975). Here, the state embodies specialization, and the salaried officials form part of the political class. Democracy, therefore, becomes the rule of an organized minority which in spite of its appearance to reflect the mass participation, is characterized with monopoly to only ruling class.

Theoretical Application

The nature and configuration of political recruitment in Nigeria could be explained from the prism of elite theory. Conceived as a system, society is divided in to two classes; the class that have access to power and instrument of power, and the majority class that do have access to political power, but stand at the mercy of the elites for political recruitments and positions. In Nigeria, minority few who have access to political power always allocate considerable influence and power, and determine who gets what, when and how. They control the state and its instrument through a formidable political platform with which they ascend to the corridor of power. This implies that, despite the configuration of political party and party politics in Nigeria, foundation members who are the elites control the parties.

The elites are the major financiers of party, and they equal determine who among themselves, and rarely from non- elites, clinches the mandate of the party for elections. In Nigeria, formations of political parties are largely the efforts of few elites drawn disproportionately from upper socio-economic strata of society. Formation of political parties by the elites do not take into cognizance the aspirations and interests of the majority poor who strive to grab mandate of party, which always remain impossible.

Methodology

The paper utilized documentary method. Data for the study were gathered through secondary sources such as official gazettes, books, journal articles, internet sources, Newspapers and monograph. Data from these sources were analyzed using content-analysis.

Findings

The findings of the study have revealed that the inability of Nigeria state to appreciate the dividends of democracy is chiefly attributed to unholy democratic characters exhibited by big party stalwarts while selecting candidates to contest vacant political positions in the country. This implies that party chieftains play swift roles in emergency of candidate for political position, occasion where each tries as much as possible to impose candidate. There is high dissatisfaction within elites who could not succeed in their tactics, but resort to defection to other political parties. Also, the civic and political rights of citizens are undermined as they find it extremely difficult to clinch party platform without godfather.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In modern societies, political parties have come to play considerable and significant functions, thereby consolidating on the principles and practices of democracy. As an element of democracy, political party ensures the provision of avenue for citizens' participation in politics. However, the case of democratic consolidation in Africa and Nigeria in particular is a negation of ideal practice of what political party portends. In this study, effort was exerted in appreciation of the nature of internal party democracy, how it has helped in bringing cohesion among party faithful, and its abuses by chieftains of party who are striving for the selfish aggrandizement. Also, the nature of party organization and candidate selection were appreciated. It is discovered that founders of political parties hold firmly every action taken for or against the party. Discussed in the paper is the character of patron-client relations, and how it has impinged on the consolidation of democracy, thereby giving way to democratic recession. The findings of the study reveal the inability of Nigeria state to hold on to the dividends of democracy. Again, it creates condition for do or dies affairs among elites and chieftains of political parties. Also, civic and political rights of citizens have been undermined as they find it difficult to participate in party primaries and election.

Arising from the findings of the study, the paper recommends that:

1. It is high time political parties organized themselves toward observing democratic principles and practices.
2. The party constitution should be supreme, and above every members of political party. This implies that constitution shall guide the selection of candidates in filling vacant positions.

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