

Elite Recruitment and Political Stability in the Nigerian Fourth Republic

Omodia Stephen Monday

*Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Adekunle Ajasin University
Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria, West Africa
E-mail: ostephenm@yahoo.com*

KEYWORDS Institutions. Political Communication. Political Parties. Political Socialization. Political System. Structural Functionalism

ABSTRACT The paper discusses political elite recruitment as a major factor in the political stability of the Nigerian State. The focal point was the use of the Structural-functional theory as the basis of analysis with interest on what constitute a structure, function, system maintenance and adaptability. As a result, the roles of political parties in political elite recruitment vis-à-vis the military influence on the Nigerian Fourth Republic were identified and analyzed. The paper vividly stated that political activities in the Nigerian Fourth Republic as regard political elite recruitment is one that has been exclusive of the masses both at intra and inter party levels, and therefore recommend among others that for political stability to be enhanced in the Republic, political parties which constitute functional institution for political elite recruitment in a democracy must be deeply rooted in the people.

INTRODUCTION

System survival no doubt is a function of the level of socialization of the people vis-à-vis the utilization of acceptable patterns of recruiting actors that would steer the process. In a political system, the level of political socialization and the nature of recruiting political elites based on political culture serve as a functional regulatory mechanism for system survival. This however, could be said to be a major characteristic of matured political systems which tend to impact positively on system survival and by implication political and economic development. (Rodee et al. 1983; Akpotor 2007).

Conversely, in third world countries such as Nigeria, the inconsistent nature of political culture arising from political instability has witnessed devices at sustaining political stability or system survival in the case of democracy (Ukaeje 2001). Such devices in the case of Nigeria, has led to the domination of the democratic space in the Nigerian Fourth Republic by retired military officers in the governance of the Nigerian State. It is also important to emphasize that when retired military officers are not directly involve in governance, just like the events of the 2007 elections, they are actively involve in determining and imposing political actors on the people.

The implication of the above is that a fragile ground for democratic governance is built, because the process for system survival is

exclusive of the inputs of the people and the system itself is distorted and dislocated to accommodate a cosmetic arrangement that may not stand the test of time (Abdullah 2007; Baba 2007).

It is from the above background that this paper is focused at unfolding the process of ensuring political stability in the Nigerian State through an inclusive process of elite recruitment. To achieve this basic objective, the paper in addition to the introductory segment shall also discuss a compatible theoretical framework of analysis, the nature of political elite recruitment in Nigeria, as well as offer useful recommendations for enhancing political stability in the Nigerian Fourth Republic.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Gabriel Almond's Structural-functional theory would serve as an analytical tool for unfolding the pattern of political elite recruitment and enhancing political stability in the Nigerian Fourth Republic. This is because the theory focuses on system stability and maintenance through an input-output analysis that emphasizes on political socialization and recruitment (Ake 1982; Almond et al. 2000; Omodia 2007a).

Thus, Structural-functionalism is anchored on two basic concepts: structures and functions. While structures are arrangement within the system which performs the functions which could

either be diffused or diffracted, functions are the objective consequences emanating from the workings of the system or what the system does (Omodia 2007). However, Offiong (1994) and Olaniyi (1997) stated that Almond who is the chief exponent of the theory of Structural Functionalism in Political Science identified seven functional variables which could be subdivided into two: Input and Output functions.

The Input functions are:

- (i) *Political Socialization and Recruitment* – This refers to the induction of individuals into different roles in the political system, and also selecting them for membership into the political system.
- (ii) *Interest Articulation* – This refers to the process through which demands are injected into the political system.
- (iii) *Interest Aggregation* – This involve the formulation of general policies in which group interest are combined, accommodated and more or less committed to a particular pattern of public policy.
- (iv) *Political Communication* – This is the channel through which information is transmitted among the different groups and between government and their rulers vice versa.

The Output functions on the other hand are:

- (i) *Rule Making* – This function has to do with law making. In a liberal democracy the legislature is basically charged with the function of making laws for the State.
- (ii) *Rule Application* – This function entails the implementation of governmental decisions or policies. This falls principally within the jurisdiction of the Executive arm of government in a democratic State.
- (iii) *Rule Adjudication* – This function lies within the province of the judiciary in the sense that the institution performs the basic function of interpreting laws that guide persons and institutions of the State.

In addition, in relating structures to functions and process to policy and performance, Almond et al. identified three concepts as central to the workings of the political system. These are: capabilities, conversion process and system maintenance and adaptation functions (Ake 1982; Almond et al. 2000). However, the maintenance and adaptation concept which is central to this paper involve political socialization, political recruitment and political communication (Almond et al. 2000).

The above conception of Almond shows that political stability or democratic maintenance is a function of the kind of orientation that exist in the State in form of political socialization, the pattern of selecting political actors in the political system in form of political recruitment, as well as the free flow of communication that exist between political office holders and other members of the political system. These indices will no doubt serve as cornerstones in analyzing how political socialization especially as regard long years of military dictatorship has shaped political elite recruitment in the Nigerian political system of the Fourth Republic. The level of communication flow between the Nigerian political elites and the masses in terms of their inputs in the emergence or non-emergence of political elites and its implication on political stability of the present Nigerian political dispensation would no doubt be accentuated.

Although, the theoretical postulation of Almond as regard structural –functionalism has been greatly criticized for his western orientation and compatibility (Ake 1982; Nwoko 1988; Omodia 2007b; Omodia 2009), for focusing more on system maintenance rather than change (Olaniyi 1997). The utility of this theory however is the conception of this paper that system maintenance is an embodiment of change. In this thinking, democratic maintenance or stability is viewed from the level of functional change that a system need to accommodate and this no doubt include recruiting elites to replace old ones or to enhance the system.

THE NIGERIAN MASSES AND POLITICAL ELITE RECRUITMENT

In looking at the Nigerian masses and political elite recruitment, the focus of this paper would be anchored on partism. This is because of the open nature of political parties which encompasses the elites and masses, quality and quantity of personnel for the purpose of achieving their principal objective of controlling the machinery of government.

Partism and Elite Recruitment – The political history of the Nigerian State just like any other State in the world is transformational. The colonial history is one in which elite recruitment in the political arena was largely anchored on ethnicity. This was made manifest in the elective principle of 1923, regional representation instituted in the

1946 Richards Constitution which snowballed into federal political arrangement with the regions exercising enormous Constitutional powers after the Lyttleton Constitution up to the demise of the First Republic in 1966 (Nwosu et al.1998).

This pattern of representation persisted in the Second Republic though with modifications in the structure and system of government. As a matter of fact, ethnic representation and elite recruitment was on the basis of Statism rather than regionalism which was emphasized in the 1979 Constitution in form of Federal Character (FRN 1979). This arrangement was also visible in intra-party politicking. Conversely, the event of the aborted Third Republic shows a sharp deviation from what used to be the norm in Nigeria's politics in that ethnic calculation in representation was rejected in favour of personal idiosyncrasy in which the purported winner of the Presidential election, Bashorun MKO Abiola of Social Democratic Party (SDP) defeated Mallam Bashir Tofa in his home State, Kano (Ola 1995).

The implication of the above scenario is that the Nigerian electorate can indeed serve as the pillar of enduring democracy in Nigeria if they are well integrated into the process by the system in form of free and fair elections. Unfortunately, the era that would have served as the era of nurturing enduring democracy in Nigeria was aborted because of class and selfish interest by the military and political actors.

The aftermath effect of the scenario of the Third Republic, based on the unfolding events of the Fourth Republic is such that class interest played more role in elite recruitment than ethnic interest. Why this could be argued based on the zoning of Presidential candidates in 1999 to the Southern part of the country, the truth however is that the emergence of the candidates was anchored more on class consideration. For instance, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo emerged as a result of his military class and influence and based on his orientation towards western capitalism.

This scenario could be said to have proved more devastating to the Nigerian masses than the ethnic one. This is because in ethicized party politics, the masses are carried along deceitfully using ethnic factor, while under class consideration, the system is to a great extent exclusive of the masses in that their votes do not count in determining who represent them in political offices.

However, it is important to accentuate that

class interest as manifested by the overriding influence of the bourgeois-military class have continued to dominate both intra-party and inter-party politics in Nigeria. For instance, in the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) which is the dominant political party in the country, it could be said that majority of retired military officers belong to the party, and as a matter of fact they dominate the party. Under the present arrangement in the party, a retired military officer is the Chairman Board of Trustee of the party, twice National Chairman of the party, as well as the Senate President.

In addition, the manner in which contestants and winners of primaries in PDP were changed and substituted by losers and non-contestants in the last General elections is a reflection of the military attribute of coup which is now being exercised in form of electoral coups in the present dispensation. This method of elite recruitment no doubt will only lay the foundation for a very fragile and weak democracy which could be inviting of coup de'tat in the future if the system capability is destroyed in the wake of the agitation for non-gradual reduction in the powers of retired military officers who are involve in party politics. This is coupled with the overdependence on judicial courts and election tribunals for settling electoral matters through nullification of electoral results and the attendant restoration of the status-quo through appeals rather than anchoring the system on free and fair elections with minimal judicial interpretations or misinterpretations.

THE WAY FORWARD

- (I) From the structural-functional perspective it was vividly observed that the mechanism for elite recruitment in the Nigerian Fourth Republic is within the system approach which to a great extent is exclusive of the input of the masses. This no doubt has led to the recycling of political actors, and when new elites are created, they are merely representing the interest of the political elite class (godfathers) through the maintenance of the status-quo of social relations between the political elites and the people. Thus, this dysfunctional social relation in terms of governance could be checked if political elites are recruited through an open process that is encompassing of the masses. This could be achieved in an environment of

matured political culture where there is free and fair elections, and the political actors view themselves as public servants rather than masters. For this to be achieved the political system has to be de-monetized, political education enhanced through functional basic education, and the economy well improved so that people do not get into politics as a result of idleness or viewing it as a quick means of wealth acquisition.

- (II) Since political parties constitute functional institution for political elite recruitment in a democracy, it is important to accentuate that the functions, purpose, and structures of political parties should be well defined and deeply rooted in the people with the hope of improving the system. This implies that political parties must effectively perform the function of political education of its members among others and the embibement and manifestation of internal democracy under the supervision of an independent electoral body which would aid and reflect in inter-party activities. This, no doubt would provide the foundation for an enduring democracy that would be appreciated by all and sundry.
- (III) Although the military factor in shaping democracy in the post-colonial Nigerian State has proven to be anti-democratic both in orientation and in the practice of democracy in Nigeria. It is however important to state that, Nigerians need to be cautious in terms of criticisms and in expectation so as not to create a systemic breakdown. What is however expected of Nigerians during this nascent State of Nigeria's democracy is for Nigerians to continue to engage the system in constructive criticisms by providing functional policy alternative rather than outright condemnation of the system.

CONCLUSION

Experience in the Nigerian political system has shown that the Marxian concept of 'dictatorship of the masses' is a 'model fixed in heaven'. This is because recycled political elites or newly created political elites always focus on maintaining the status-quo of politically dominating the masses by excluding them from the process of elite recruitment which often tends to lead to

political instability. However, while the above factor distinguishes the masses class from the elitist class, one major factor they share in common is the devastating effect of political instability on the economy, political immaturity, poor political socialization and recruitment to mention a few.

As a result, political stability is being viewed in this paper as a factor which is indispensable to both the elites and the masses and which could further enhance the Nigerian Fourth Republic through the involvement of both the elites and the masses in political elite recruitment that will form the basis for acceptability and an enduring democracy in Nigeria.

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