Sustaining Democracy through the Instrumentality of Viable Opposition Political Parties in Ekiti State, Nigeria

By

Ogunbayo, Oluwasegun
Department of Social Science Education,
Bamidele Olumilua University of Education,
Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria
ogunbayooluwasegun@gmail.com
08039444862

Folorunsho Christiana O.
Department Of Social Science Education,
Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science And Technology, Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria
folorunsochristy@gmail.com
08032314814

&
Adeyanju, Lateef Ademola
Department Of Social Science Education,
Bamidele Olumilua University of Education,
Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria
adeyanjuademola6@gmail.com
08034387113

Abstract

This paper aims at providing a frame work for sustaining democracy through instrumentality of viable opposition political parties in Ekiti State, Nigeria. In politics, the opposition comprises one or more political parties or other organized groups that are opposed to the government. It is the party that goes against another party. The degree of opposition varies according to political conditions. Democracy gives maximum degree of freedom that enables the citizens to choose their leaders and representatives. This is because democratic government provides for an adequate means for the expression of the will of the people ad by examining the extent to which the people are involved in decision-making process. Political party is one of the geniuses of intermediary groups in a political system. Opposition political parties have safely becomes an indispensable determinant of the nature of political interaction in most countries of the world. Opposition political parties check the excess of the party in power which influence

governmental decisions in the interest of the general public. This paper understudies the concept of democratic tenets, political party, political opposition and identifies the role of virile and strong opposition political party in deepening and sustaining democracy. The study examined the challenges to political opposition in Nigeria and the way forward to these challenges were also analyzed. The researchers adopted explanatory type of research for the study. The researchers concluded that vibrant political parties lie at the heart of democratic growth, it was also concluded that party cohesiveness are vital ingredients that make viable element in deepening and sustaining democracy, finally, the researchers concluded that the viable the opposition political parties are, the more democracy is strengthened. Based on the conclusions derived for this study, the researchers recommended that there should be increased capacity and awareness workshops and seminars on the centrality of political parties tor thriving democratic governance, Training programmes on political party management and organization in order to increase their effectiveness, transparency and accountability, offer political alternatives by developing its own programmes and proposing alternatives solution to the decisions planned by the government and representatives of the majority.

Keywords*:* Sustaining, Democracy, Virile, Opposition, Political party.

Introduction

There is clear indication all over the world that democracy is being pursued. This is because democratic government provides for an adequate means for the expression of the will of the people and by examining the extent to which the people are involved in decision-making process. Dahi (2021) asserted that literally, democracy, is rule by the people and the political systems existing in some Greeks city states and many other countries in the world today. Allern and Pedersen (2007) opined, democracy is government in which power and core responsibility are exercised by all adult citizens, directly or through their freely elected representatives. Democracy rests upon the principles of majority rule and individual rights, fair, frequent and well-managed, elections are essential in a democracy. Democracy gives maximum degree of freedom that enables the citizens to choose their leaders and representatives.

The party system is based upon a paradoxical ideology. It breeds fractional element of disunity, showing the seeds of diversity while at the same time it strengthens and consolidates the nation. Political party provides almost blessing to a nation when it checks the government from becoming tyrannical and autocratic but in its prostituted spirit tears a nation into clashing groups leading the country to the worst form of demoralization. Becker Frans and Rene Cuperus, (2002); Benjamin DisraelisRetervie, (2020) stated that "no

government can long be secured without a formidable opposition political party", this has been proved true and fully valid for the health and efficiency of a democracy. Opposition parties are created by the government groups in order to create an impression of democratic debate. If we agree that politics is the struggle for acquisition of control and use of state power, then political parties are the vehicles for attaining that goal.

In politics, the opposition comprises one or more political parties or other organized groups that are opposed to the government. It is the party that goes against another party. The degree of opposition varies according to political conditions. Opposition parties are expected to accent the positive socio-economic development of the country and come up with new political innovations they can share with the public and the ruling party. There is no gain saying the fact that there is a very good relationship between sustaining democracy and existence of political party both opposition parties and ruling party.

Nature of Democracy

Bader (2014) asserted that compared to dictatorships, oligarchies, monarchies and aristocracies in which the people have little or no say in who is elected and how the government is run, a democracy is often said to be the most challenging form of government, as input from those representing citizen determines the direction of the country. The basic definition of democracy in its purest form comes from the Greek language. The term means "rule by the people".

Democracy also has roots in the Magna Corta, England's Great charte of 1215 that was the first document to challenge the authority of the king, subjecting him to the rule of the law and protecting his people from feudal abuse. Democracy as we know it today, was not truly defined until the Age of Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th centuries, during which time the U.S Declaration of Independence was penned, followed by the U.S Constitution (which borrowed heavily from the Magna Carta). The term evolved to mean a government structured with a separation of powers, provided basic civil rights, religious freedom and separation of church and State. Democracies can be classified as liberal and social. Liberal democracies also known as constitutional democracies are built on the principles of free and fair elections, a competitive political process and universal suffrage. Liberal democracies can take on the form of constitution republics such France, India, Germany, Italy and the United States, or a constitutional monarchy such as Japan, Spain or the United Kingdom. Social democracy, which emerged in the late 19th century, advocates universal access to education, health care, workers' compensation and other services such as child care and care for the elderly.

Many definitions of democracy abound in theory and practice. The one universally accepted is that advanced by (Abraham Lincoln) 1946 which says that democracy is the government of the people, by the people and for the people. The abiding principle of democratic government is majority rule, one in which supreme power is held by the people under a free and fair electoral system. ln a real democracy the people possess the constitutionally guaranteed right to choose who rules over them at any given point in time. In apparent recognition of this universal concept of democracy, the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended (1999) in section 14(29) proclaimed that "sovereignty belongs to the people of Nigeria from whom government through this constitution derives all its power and authority.

To achieve sustainable democracy, we must understand that there is more to democracy than elections and voting. The fact that a nation chooses her leaders through the ballot box does not necessarily translate to democracy. There are certain tenets upon whom any democracy can be deepened, nurtured and sustained. There is sovereignty of the people, majority rule and minority rights, the rule of law and government, respect for civil and political rights, mass literacy, economic prosperity social development, free press and an independent judiciary.

Nature of Political Party

Robert Michels (2001) opined that political party as one of the geniuses of intermediary groups in a political System. The commonest definition of a political party is the one by Wikipedia, the free online dictionary (2003) defines a political party as "an organization of people which seeks to achieve goals common to its through the acquisition and exercise of political powers. Opposition political party on the other hand is the party that goes against another party. In politics, the opposition comprises one or more political parties that are opposed to the government Blonde (1997) corroborates that, opposition parties are created by the government groups in order to create an impression of democratic debate. If we agree that politics is the struggle for acquisition of control and use of state power, then political parties are the vehicles for attaining that goal. In democracies Worldwide, political parties are elected by the electorate to form a government except where the constitution makes provision for independent candidates, politicians stand for election as representatives of difference political parties political parties deepened and sustained democracy. There is no gain saying the fact that there is a very good relationship between sustaining democracy and the existence of political parties both opposition parties and ruling party. The party system actually helps for the sustenance and deepening democracy. Over the years, various societies in Europe, America and even the far East have tender to gravitate towards two-party system to largely aggregate the multi-interest of people.

Nature of Political Opposition

According to Maurice Duverger (2006), the opposition may be defined as all political parties or movements that do not belong to the parliamentary. Majority or the government coalition and voice their disagreements and critical views concerning government action and competing for legal accession to and the peaceful exercise of power. The political opposition is not necessarily the parliamentary opposition, even though it finds the preferred means to ensure its recognition and express its opinions in the deliberative institution. In politics, the opposition comprises one or more political parties or other organized groups that are opposed to the government. It is the party that goes against another party. The degree of opposition varies according to political conditions. Political opposition is a political party opposing and prepared to replace the party power. A political party or an organized group opposed to the party in office and prepare to replace it if elected.

Dalton, et al (2011) stated that political opposition is essentially a positive trend and implies the prevalence of a greater political responsibility both as a political party and as an institution compared of responsible citizens engaged in supplementary the efforts of the ruling party. Political opposition parties cannot be viewed in isolation from the prevalence of a democratic political culture that is gradually but surly getting ground in the country. Cohen, et al (2012) explains that opposition implies critical support for the government proactive and targeted advocacy for the national interest of the country and circulation of innovative and constructive ideas that could practically benefit the ordinary citizen. Some opposition parties in the country have already chosen the path towards peaceful and based opposition, while quite a number of them are engaged in saber-rattling and going against the tide of the political flow in the country. Andres Solimano (2005) stated that opposition parties are expected to accent the positive socioeconomic development of the country and come up with new political innovations they can share with the public and the ruling party. They can help to widen the political environment of their participation by engaging in a constructive dialogue among themselves and the ruling party. Democracy is deepening and sustainable when good governance is the central goal of the opposition political party. Viable opposition political parties contribute to good governance and by implication, sustainable democracy. Deepened and sustained democracy is depending on the existence of well-functioning and well-funded political parties. Said Adejumobi (2006) opposition political parties are crucial factors in bringing together diverse interests, recruiting and sponsoring candidates and developing competing policy proposals that provide people with a choice.

Deepening and sustainable democracy in Nigeria needs strong and viral opposition political parties with the capacity to represent citizens and provide policy choices that demonstrate their ability to govern for the public good. Opposition parties should be strengthening so that they do not constitute a weak link in the democratic process. In deepening and sustaining democracy, opposition political parties ought to advance political pluralism, enhance citizen participation in the political process, broaden the representation of different political opinions and ideologies in the governance process, ensure the peaceful and democratic transfer of political power at both National, State and local government levels enhance the accountability of governments and give the necessary legitimacy to both the government of the day and the political system as a whole. Every government at all level needs a viable, vibrant and strong opposition party for sustainable democracy. The opposition political parties must be alive, strong, Virile, focused and ready to play its role. It must consistently and responsibly expose the weaknesses of the ruling party and challenge it to deliver on its promises. In the process, it is their duty to articulate, aggregate and advance its ideology as superior to that of the government, that the people's interest are better served with them that way, the viable and strong opposition political parties is able to keep the government on its toes and motivate them to deliver on good govemance. Alfred (2019) explained what he considers the virile and strong opposition political party in societies where authoritarianism had survived for long before the democratic transition as not only essential, but also key in deepening democracy. He further stated that by "turning vital non-issues into issues and also by creating new structures of participation, transparency and ultimately accountability" the opposition party is indeed helping to deepen democracy, he then went ahead to list the five key functions for the virile and strong opposition party.

1. Resisting integration the ruling regime
2. Guarding zones of autonomy against the ruling regime
3. Disputing the legitimacy of the ruling regime
4. Raising the cost of authoritarian rule
5. Creating credible democratic alternative

In deepening and sustaining democracy, the opposition party is expected to offer political alternatives: to articulate and promote the interest of the voters: to offer alternatives to the decisions proposed by the government and the major representatives (in the national assembly) to improve parliamentary decision making procedures by ensuring debate, reflection and contradiction: to scrutinize the legislative and budgetary proposal of the government: and to ensure stability legitimacy, accountability and transparency in the political process. Ann-kristinKolln (2014) Political parties are essential aspects of representative democracy on the basis of a particular ideology worldview, political leaders

organize their followers and ordinary people in the party, create opportunity structure for the re-distribution of the cake between the classes. It is obvious opposition political parties play a critical role in deepening democratic process besides providing veritable avenue for popular participation. They are celebrated mechanism for political mobilization, guiding policy formulation, implementation and much more significant guards against dictatorship.

In modern societies, multiparty has proved to be only viable possible form democracy which can address and key in various interests of the citizens to government. Opposition political parties check the excess of the party in power which influence governmental decisions in the interest of the general public. In reality, political parties are central and critical to both installing and deepening of democratic experiences over the years. Opposition political parties have safely becomes an indispensable determinant of the nature of political interaction in most countries of the world. Political party is seen as the institution of a social group with common goals, interests and ideologies struggling to gain political powers. It is certainly true that political affiliation, political socialization and political attitudes of an individual are to a remarkable extent depend on his duration social ties. The existence of clear and well institutionalized opposition political parties is basic prerequisite for the growth and maintenance of representative form of democratic government. Evidence has shown that stake and sustainable democratic process like developing nations benefit from well-articulated and competitive political system. Political party is one of the geniuses of intermediary groups in a political system. Others are interest groups, and pressure groups. While democracy rest on the informed and active participation of the people, political party is a viable tool in this regard. Democracy exists where the principal leaders of a political system are selected by competitive elections in which the bulk of the populations have the opportunity to participate. As a matter of fact, the best possible evidence of the nature of any democratic regime, viable opposition political parties contribute to democratic growth, much, as in-viable ones may result in democratic regression. Bader and Bonotti (2014) stated that opposition and political parties are like piston in the engine of democratic practice, the extent to which they acquire value and stability, party cohesiveness and development a coherent. Political doctrines are vital ingredients that make them element in democratic growth, deepened and sustained. The opposition represents an alternative government and is responsible for challenging the politics where appropriate since we operate party democracy in Nigeria. Opposition party should be the people's watchdog keeping the government on its toes and forcing to follow the right democratic path. Opposition parties are also expected to play the oversight role by ensuring that the actions of government are in the best interest of the people. The role of opposition political party in a democracy is much more creative and crucial rather than

opposition for the sake of opposition. Its main role is to expose weakness in government policies and remain a vigilant watchdog over the action and inaction of the government. One of the most important jobs of the opposition is to constantly question the government. Any government has to remain answerable to the public at all times, and a virile, strong and good opposition can put the spot light on some issues and have them resolved quickly.

Challenges to political opposition in Nigeria and the way forward

Political pluralism is an inseparable part of democracy and the government's acceptance of protest or of the opposition and the existence of an institutional representation of the people. Political opposition is pre-conditions for the democratic operation of institutions. The situation of the opposition determines the democratic character of institutions as well as the broad balance of the pluralistic political system.

Some of the challenges are enunciated below:

1. Opposition parties on the continent and Nigeria in particular are fragmented. They are invariably small and weak. Opposition political parties in Nigeria are seldom grown out of big social movements in the creation of ambitious individuals.
2. Lack of finance: financing political parties is another major hurdle in this country. Disclosure of sources of funding and regulation of political party are not enough.
3. The media houses give too much publicity to the ruling party while giving lesser publicity to the political opposition and scant coverage of smaller political parties especially towards the elections.
4. Lack of probity and incorruptible human resources
5. Lack of trust from the citizens.
6. Weak formal links with the citizens.
7. Some opposition parties pursue sectional and personal interest.
8. Defection

The way forward of these challenges

The opposition in pluralistic system has little in common with those attempting to organize themselves in autocratic system. The opposition code of conduct" should be based on the following:

1. Competition with the aim of assuming power.
2. Tolerance in the exercise of power.
3. The changeover of power.
4. Criticize the government's programmes, decisions and actions by closely examining its draft laws and budget.

5. Offer political alternatives by developing its own progranines and proposing alternatives solution to the decisions planned by the government and representatives of the majority.
6. Improve the parliamentary decision making procedure by ensuring debate analysis and the presentation of divergent opinions.
7. Monitor and oversee the activities of the government and the administration authorities.
8. Strengthen the stability, legitimacy, accountability and transparency of the political process.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the role of virile and strong of opposition political parties in deepening and sustaining democracy. Findings reveal that vibrant political parties lie at the heart of democratic growth. In other words, the viable the opposition political parties are, the more democracy is strengthened and opposition political parties are like Piston in the engine of democratic practice, the extent to which they acquire value and stability, party cohesiveness are vital ingredients that make viable element in deepening and sustaining democracy.

Recommendations

After critical and through examination of the role of deepening and sustaining democracy through virile and strong opposition political parties, it is recommended that:

* There should be increased capacity and awareness workshops and seminars on the centrality of political parties tor thriving democratic governance.
* Training programmes on political party management and organization in order to increase their effectiveness, transparency and accountability.
* Offer political alternatives by developing its own programmes and proposing alternatives solution to the decisions planned by the government and representatives of the majority.
* Opposition parties should accent the positive socio-economic development of the country and come up with new political innovations that they can share with the public and the ruling party.

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