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## Political parties and democratic consolidation in Nigeria (1999-2019)

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### Abstract

Democracy has become the most dominant political movement in the world today. The popularity of this political practice has been a worldwide trend over the years. Also, political parties are the engine room of democratic societies and without them; there will be no genuine democracy. Hence, this revealed the importance of political parties when he stated that "modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of political parties". Indeed, the existence of vibrant political parties is a sine qua non for democratic consolidation. Therefore, it is not just the existence of political parties themselves per se, but the existence of vibrant ones in the polity. The degree of democratic consolidation in a country depends largely on the character and conduct of the country's political parties. The research adopts system theory analyses. The aim of this research work is to examine why democracy is not yet consolidated in Nigeria. Information about the subject of discourse was obtained through exploration history, this research solely rely on secondary data such as books, internet material, journals which were textually analyzed. This research work reveals that party system in Nigeria is weak and vulnerable, its future remains precarious and endangered by politicians who through their whims and caprices have become greedy, selfish, dubious, thoughtless and irrational. Nigerian political parties have proven themselves to be undemocratic and anti democratic institutions. It was observed from the research that lack of accountability, inequality, corruption, weak enforcement agencies, god-fatherism among others is limiting democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The research recommends that critical attention needs to be paid to the political parties as institutions that play diverse but central roles in democratic consolidation and that parties need to be re-engineered from mere institutions for acquiring political power to effective institutions that are capable of structuring, mediating and reconciling societal interests and conflict.

**Keywords:** Political parties; Democratic consolidation; Democracy; Party systems; Nigerian Politics; God fatherism

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## 1 Introduction

Political Parties are *Sine qua non* to democracy, in a way that no free country has been without them, no one has shown how representative government could have worked without them, they bring order out of chaos of multiple voters, and if some parties cause some evils, they avert and mitigate others Bryce (1921) fundamentally, the existence of Political parties has gone beyond winning an election, But has special importance democracy because of the crucial role they play by creating consciousness among the voters and keeping the nation alive politically [1]. Political parties create interest of the voters in politics and attracts them towards important problems. For these reason Political parties play a universal role in democracy and democratic consolidation. Political parties have been seen as the heart of effective functioning and eventual consolidation of democracy, but this has to do with structure of the existing Political parties with an institute and the support they command [2]. The importance of political parties in democratic society cannot be overstated because their origins are inextricably linked with the development of the modern state and representative democracy. It is therefore essential to note that representative government cannot be established without the survival of a political party [1].

Discussing the original roles of political parties, it will be interesting to note that political parties are inseparable with democratic consolidation, according to Schattschneider (1942), captured the essentiality of political parties on democracy, when he states that “Modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of political parties” [3]. Therefore, Political parties are seen as inevitable in establishing the necessary link(s) between the state, civil society and democratic consolidation. They are the gatekeepers and the measuring political barometer for indicating the degree and effectiveness of the practice of democracy [4]. Some of the functions and role of political parties include: governance, representation, policy making and execution, interest aggregation and articulation, peaceful change of government, making government effective and responsive (opposition parties function also as pressure group), accountability, social and integration functions. In sum, wherever a political party exists, it tends to perform common functions at different stages of economic, social, political and judicial development [5].

As a result of these, the political landscape of Nigeria has undergone a dramatic transformation since independence in 1960. Nigeria has spent most years his independence years struggling with political, social, economic failure, repeated attempt to sustain and consolidate democratic government had been fuelled with pessimism concerning not only the future of democracy in Nigeria, but also the existence of Nigeria as a political entity, the way the Nigerians democracy is sustainable or not more so Nigeria before it became a democratic nation has gone through a lot of mayhem [2]. However sustaining democratic in our country like this, was not likely to be smooth, this is why this study examines the role played by political parties being functioning in protecting her democracy and financing it and how democratization can foster development. Also as democratic spreads around the world, the realization is growing that a nation’s political future, its economic strength, its national vitality, and its identity will be shaped by the creation of better, more transparent government in partnership with a vibrant political party [6]. It is in this light that attempts are made on the betterment of the political parties and how democracy can be consolidated in Nigeria, it also offers an explanatory analysis of measure that might lead to the successful establishment of political parties and democratic requirement in the country.

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## 2 Analyzing and Conceptualizing the Major Concepts

### 2.1 Democratic Consolidation

The term democratic consolidation is not farfetched with reference to countries that practice democratic and representative for of government , it is usually referred to the process by which a new democracy grows maturity, such that tendency to reduce it qualities to authoritarianism becomes rare and unlikely [7]. This is the case when: no significant political group seriously attempts to overthrow the democratic regime, the democratic system is regarded as the most appropriate way to govern by the vast majority of the public. In democratic consolidated country, all merits of democracy are almost guaranteed and covered, such that: special heed of interest of common man are considered, egalitarianism, public opinion characterized and lofty ideals of liberty and fraternity upheld .

According to Dode [8], referred to democratic consolidation as a political process that yields success on the basics of continuity, in a way that there wont be occasional breaking of democratic governance or power seizure. This also implies this level of democratic maturity, are institution of government will be able to perform their structure function properly without application of coercion, such that political parties and levels of government will be held on high esteem by the citizenry. Through this, positive result like: sound education, Enlightened citizenship, Political awakening, freedom, equality, law and order, social and economic security, high moral standard, tolerance and spirit of Unity among others.

Where the legitimacy of democracy is not deeply rooted at all levels of society, disaffection and dissatisfaction with democracy are much more likely over the long term, to give rise to preferences for, or diminished resistance to the return of some form of authoritarian rule. However, without a stable and institutionally strong parties countries like Poland, Hungary, and Czech Republic consolidated their new democracies fairly rapidly during the 1990s, because of other overwhelming favorable factors (including close proximity to Western Europe and political cultures that generated strong initial commitments to democracy). In the absence of vibrant political parties like the cases identified above, where democracy is not rapidly legitimated by other means, however, weak political institutions, poor political performance and the consequent cynicism about parties and politicians obstruct the consolidation and even risk undermining the viability of democracy.

## 2.2 Democracy

The word “democracy”, as well as the concept represents, can be traced back to the area surrounding the Mediterranean sea. The beginnings of democracy can be attributed to the Greeks of the sixth century BC. The word is derived from two Greek words demos, meaning “the people”, and kratia, meaning “to rule”. Putting these two words together, we have what is now known as democracy, literally meaning “rule by the people” (pious). It was discovered that the Greek system of government was perhaps closer to a true democracy or rule by the people than any other in history.

As to its nature, various scholars has contributed in many ways, for example, Aristotle defined democracy as rule by the people (Greek; *demokratia*), and the idea that in some way the people govern themselves is still the core meaning of what democracy means. But around this idea several related have developed that are now thought integral to what democracy means. One is that the people govern themselves by regular elections through which their highest leaders are periodically determined (Representative Democracy) or policies governing them are chosen (Direct Democracy). Herodotus also says , that democracy denote that forms of government in which the ruling power of the state is largely vested in the members of the community as a whole, that is, the decision about who is to control the affair of government is designed collectively by the who of the people. Mazzini also writes that democracy is the government of the best and the wisest, for the progress of all through all. Democracy in his opinion ends with selected best, sound and wisest groups that forms the government in the interest of the majority. The trademark of democratic regimes is “government of the people, by the people” (or elected representative of the people) “and for the people” (Abraham Lincoln’s famous definition of popular government). but the degree to which that trademark is reflected in practice varies from one democracy to the other and so, those the extent to which popular government is complimented by free speech, a free press, an independent judiciary and the impartial enforcement of the rule of law this is suggested by indicators of the political performers of democracies regardless of whether they are based upon yardsticks of political productivity [9], measures of the political process, policy output and policy outcomes [10] or socio-economic outcome indicators [11]. For example, some democratic regimes pride themselves in the higher degree of economic freedom they reserved for individual, such as most English-speaking nation-state.

## 2.3 Political Parties

Political parties have been seen as central for democratic practice and evolution. Political parties and party systems are seen by many as panacea to the effective functioning and eventual consolidation of democracy, but this is contingent on the nature of political parties as institutions and the support they command [12]. One of the most complex and critical institution of democracy is political party. Political parties are the lubricant of democracy and without which, democracy based on the western model cannot function [13]. Political parties, as “makers” of democracy, have been so romanticized that scholars have claimed that neither democracy nor democratic societies are thinkable without them.

They not only perform functions that are related to governance, such as making government administration, management of state apparatus, and electorate related functions such as political representation, expression of people’s demand through interest articulation and aggregation as well as strutting of electoral choices: but also linkage related functions, playing an intermediary and mediatory role between the government and the electorate [14]. Furthermore, a political party is a political organization that seeks to attain political power within a government, usually by participating in electoral campaigns. Parties often espouse a certain ideology and vision, but also represent a coalition among disparate interests.

In countries that have a parliament, political parties that have seats in parliament to form a parliamentary party that consists of all their member of parliament. In parliamentary system of government most political parties will also have an elected leader who, if the party is elected by absolute majority, or with a relative majority within the coalition, becomes head of governments. In other words, the party or parties who win majority of seats in the second largest number of seats in the lower house of representative, forms the government [15, 16]. The party or parties that win the second largest number of the seats becomes the opposition.

In presidential system, the president is elected directly through general election as a representation of the people through his party: however, in many nations the president is forced to relinquish connections, with the party upon the assumption of office as head of state. In certain electoral situation a coalition government may be formed from members of more than one party [17]. This is more common after elections using proportional representation rather than a “plurality electoral system or first past the post” system. A political party is a victim of definitional pluralism and this is why there are various definitions attributed to it. In other words, the practice and activities of political parties have societal variation. Perhaps the most used definition are those who focused on political acts which are likely to be performed by parties [18].

To this end, a political party is a social group, as defined by Herbert Simon as “a system interdependent activities characterized by high degree of rational direction of behavior towards end that are objects of common acknowledgment and expectation” it should be noted that political parties are different from other social groups, such as labor unions and other associations because of the unique functions a political socialization and interest articulation and aggregation [19]. This is why a political party is taken as a useful index of the level political development and the relationship between a viable political party and democracy dispensation is axiomatic.

### 2.3.1 *Types of Political Parties*

The French political scientist, Duverger in 1969, classified parties into “cadre” and “mass” parties. This classification was based on the principles of strength of the members and the structure of the organization of political parties. One merit of mass parties is that, the appeal of mass party lies in the public and it can then counter the pressures of those with vested interests. Simbine [20], argues that listening to it, “the public get acquainted with issues that confront the country, and thus causes it to know how to intervene in the life of the state.” A cadre is based on a group of notable persons preparing for the elections campaigns and maintain links with candidates. The fundamental difference between mass and cadre parties lies in the mode of selection [20]. He said pointed out that the mass party stresses the strength of membership, while the cadre rest on personal acts, that is, the notions are determined by individual’s qualities. Thus if a party membership is defined on the regular payment of subscription and signing of undertaking to the party, the cadre party, as it recruits no members does not seem to have any membership. This is true in case of many parties in advanced democracies like that of United State and some European countries, another distinction between the “mass and cadre” parties as identified by Simbine [20] is based on the kind of party organization. Cadre parties are caucus parties, decentralized and weakly knit, while “mass” parties are based on branches, they are more centralized and weakly knit. Their recruiting techniques differ in the kind of community to be built up. Duverger in 1969, points out the possibility of a new conception, namely devotee, parties that emphasis quality rather than quantity. The party is made up of not all working class; but is instead concluded as elite. However, there is need to emphasis this category because emphases are placed on “participation” rather than passivity.

### 2.3.2 *Functions of Political Party*

- It is the function of political parties as a group of voters organized to support certain public policies. The aim of a political party is to elect officials who will try to carry out the party’s policies. A political party offers candidates for public office. When people in a democracy disagree about what the government should do, voters express their opinions by voting for the candidates that most closely reflect their views political parties provided a way for voters to easily identify a candidate’s positions [21]. Political parties may be large or small, national or local. Large political parties generally have millions of members and supporters. In democratic election campaigns, parties compete freely for votes. Such competition is one of the hallmarks a democracy. As Duverger has rightly said that “a representative democratic system would be impossible without political parties.”
- In a Westminster or parliamentary democracy, such as Australia, organised political parties are seen as fulfilling a number of important functions such as drawing together people who have similar political philosophies and ideas by acting as a means by which people of broadly similar interest can meet, organize and campaign. In Australia, parties are the chief means by which political power is exercised. All federal, state and territory government are composed of people who belong to political parties. Electors usually vote for parties, rather than for individual candidates. In parliamentary system, political parties provide the government and opposition. The party or parties who win a majority of seats in the lower house, the House of Representatives, form the government. The party or parties which win the second largest number of seat becomes the opposition. Much of the political debate is defined in government versus opposition terms. Political parties also provide organization support for their candidates during campaigns.
- Parties articulate philosophies and develop policies. All parties have methods of debating issues and formulating policies to be presented to the electorate during election campaigns. In government or opposition, parties utilize these policy-making processes to determine their attitude to legislation and issues of the day.

Parties are an avenue for community groups to influence the decision-making processes. Parties are ultimately responsible for the structure of the machinery of government. The organization of the public service and statutory authorities lies in the hands of the government of the day. In practice, parties can make appointments to the public sector from the ranks of their members and supporters [22]

## 2.4 Political ideology

ideology is an indispensable element of politics. It does not only serve as a major instrument of state power, playing a major role in the acquisition, use and consolidation of power, but also functions as a political lifeline for the animation of politics, forcing individuals and groups alike to make political judgments, especially in the face of competing and conflicting divides, as between capitalism and socialism during the cold war. Ideologies represent a typically crucial element of political parties and modify and support each other. It is not yet a dynamic phenomenon, capable of being modified by new issues. It was in this light that Philip W. Shively (1997) defines ideology as “a continually developing, organized set of ideas about politics that helps us to make sense of the myriad of political questions that face us,” According to Scruton (1982), “party’s ideology consists of a moral system that enshrines the sanctity of contracts and promises between them and the electorate; it constitutes the political doctrine from which a program of political action emanates and on this basis, citizens choose how they will like to be ruled.

## 2.5 Party System

Party system is the complex web of interrelationships existing between political parties of different ideologies and, between these parties, the socio-political community in which they also exist. There are basically three (political) party systems. They are one party system, two party systems and multiparty system. However as a result of political instability, some countries like Nigeria have coined the term Zero party system a system where no elections are conducted along political lines, in a zero party system, Political Parties do not exist.

- In a one party system only one party is legally allowed to hold an effective power. Although minor parties may sometimes be allowed, they are legally required to accept the leadership of the dominant party. This party may not always be identical to the government, although sometimes the position within the government [23]. Communist states such as China and the defunct Soviet Union are some of the examples. One of the reasons in support of a one party system is that non-existence of opposition fosters acceleration of economic and social development. It features concentration of powers, ideological imperialism, only one party is permitted to contest elections and form of government, official opposition is not allowed [24].
- A two party system means the existence of two parties in a state. Under this system the voter has a choice of programmes and alternatives between the parties. In a parliamentary system the party with the majority usually forms the government while the party of the minority usually forms the opposition [25]. Two-party system can assume two different forms. The first is the one where only two parties are dominant. Nigeria, in the third republic, operated the first type of two-party system, where we had the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Constitution (NRC) Two-party system exists in states such as the United States and Jamaica in which there are two political parties dominant to such an extent that electoral success under the banner of any other party is extremely difficult [26]. One right wing coalition party and one left-wing coalition party is the most common ideological breakdown of such a party system. The main feature of a two party system is the existence of a government and an oppositional party. A majority voting election system usually leads to a two-party system. In nations such as (Canada) and the (United Kingdom), there may be two strong parties with a third party that is electorally successful. The two parties, but has still never formally held government [27].
- In some rare cases, such as in Finland, the nation may have an active three-party system, in which all three parties routinely hold top office. It is very rare for a country to have more than three parties who are all equally successful, and all have an equal chance of independently forming government [28]. More commonly, in cases where there are numerous parties, no one party often has a chance of gaining power, and parties must work with each other to form coalition government [29]. This has been an emerging trend in the policies of the Republic of Ireland and is almost always the case in Germany on national and state level (and often common on communal level too).
- Multi-party system occurs where there are many or several political parties, having nearly equal political strength and power in terms of citizenry embracement of their ideology and principles. Example of countries where the multi-party system is common includes Italy, France, Turkey Switzerland, Nigeria and Israel [30]. Under the multi-party system, the voters are to support any of the political parties that present programmes representing his or her opinions and political beliefs. The permanent features of this party system are coalition of government and alliance [31]. This could be seen in the case of Nigeria’s first republic where the NCNC and the NPC merged to form the Nigeria National government which later collapsed.

### **3 Challenges INEC in democratic consolation in Nigeria**

#### **3.1 Time**

Time is an important factor of life. It is as important as life itself. The current commission assumed office shortly before the 2011 election as a result it was unable to achieve much reforms before the conduct of the 2011 General Elections. However, the ability of the commission to learn from the failures of the past was one of the factors that shaped the 2019 General Election. Immediately after the 2011 General Elections, INEC did not leave any stone on touched but evolved different strategies towards genuinely conducting an acceptable election in Nigeria. So the commission had enough time to strategize.

#### **3.2 Voters Registration**

One of the major challenges and criticisms raised against the previous elections which would have also affected the integrity and genuineness of the 2019 polls was voter's registration. The voter register prior to the 2015 General Elections were full of irregularities and discrepancies. However, INEC's leverage on the biometric registration which was one of the major achievements of the commission in 2006 placed the commission above board. Although, the exercise was seen by many as cumbersome by it paid off at the end of the 2019 elections. Furthermore, the introduction of technological driven voter authentication shaped the elections and gave it public acceptance. The use of technology in promoting the integrity of the electoral process cannot be under emphasized.

The success or failure of any election starts from the process of registration and furthermore authentication of registered voters on the Election Day [32, 33]. Nigeria's elections have been replete with voter's registration and authentication based fraud. However, these challenges were overcome through the adoption of card reader technology. The implication of this was the almost reduction of electoral fraud to 0% in the 2015 General Elections. The reduction in fraud led to the reduction in post election violence and litigation which usually characterized Nigerian elections.

#### **3.3 Election Material**

One of the major sources of Election Day and Post Election conflicts in Nigeria has been Election Material related. Several things happen in the area of Election Materials. Sometimes the Election Administrators connived with the politicians to duplicate materials, ensure the delay in distribution of materials to some areas and outright ensuring that materials were not sent to some areas. However, the innovations which INEC adopted improved this process and further strengthened the integrity of the commission. The commission ensured that all the Electoral materials were coded in different patterns from State to Local Government levels. So, no one material looks exactly as the other in another place. This made the snatching of electoral materials almost impossible and promoted the security of the material and even personnel. Another innovation which was a departure from the previous practice was the cancellation of unused ballot papers in the presence of all the party agents before the commencement of counting. This promoted an unusual understanding and cooperation among all the party stalwarts and voters. Besides, the arrangement that all the materials and personnel gets to the RA 24 hours before the commencement of election ensured that materials got to the polling centre on time.

#### **3.4 Polling Center**

In the past polling centre could be indiscriminately cited in the residence of some prominent people. This is one way by which fraud was perpetrated in the past. However, there was a departure from this exercise during the 2019 General Elections. There was strict adherence, to the rule that polling centre were placed in public places.

#### **3.5 Integrity**

Reforms are good. However, reforms do not implement itself, therefore the character and doggedness of drivers of reform to a large extent determines the outcome of such reform [34]. The leadership of INEC needs to be greatly commended for displaying exemplary courage, strength of character, integrity, fairness and equity in the discharge of his duties. These attributes of the leadership of INEC shaped the 2019 election and ensured the stability and democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

#### **3.6 INEC lacks financial autonomy**

INEC relies on subvention from the federal government while the State Independent Electoral Commissions relies on subvention from the state governments. The chairpersons and members of the electoral bodies were appointed by the president and governors subject to the approval of the senate and Houses of Assembly respectively. They lack financial

autonomy. Allocations are made to INEC by the federal government, while the state governments made allocations to the state INECs from the states' allocations. These provisions do not ensure the independence of these bodies. He who pays the piper dictates the tune. These bodies are potentially exposed to the benevolence, generosity, and by implication manipulations by the president and the governors. There is an urgent need to amend the relevant sections of the constitution to ensure the independence of the umpire, INEC.

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#### 4 Theoretical framework – the systems theory

The theory was adopted first by anthropology from biology, then it was adopted by sociology and psychology and finally by political science, it posits that system is interaction in any society through which binding and authoritative allocation of values are made and implemented, it also establishes mutual interdependence of each integral part from each other to make a whole [35]. Hence Batterlanffy in 1951 propounded that there is a General systems theory (GST) that could be applied to general systems that exist in nature or in a business context, organizational or economic system. It was further argued that almost everything in life is a system, as most things in life comprise assemblage of parts that are interdependent so as to form a complex whole [36, 37]. This ranges from human beings, to inanimate objects like computer systems, to social organizations, plants, universe, production and administration. Following from this proposition, Easton in 1965 and Kartz and Kahn in 1966 adapted system theory to political science and organizational theories respectively [36]. Mbah [38] highlights that Easton was the first political scientist to systematically developed a framework on the basis of the systems approach for the study of politics instead of merely adapting it from anthropology and sociology. Easton also talked about political systems and subsystems. The political system according to him, is a system in itself.

However, it consists of subsystems. These subsystems include mediating groups that are involved in the decision making process [38]. Mbah [38] further highlights that the political system can be conceived as analogous to an electronic computer which processes and thereby transforms 'inputs' into 'outputs' while adjusting mechanisms, allowing for a feedback from the 'outputs' on the 'inputs' mechanism.

Nigeria is a political system or democratic system on its own. With which we see political parties as a subsystem or integral part of the whole system. Using input and output analyses, the issue now is that fact that Political parties lay claims for wages and fixation of working hours, opening of educational institutions, road and transportations, minimum wages etc were these actually transputed to good governance which in turns determine the maturity of democracy that is democratic consolidation.

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#### 5 Conclusion

That political parties optimistically have tendency in bringing out best in Nigeria democracy, this means that issues of organizational capacity, effective leadership, internal democracy, discipline, institutionalization and personalization, ideological platforms of mobilization and linkage to civil society and the masses have to be tackled strictly.

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#### Compliance with ethical standards

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The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest.

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