

Political Parties,
Pressure Groups
& Public Opinions

in Democratic Politics



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Chapter 6

Political Party Process and Electoral Systems

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Introduction

The growth of modern democratic practice centers on political parties, which stand out as organized platforms for the articulation of aspirations and canvassing for the electoral votes. A political system is an important institutional component of all liberal democracies and electoral processes. It is through political parties that candidates are produced, the parameters on the issues and agenda within which elections are conducted is set, it is within this context that elected officials are also expected to perform certain duties and obligations from one election to the other. It is important to stress that political parties carried out their activities within the ambit of electoral laws as specified by the electoral body.

However, it is the task of this paper to review the issue of political party system and the electoral process to bring to limelight the impact of political parties on the electoral system, types of political parties, functions of political parties, the relationship between political party system and electoral system.

Conceptual Clarification

Political Party System:

A lot of variations exist among scholars on the conceptualization of party system. A party system in the view of Lawson (2009:23) consists of all the parties in a particular nation and the laws and customs that govern their behaviour. Nnoli (2003:212) however, widens its conceptual scope when he explains that whenever the phrase party system is used, three ideas seem to be implied. The first is the idea of constitutional and legal regulations governing the formation, organization and functioning of political parties. The second is the balance of the

electoral support among political parties in a given political system. The third is the actual number of political parties operating in a country. A close examination of Nnoli's view entails that the party system is broad based and comprehensive and therefore, shall be our working definition for this discussion. Political parties on the other hand refer to organizations. According to Ayo (2012) as organizations, they are deliberately constructed and reconstructed to mobilize voters on behalf of a common set of interests, concerns to achieve specific goals. In a similar vein, Ajene (1996) sees political parties as the aggregative process in which diverse interests are brought together under a broadened political platform with a state program or set of appeals and regularized procedures for selecting candidates, conducting political campaigns and seeking to elect governmental officeholders. Party plays a preponderant role in the development and substance of democratic process. According to Jega (1990:160), the party system emerges out of the political experience of a country with a competitive electoral process and party competition. This is why the political system of a society is rooted within the context of the people's nature and way of life. This is why in some countries, party systems are based on the ethnic considerations while in others, it is based on religious sentiments, in others; it is based on economic class.

Electoral Process

The electoral process as a concept suffers a definitional problem. However, for the purpose of this work we shall adopt the following definitions. To Nwabueze (1993), the electoral process embraces within its ambit all the institutional procedures, arrangement and actions involved in elections. In a further argument he stated that the electoral process involves issues like suffrage, registration of voter, delimitation of constituencies, the right to contest elections, the electoral competition between rival political parties, bodies charged with conduct and supervision of election, the method of selection of candidates within the political parties, nomination of candidates, method of voting, the actual conduct of election, the determination of results, trials and determinations of electoral malpractices and their consequences.

In another dimension, Chukwu (2007:77) notes that electoral process includes election observations and verification activities carried out by local and international bodies or both. It also involves the establishment of institutions and structures that will mobilize the populace toward involvement in the electoral process, and provide the rules and regulations that govern the process. The electoral process can be divided into two parts, namely the constitutional and non constitutional. The former entails issues which are prescribed in the constitution such as the body overseeing the electoral body and its independence. The latter involves aspects such as voter's register, procedure at elections, electoral offences among others.

An Analysis of Party System

Party system permeates a potpourri of issues in any democratic society. If it is well organized, it has a high propensity of impacting positively on the political, economic, social, cultural and a multiplicity of other substantial sectors of the society. It is however noted that in Nigeria for instance, the party system is predicated on the western type of the capitalist production, which produce its unjust and exploitative tendencies and structural dependencies. Considering the above background, we shall discuss the types and functions of political party system.

Types of Political Party-System

Considering Nnoli's (2003) conception of party system, we shall discuss and analyze the following types of party system such as one-party system, two-party system, and multi-party system.

Zero Party System

In a zero party system, elections are not contested on party basis. Individuals are allowed to mobilize their supporters on a non party basis to win elections. It is expected that, a non party system rids the society of ethnic based sentiments. Instead it encourages unity and credibility.

One Party System

This is a situation where the political landscape of a society recognizes only one party under which people contest and win elections. Nnoli (2003:213) viewing this from an African perspective asserts that one party state has been the most prevalent form of party system in contemporary times. Conversely, Nazi regimes in Germany and Italy, as well as the communist regimes have been, and still are one party system. The system is usually characterized by a constitutional provision that only one political party is recognized by the state. Examples include the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), Zambia's United National Independence Party (UNIP), Kenya's Kenya African National Union (KANU) or the parti Democratique de la Cote d'Ivoire (PDCL) of Ivory Coast. This kind of party system has advantages such as social and economic transformation, organization and reduced financing, a useful instrument of national development among others. The system also creates monopoly, authoritarianism and dictatorship. It also encourages political patronage and exclusion of the majority from the governance process. According to Tsuwa (2010:321), a single party system institute unbridled corruption and political intimidation.

Two-Party System

A two party system is a political system in which two political parties enjoy predominant electoral support among the population. This idea is conveyed by

the saying that a two party system is one in which even though three or more parties have a legal existence, the probability is very high that one or the other of the two predominant ones will form the government after each election. In this sense, the system in Britain and the United States is often referred to as a duopoly because of the domination of the conservative and labour parties in successive British governments and the United States of America. The Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC) was an experiment carried out in Nigeria during the Gen. Ibrahim Babangida regime.

The two-party system is held to be a major stabilizing influence in democratic government because it prevents governmental inability and encourages a political style that is inimical to the politics of ideological polarization. The two systems are also nourished by an electoral system that is based on single member constituencies. In a two party system, the party that forms the government is the party that wins the most number of seats in the legislature while the other political party forms the opposition not only to be a watch dog of the activities of the government but also to offer constructive criticism.

Multi-Party System

The multi-party system is characterized by three distinct features, thus, the legal existence of three or more political parties, the high degree of fragmentary electoral base of each of these parties, and the inability of any single one of these parties to form a government on its own thus giving rise to the emergence of coalitions of several parties to form the government. Multi-party systems are therefore very prone to governmental notability. For typical instances France during the fourth Republic (1945-58), Italy and Nigeria all have or have had classic multi-party systems. A multi-party system ensures that all political, religious, social, cultural and economic groups are involved in the political process as it gives alternative to the people to make their choices in the election of their leaders.

It may be observed that a multi-party system and its attendant shortcomings only reflect the high disagree of social, political and religious diversity in any given society. It can be argued that by allowing the expression of different political interest, especially on an ideological basis, multi-party system encourages unity in diversity.

Summing up the above, Anifowose and Enemu (2005:198) noted that, disparities exist among one party, two party, and multi-party systems. In one party system, a ruling party affectively functions as a permanent government. In two-party system, power alternates between two major parties. In dominant-party systems, a single major party retains power for a prolonged period. In

multi-party systems, no party is large enough to rule alone leading to a system of coalition government.

Political Parties and Electoral Systems

The electoral process is an ideal integral part of any democratic process whether in developed or developing societies. However, a malfunctioning of any electoral system is consequent upon the failure of political leadership and political violence. In most societies, crisis of governance is usually the major problem because of the kind of people chosen into the elective positions. We shall therefore undertake a critical analysis of political party system and the electoral process in this work.

An Overview of the Electoral Process

Olanyi (2004:136) argues that the origin of electoral bodies in Nigeria can be trace to 1959 when the electoral commission of Nigeria (ECN) was constituted by the colonial administration to conduct the 1959 general elections. Again after independence, the body was transformed to be known as Federal Electoral Commission (FEC) which conducted 1964/1965 general elections respectively. Furthermore, during the transition period that proceeded the second republic, the federal electoral commission (FEDECO) was established in 1978 which conducted the 1979/1983 general elections. More so, national electoral commission (NEC) was set up in 1987 with a responsibility of conducting general elections in the transition period of 1989-1993. Moreover, the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) was set up in 1995 with a charge of conducting elections in the country. And finally, the independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was established in 1998 and has so far conducted the 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 general elections.

Therefore, a survey of Nigerian electoral system according to Kwaghga (2012: 68) has increasingly reviewed an important point of concern. This is based on the fact that the electoral system rather than provide expected result has become a disappointment and an episode that could best be described as farce. From 1959-2011 elections, the system has gradually moved from a fallen system to a failed system. The system is characterized by a deepening form of fraud such as sophisticated rigging that is detrimental to the survival and endurance of democracy. The electoral bodies instead of abating electoral fraud have joined with the so called ruling party to disenfranchise the electorate. In reality, they have helped institutionalized electoral crimes in our political system. Indeed, the electoral system in 2003, 2007 and 2011 particularly has been seen as a charade. It is with this conception that Kwaghga (2012: 68) notes that the magnitude of fragrant and deliberate abuse of electoral process especially by people in power in clear. The elections were flawed from inception to execution lacked the

calories that can produce genuine result that could be respected by observers and all the contending parties.

How Does Political Parties Influence the Electoral Process?

Political party remain an integral part of all electoral process be it developed or developing countries. Political party is an association of individuals that engage in electoral and other competitions with its counterparts for the control of the personal and the administration of the government. Thus, parties are described as political machines for fighting election.

In Nigeria the political party remains the soul of the political system. The country in 2003, 2007, and 2011 elections opted for a multi-party system. Currently the country has over 30 political parties such as PDP, ACN, ANPP, PPA, LP, etc. there performance in the just concluded elections shows that the domination of one political party that is the PDP. Kwaghga (2012: 69). This has instigated problem of court cases and other crises in the polity. PDP has adjudged as hijacking the elections through rigging, intimidations, use of force-the police the army and the undue control of INEC.

Deducing from the above, it is cleared that political party greatly play an important part in the political system of any given society. The efficacy of political parties tends to guarantee a sound and effectiveness of democratic rule by all means in most societies. But their activities in the 2003, 2007 and 2011 elections have being a far cry from expectation; they have bastardize the electoral system. Their criminality is reviewed in rigging, kidnapping, the use of money to influence the electorate and the deployment of state power in hijacking power especially the ruling party (PDP)(Kwaghga2012:69).

The above scenario attracted several comment from well meaning Nigerians, the press public analyst to strengthen the fact. Thus, it has been noted that the outcome has been manipulated in favour of candidates of the powerful few. This is unfair and shameful, given the democratic system we have opted for. It is better telling the people that the leaders could be selected: so that they would not bother to queue scorching sun.... (Daily Independence May 9, 2007). This is a clear indication that the people were disenfranchised and the elections were hijacked to favour some candidates of certain political parties. In the words of Kwaghga (2012: 70), this scenario created by INEC and political parties especially PDP in conjunction with some power seeking politician, is a sad one. For instance in places like Calabar where PDP was in charge of INEC materials distributing it via their machines, the electorates only voted to exercise their rights but the real result was provided by the ruling PDP who influenced everything to favour their candidates.

Conforming the above, European Union Election Monitors in 2003 general elections observe that, the elections were marred by power organizations, lack

of essential transparency, wide spread procedural irregularities, significant evidence of fraud particularly during the result collation process voter disfranchisement are different stages of the process, lack of equal condition for constant and numerous incidence of violence.

Despite, the negative impact that the political party system has on the electoral process, there are celebrated positive influence with exerts on the political system such as educating and orientating the electorates on the policies, rules and regulations embark upon by a particular electoral system.

Creation of Political Party-Electoral System Harmony

In trying to establish a harmonious relationship between political party system and electoral process, the following steps should be adopted and carefully implemented such include the following:

Adequate funds should be released in time to the electoral body for effective prosecution of election in a vast country like ours. This will ensure autonomy of the body and will safeguard the polity from undue interference from external sources.

The franchise of the electorates should be respected, upheld and strengthen in our democracy by all politicians, political parties and the electoral body.

Constitutional democratic development must be allowed to endure and honoured by the various actors in the electoral process or system.

These steps when followed judiciously are capable of instilling harmony between the political party system and the electoral process. Okoli (1990:169) notes that the only safeguard against banality of the electoral process is informed and vigilant electorates, confident in its duties, conscious of its rights and committed to the maintenance of a quality of life within the social political system.

Conclusion

The politics of electoral process in Nigeria is always express in the absolute denial of the right of the electorates who are suppose to chose those who rule them. In this work, the issue of political party system and the electoral system have carefully been analyzed, which reviewed the current trends in the party system such as its centrality in any political system, its types, its relationship with the electoral system. Again several factors like rigging, intimidation, political violence are associated with party system and have been identify to have effect on electoral system. Finally, the work makes recommendations to ensure party-electoral system harmony.

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