

**THE LEXICON OF CONSENSUS CANDIDATE AND THE NIGERIAN  
DEMOCRACY: HOW HEALTHY IS IT?**

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***Abstract***

*This paper discusses the issue of misused and misapplication of the term consensus in the political arena which has over the years caused disaffection, carpet-crossing among party members and the formation of new pre-matured political parties because of harmonizing out members of the same party. This misconstrue language (consensus) has also made political parties field wrong choice candidates which has further resulted to bad governance. The word consensus which ordinarily means common agreement, understanding or mutual cooperation to accepting an issue or something especially in selecting candidate(s), in Nigeria has turned a situation where two or few party chieftains connived (in their own interest) to edge out or manipulate other people in selecting a single person who happens to be their cronies, without the consent of the entire group. The forceful imposition apart from resulting to bad leadership had also cause rancour, intra-party wrangling and disunity, and political malady, which has not been too healthy for our endured democracy. As a review article, this paper, considers the consensus theory, various authors' views about the concepts of the term was lavishly x-rayed and in the end the paper seeks to suggest that party chieftains should apply the concept properly, by consulting widely before coming out with a choice candidate(s) who will represent the party very well, so that the dividends of democracy will be felt and not be sacrificed on the altar of "puppet-godson" who will be pledging unnecessary pretentious loyalty to his godfather(s) to the detriment of the electorates, if he emerges the general winner at the general poll.*

***Keywords:*** *Lexicon, Consensus, Candidate, Democracy.*

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## **1. Introduction**

The dictionary meaning of the word consensus has been misunderstood, misconceived, misconstrued, misinterpreted, misused or misapplied by politicians in Nigeria. The word actually means an opinion agreed by all members of a group, particularly issues “about or on” something; be it in decision making or in choosing a candidate. And so if it has to do with candidate of a political party, it means all the members of the party have generally accepted, endorsed or anointed the person to represent the party at a general election to compete with representatives of other political parties who came through the same manner of selection. But in Nigeria, the term or concept of consensus has rather become a dangerous instrument of exclusion, of disenfranchisement, deprivation, manipulation, to preferred or make a choice of a person coming from the leader of a party (either the president or party chairman) as against the general wish or acceptability of the group (Ugwuanyi, 2022, p. 1).

In democratic societies, the term consensus is more liberal as compared to the term “majority rule”. But the Nigerian political elites have so turned the concept and terminology to mean a situation where the party leadership (few of them) employs to suborn party delegates into believing that, it is a democratic aspiration (Ugwuanyi, 2022, p. 2). By this, card carrying members who have little or no knowledge about the concept sing the term as an anthem just to do the bidding of their party heads.

The idea of wrong usage of the word consensus candidate was played out recently between the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) and the major opposition party, the Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP) especially now that the 2023 general elections is at hand. Both political parties have joined the bandwagon of gravy train after the charade of consensus arrangement in their party conventions in order to come up with an anointed candidate that will flag-bear at the general elections come 2023 without a baraza with party congress men and women.

According to Ugwuanyi, (2022, p. 1) in the train, the likes of the party’s heavy weights such as Bukola Saraki a former president of the senate and former governor of Kwara State and Aminu Tambuwal, ex-speaker of the House of Representative and current governor of Sokoto State who are all presidential hopefuls are the chief proponents of the consensus idea. Thank goodness to some other party bigwigs who never subscribed to the duos’ obduracy. The bigwigs did not oppose to this idea because they were conversant with the lexicon of consensus,

but because they felt short-changed and secondly, because the political system is turning to a state of ennui and non-beneficial to them. Although, at the end of the day the PDP family later conducted its party convention and Atiku Abubakar won. Even at that, Aminu Tambuwal who was a strong contender of the ticket who still believed so much on consensus candidacy wholeheartedly threw in the towel at the dying minute and asked his supporters to give their vote and support to a single (consensus minded-candidate) Atiku Abubakar. On the other side of the political divide, the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) was equally drumming, singing and fanning the embers of consensus/ anointed candidate to represent the party at the 2023 general elections amidst the 22 other contenders.

According to Onuanyim, (2022, p.4) the party chairman, Senator Abdullahi Adamu two days to the national convention of the party has announced the current president of Senate, Senator Ahmad Lawal as the consensus candidate by the party who will represent the party in the 2023 general elections. In this, were an imbroglio, impasse, trailed confusion and conundrum both in the presidency and the National Working Committee (NWC) which made both kicked against the decision of the party chairman and his cohorts who were championing the course of a consensus candidate.

Thank God that the other members of the party acted swiftly after realizing the enormity of the political consequences of how the misused grammar of consensus would cause them. Ahmed Bola Tinubu however later won the APC ticket to contest for the 2023 general elections. This kind of feats have in the past caused major rancours within the parties with many of the aggrieved victims cross-carpeting to other political parties; a situation which later made all the parties form a reconciliatory committee to broker peace among the aggrieved members.

In faraway city of Kano, the New Nigerian Peoples Party (NNPP) adopted and anointed Senator Rabiu Kwankwaso as its presidential flag-bearer. Also, the Labor Party was able to accommodate the aggrieved Peter Obi who was pressured out of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) haven seen the handwriting on the board that he wasn't going to have his way. He was however anointed the flag-bearer of the Labour Party (LP). The whole political scenario in Nigeria is how one will be endorsed, adopted and seen as a consensus candidate leaving others crying. Rejected here, accepted in another place. Is it that most candidates are afraid to contest with other rivals or they just want to be given a soft landing ground of becoming consensus candidates?

In the view of Ishiekwene, (2022, p. 1) “Consensus candidacy is not a new clown in our political circle”. Like a child the concept has been with us (as parents) for all this while. For instance, Buhari was a chief beneficiary of this misconstrued language when he first contested as the Presidential candidate of the All Nigeria Progressives Party (ANPP) in 2003. In 2015, the same Buhari enjoyed the same gesture where Action Group (AG), All Nigerian People Party (ANPP) and the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) adopted him as the sole candidate against the PDP (Ishiekwene, 2022, p. 1).

In every democratic setting, the choice of would-be-aspirants is selected in an in house party election called “Primary Election” after having a party baraza. The term democracy is when the people unanimously agree on a particular decision, issue or person (if it is about elections). But here in Nigeria, the concept of consensus has been changed to mean an agreement by a few groups of people to represent the views of the general people, and a few taking decisions on who to be the candidate of political parties. The question is, has the dictionary meaning of consensus changed? Is it that the Nigerian political elites are naïve or ignorant of the term consensus or is it that they are merely or deliberately using it to bamboozle the electorates to achieve their personal gains? These questions have requested for answers, hence this research: *The Lexicon of Consensus candidate and the Nigerian Democracy: How healthy is it?*

## **2. Misconstruing of the Term**

The Nigerian politicians have been blinded and could be said to be naïve with the use of the term or concept of consensus. To them, it means to endorse, anoint or hand pick a preferred candidate into electoral positions that ought to be contestable ones. The use of consensus agreement which is rooted down to hand picking of choice and endorsed candidate started during the Babangida regime in 1989 (Ishiekwene, 2022). According to him, Babangida in that year rejected all the six political parties registered with the National Electoral Commission (NEC) and were replaced with the National Republican Convention (NRC) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP). The bottom line was to favour and handpick choice political party which he can control as against the other ones, thereby defying the nations democratic process, denying candidates that would have won in their respective political parties and disenfranchising them. Those who emerged winners as presidential candidates from their various parties were disqualified, annulled and barred from re-contesting. The aim was purely a brazen form of militarized consensus and bias arrangement which produced MKO Abiola

and Bashir Tofa as the respective presidential candidates for the NRC and the SDP. This according to Ishiekwene's observation marked the genesis of endorsement and consensus candidacy in the political lexicon of Nigeria (Ishiekwene, 2022).

Again, the feats were repeated by another military junta, Gen. Sani Abacha who produced his self-styled consensus arrangement. Four political parties namely: the United Nigeria Congress Party (UNCP), Congress for National Consensus (CNC), Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN); and the National Centre Party of Nigeria (NCPN) were formed, but the four parties was later collapsed to form an adopted, endorsed, anointed and consensus political party named Grass-root Democratic Movement (GDM) with Alhaji Dikko Yusuf as the sole candidate (Ishiekwene, 2022).

This was another display of a misunderstood meaning of consensus. And in the eyes of a democratization process and dispensation in 1999, another form of consensus blunder was made; this may have toed the line of the former administrations at the formation of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP). The Alliance for Democracy (AD) and the All Peoples Party (APP) formed the merger that produced and ceded the contesting ticket to a single man (consensus choice) Olu Falae.

According to Ishiekwene, (2022), while this consensus arrangement went on between AD and APP, the military was bent on choosing and making Obasanjo the President; thus he became the choice candidate of the PDP, although, there was a make-believe primaries in Jos (Plateau State) between Obasanjo and Alex Ekweme of blessed memory, where Obasanjo got 80% and Ekweme had just 20% of the votes. This shows another political gimmick of selection mode borne out of the misused concept of consensus conveying a wrong meaning.

Another problem which was glaring, was the deliberate affront without pretense in the stoppage of the internal democratization of his party – the PDP governors who wanted to flex nerves with the then President Obasanjo, were cowed and intimidated to accepting Umar Musa Yar' Adua as the sole consensus candidate in 2007. This was another form of misconception of the concept of consensus and an attempt to thwart democratization process because of who to be adopted as party flag-bearer.

The same veneer of political consensus misunderstanding covered those at the state levels. In 2007, Chief James Onanefe Ibori at the verge of finishing his tenure as the Governor of Delta State ensured his Chief of Staff, Dr. Emmanuel Uduaghan takes over from him. According to

Akinrefon & Ejuwa in Vanguard (2010), excerpt how the Great Ovadje Ogboru lamented that “Uduaghan became governor of Delta State without elections”. This means that there was a compromise in the process of selection in the aegis of consensus. Yet another misused term of consensus. This type of political calibration and wrong usage of the terminology of consensus was also wrongly applied in Akwa Ibom State where the then Governor, Senator Godswill Akpabio made way for his Chief of Staff, Emmanuel Udom to succeed him. This development according to Udo, in Premium Times of 2014, April 25<sup>th</sup>, made Don Etiebet lambast Akpabio.

In Bayelsa State, the misuse of the concept was an easy ride and a huge benefit to candidates who were cronies and favourites to serving governors right from the inception of democracy after the creation of the state in 1999. There has been one form of harmonization of one person against the others because of preferred and choice candidates. For example, youths in Bayelsa on April 9, 2022 urged Senator Douye Diri to be fair to all candidates towards 2023 general elections (Vanguard, 2022, April 9).

The misconception of the concept “consensus” is also not new in the Edo State political history. Recalling vividly, the incumbent Godwill Gaius Obaseki was humiliated out of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in his bid for the second tenure. His political godfather, the dethroned National Chairman of the Party never wanted him for reason of being disloyal and so wanted the party’s ticket to be given to Pastor Ize Iyamu. The anointing and endorsement of Ize Iyamu brought about the quagmire which necessitated the forceful change of platform by Godwill Obaseki to the Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP). In 2021, he was given the party’s ticket to run, and he eventually won the election. But the question here is, why seeking to be a consensus candidate?

In the THIS DAY Newspaper publication of May 26, 2022 edition, Ibunge observed that prior to the voting exercise during the Rivers State PDP primary election, the governor, Barrister Nyeson Wike had an indoor meeting with the LGA Chairmen and elders of the party, probably to agree on the choice of candidate. At the end of the exercise, a neophyte into active politics and a former Accountant General of Rivers State (an ally of the Governor) Siminialayi Fubara emerged as the anointed candidate leaving other PDP bigwigs like Senator George Sekibo and other contenders not even putting appearance at the venue of the exercise where the primary was conducted.

On the side of APC, Ann Godwin on 24 April 2022 reported in *The Guardian* newspaper, that “members of the Rivers State APC received the party’s endorsement of Mr. Tonye Cole as flag-bearer in the 2023 guber-race with mix feelings”. Godwin in his report narrated how “10 aspirants and 2 new entrance to the race were asked to be excused and were later called in to be briefed of Tonye Cole’s endorsement by a decision purportedly taken by the party’s leadership”. Magnus Abe and his allies swiftly contested the endorsement, saying Tonye Cole does not have their approval”. Quoting one George Tolofari, Godwin said the party (APC) met in Abuja on April 11, 2022 with all the 13 aspirants to unanimously adopt Tonye Cole as a consensus candidate against any other candidates in APC. The language of consensus is changed again here because not all agreed to the candidacy of Tonye cole.

The inability of politicians to be conversant with the concept of consensus is not only peculiar to the states in the Southern region of the country alone, but it’s been a universal phenomenal disease of ignorance which has affected the length and breadth of the Nigerian political landscape and its politicians. In the face of these manipulative feats of ordaining and anointing candidates, how healthy will the Nigerian democracy be? What will be the fate of the Nigerian politics as this ugly trending issue of consensus candidates continue? Does bringing a candidate and making sure the candidate flag-bear a political norm or a new language that is trying to gain popularity in the lexicon of Nigeria politics? How healthy could this be to the country’s enduring democracy? These questions are begging for answers; hence this study: *The lexicon of consensus candidate and the Nigerian democracy; how healthy is it*, is been written.

### **3. Conceptualization of the term Consensus**

The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 10<sup>th</sup> edition defines consensus as an opinion that all members of the group agree with. Arising from this definitive meaning, a consensus is a decision on or about an issue that is generally accepted by members of a group, organization, association or that of a government. Consensus according to the Merriam-Webster, the web dictionary, is a general agreement about something; an idea or opinion that is shared by all the people in a group. It also defines the word as group solidarity in sentiment and belief. It then means that if the generality of the group members agree on a matter or issue, it must be binding on every member. The opposite simply mean that the decision(s) reached or accepted cannot come from a single person or from a few people without the consent of the full house. Any decision that does not come from the full house can cause a conundrum.

In the view of Haug, (2015, p. 2) consensus is when decision of great importance is taken and accepted by every group member without division. This simply implies that any decision not generally accepted is against the will of the people that makes up the group. Haug, further states that consensus is quite different from unanimity, that while consensus is the general acceptance of a decision, after much meetings, analysis and consideration of the issue, a unanimous decision may be done by simple voice vote or a raise of hand to signify support without the nitty-gritty as conducted in the former. Haug, (2015, pp. 4-6) maintained that consensus has many typologies – meeting to deliberate an issue exhaustively before taking a firm decision, breaking or collapsing into a committee to further peep into the matter at hand before making a conclusion on the matter after much brainstorming (mental consensus) or by Top Management Team (TMT).

If the National Working Committee (NWC) as a policy making body of any political party, its governors on the same platform are excluded or exempted from any crucial meeting that borders on how to pick a consensus candidate, but the decision came from a single person maybe the chairman or the President who is the head of the Party, then the decision is short of being a consensus. It means that the decision of the choice candidate is not widely accepted, the opposite is not the case. A consensus requires that a group must reach a decision which has been agreed upon by a collective agreement. For a decision to gain full support, it is necessary and expected that all group members who participated in the decision-making process would have been consulted, including those with minority opinions (Wikipedia).

Haug, (2015, pp. 2-7) in trying to throw more light on what consensus is, says that in a consensus, a democratic decision making process should allow the group members to engage in the dialogue and share information for the purpose of increasing the understanding of the other members and provide a rationale for choosing a particular position. Under this, consent is the bases of consensus.

According to Akinkuotu, et'al, (2022, p.2) the APC national chairman Abdullahi Adamu's consensus candidate of Ahmad Lawal failed because the 22 aspirants, the governors under the APC platform, the NWC of the party and the presidency were all at variance with the purported candidature of the Senate President, Ahmad Lawal. A unilateral decision for any reason does not translate to a consensus decision. In furtherance to this, Onuanyim, (2022, p.4) says,



obduracy and conundrum trails the supposed consensus agreement of the APC 2023 candidacy. He averred that the presidency, governors of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and members of the National Working Committee (NWC) disagreed on the decision of adopting a choice candidate as against other aspirants who have spent a whopping sum of One Hundred and Forty-Three Million Naira to obtain form of intent to contest for the party's presidential ticket.

### **Decision Making**

Decision is the selection of a cause of action. It is the choice from among a set of alternatives. This may be as a result of much or careful planning. It represents a judgment, a final resolution of a conflict of needs, means or goals and a commitment to action (Sharma, et'al, 2012, p.794).Decision making according to Rao & Rao in Sharma, et'al, (2012, p. 794) "the process by which individuals select, a course of action from among alternatives to produce adhesive result".

Cole & Kelly, (2011, p. 214) sees decision making as the process of making choice from among several options. From the above, decision making simply mean making a choice from a set of alternatives. There is a process according to the views of Rao & Rao in Sharma, et'al, (2012, p. 794), this processes can mean the various areas and analysis which the matter is subjected to before a final judgment is taken. The whole of the processes is to avoid rancour from the members. The various political groups that are coming up with the decision of having a sole representative of the party must have exploited all the processes and finished consultation widely before agreeing on a single candidate.

### **Group Decision Making**

In democracy, decision making is expected to be a widely consultative issue before making a final judgment. This is to avoid rancour. According to Onah, (2005, p. 89) "an important way of enhancing participative decision making is through group decision making". The political party is a group setting, and for any decision that must be reached, must be a participative one by all and sundry. Anything short of this will be tantamount to authoritarian and a military style of rule. The choice of one man to represent the party therefore ought to be a group decision which is participatory by every member of the party (group).

## **Decision Making and Consensus**

From the above, decision making explains the gamut of how a choice can be made among other alternatives after much analyses, considerations and consultations (processes) have been made. If all the members of the group is consulted before the choice is made among other alternatives without any one raising eyebrows or devoid of rancour, then the decision is a consensus one (Haug, 2015, pp. 2-7). This must be done by individuals (Onah, 2005, p. 89). Furthermore, Onah, says any decision made by a group is participative (that is, it involves everybody) and a consensus is a decision-making process that requires the collective agreement of everybody to rule on an array of opinions (Haug, 2015, pp. 2-7).

The “collectivity” of Haug and the “Participative” of Onah means, the involvement of everybody in the group, with a mutual understanding before acceptance is made after much negotiation. Any political party coming up with a consensus candidate, but lacks these ingredients, is a single man’s idea which does not reflect the true meaning of the word consensus in context. This is likened to the case of Abdullahi Adamu who single handedly presented Ahmad Lawal as a consensus candidate against the wishes of the National Working Committee (NWC), the governors under the APC platform and the presidency. Nwaneri, (2022, p. 4) quoted Buhari’s associates saying, “Adamu’s position on Lawal not final”.

## **The Difference between Consensus and Majority Rule**

Kenneth May, (2013) observed that fundamentally, there are differences in the way decision-making process is carried out, especially a conclusion when it has to do with majority rule and also when it has to do with agreement and negotiation to get a consensus.

Below are some of the differences between both terminologies as opined by Kenneth May in 2013.

- That a consensus requires participation from all group members, including those with minority opinions. Majority rule does not require a collective agreement.
- All group members must invest in the chosen outcome; but majority rule may result in those in the minority that felt left out of the decision-making process.
- Again, that consensus must require a more conducive environment healthy for any discourse; while majority rule does not need any similar or common level of interaction, and may allow members to shelve their beliefs. If they so desire, majority rules is quicker

in process and is susceptible and prone to abuse by the majority, while in the case of consensus, groups wanting to reach a consensus may collapse to group thinking.

### Consensus and the 2022 Electoral Act Provision

According to Section 84(9), “A political party that adopts a consensus candidate shall secure the written consent of all cleared aspirants for the position, indicating their voluntary withdrawal from the race and their endorsement of a consensus candidate”. This section of the Electoral Act of 2022 is used discreetly, it will be democratically healthy in exonerating the proponents of consensus since it portrays a consensual backing, but the application to drive or convey the message is what has frequently caused the fallacious use of the concept of the word “consensus” by the politicians in the country. For example, the Buhari led APC government saw Section 84(9) and section 84(10) as a backup which stipulate that consensus must be consensual and voluntary 84(10) that “where no written consent can be obtained, then there should be direct or indirect primaries...” as a window to coerce every interested candidate to fill the “form 18” letter of withdrawal which was attached to the expression of interest form as a means to directly adopt or anoint candidate of their choice as a consensus candidate (Bolaji, 2022, p. 1). According to Abayomi, (2022), the letter is contrary to the laws and norms of democracy. See below form 18 withdrawal letter. The idea of ‘Form 18’ to force consensus on the candidates was also faulted by Ogala, (2022, May 5).

**18. WITHDRAWAL LETTER**

Date:.....  
Name:.....  
Address:.....  
Phone No:.....  
Membership No:.....

The National Chairman,  
All Progressives Congress,  
40 Blantyre Street,  
Wuse II, Abuja.

**LETTER OF VOLUNTARY WITHDRAWAL**

I,..... of the above  
address vying for.....  
of ..... State, hereby voluntarily withdraw  
my candidacy from the contest scheduled to hold on.....  
of....., 2023.

My withdrawal is in the best interest of our great party the All  
Progressives Congress (APC).

Thank you.

Name:.....  
Sign:.....

Before me.....  
Commissioner for Oaths/Notary Public, etc.

Source: APC online page, (2022)

Section 84(9) & (10) of the Electoral Act, 2022 was the document the APC chairman wanted to use to alter the full meaning of consensus. This brought about serious altercation in the political arena during the period when political parties were to get their party flag-bearer(s). The various sections clearly stated the process of how consensus candidate would emerge, but since the aspirants felt short-changed after spending colossal amount of millions of naira, they never subscribed to the idea of a consensus candidate.

The APC family did not secure a clear and good negotiation with the members of the governors under its platform, the NWC, the candidates and other stake holders of the party. The party tried to employ one sided approach of forceful and tactful voluntary withdrawal of candidates to call it 'consensus', by attaching the 'Form 18' to the interest form. This form and its clause could be termed as a "hidden pit fall clause". In their wisdom, they wanted to evoke or secure section 84(9) and section 84(10) requirements of the Electoral Act, 2022 to relegate candidates so that they could bring in their own. They never applied the full clear meaning of consensus.

Also, President Buhari in his address to the APC governors in paragraphs 6-10 besought the party (mostly the governors and LGA Chairmen who are powerful in their states and Local Government Areas) to reciprocate the gesture given them, when some of them were returned for a second term so that a candidate can be picked and endorsed in readiness for the proposed national convention of the party. This appeal may have also helped the party come up with a new mode of having a consensus candidate for the party come 2023, hence the "constructed" Form 18 indicating voluntary withdrawal by candidates and not handwritten withdrawal by the various candidates stating reasons why they want to withdraw, notwithstanding the large sum of money expended for the purchase of the form of interest/intent. The content of the Form 18 does not portray voluntary withdrawal which would have been a consensus agreement, but a manufactured document to make candidates withdraw without common agreement. See letter below.

**ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY, MUHAMMADU BUHARI, PRESIDENT, FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA, TO THE PROGRESSIVE GOVERNORS' FORUM AT THE CONSULTATIVE MEETING HELD AT THE PRESIDENTIAL VILLA, ABUJA, ON TUESDAY, 31ST MAY, 2022**

PROTOCOLS

I am delighted to address this gathering of the Progressive Governors' Forum as part of the consultative processes that have always strengthened the internal dynamics of our Party, the All Progressives Congress, (APC).

2. You will all recall that APC came to power at the center in 2015 through a cohesive machinery, notwithstanding its status as the opposition party. Similarly, in 2019, it was returned to power under my leadership, because of the dividends of democracy delivered to Nigerians irrespective of their political leanings.

3. The Party has since grown in strength and capacity to govern. The key to both electoral successes is the ability of the party to hold consultations and for its members to put the nation above other interests.

4. The transition processes for the 2023 General Elections have commenced in earnest and I note that the most successful Political Parties globally have always relied on their internal cohesion and a strong leadership brand to achieve bigger electoral fortunes. Our party, the APC, shall not be any different, more so as we are still implementing the blueprint for a more prosperous nation.

5. As I begin the final year of my second term as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and leader of the Party, I recognize the compelling need for me to provide stronger leadership to the Party under this transition process and to ensure that it happens in an orderly manner.

6. Such leadership is required so that the Party remains strong and united. It is also needed to improve our electoral fortunes by ensuring that it retains power at the center, hold the great majority in various legislative chambers and also gain additional number of states at state levels.

7. In pursuit of the foregoing objectives, the Party has successfully established internal policies that promote continuity and smooth succession plans even at the state and local government levels. For example, first term Governors who have served credibly well have been encouraged to stand for re-election. Similarly, second term Governors have been accorded the privilege of promoting successors that are capable of driving their visions as well as the ideals of the party.

8. In a few days, the Party will be holding its Convention during which primaries would take place to pick the Presidential Flag Bearer for the 2023 General Elections. This is a very significant process and its outcome should prove to the world, the positive quality of the APC regarding democratic principles, culture as well as leadership.

9. As we approach the Convention, I appeal to all of you to allow our interests to converge, our focus to remain on the changing dynamics of our environment, the expectations of our citizens and the global community. Our objective must be the victory of our party and our choice of candidate must be someone who would give the Nigerian masses a sense of victory and confidence even before the elections.

10. In keeping with the established internal policies of the Party and as we approach the Convention in a few days, therefore, I wish to solicit the reciprocity and support of the Governors and other stakeholders in picking my successor, who would fly the flag of our party for election into the office of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 2023.

11. I wish to assure you that the consultation process shall continue to ensure that all aspirants and stakeholders would be brought on board right through to the convention. This would also ensure that any anxiety occasioned by different factors are effectively brought under control and that our party emerges stronger.

12. I thank you all for listening. God bless you all. God bless our Party, the APC and God bless our nation, Nigeria.

*Makbere, Etire, Romeo & Ibukilebu*

Source: Shehu Garba's facebook page (2022)

#### **4. Theoretical Framework**

This study shall consider the consensus theory.

A consensus theory is one which believe that the institutions of society are working together to maintain social cohesion and stability. According to Nickerson, (2022, p. 1) the “value of consensus deals assume that the norms and values of society are generally agreed and that social life is based on co-operation rather than conflict”. Nickerson further maintains that, “Consensus theories have a philosophical tradition dating back to the days of Plato and Rousseau, who contended for structures that maintain the consensus of society. According to her, the first formal sociological consensus theory is the ‘Functionalism’ propounded by Emile Durkheim, (1893-1897) which argued that all institutions within a society play an important role”

Nickerson in her definition of what consensus is, states that the term means “agreement”. According to her, the term is used in sociology to describe theories which stress the essential cohesion and solidarity of society, where the core principle of social life is “based” on agreement or mutual cooperation of the members of the society”. Keywords that could be drawn from Nickerson’s definition, explanation and the theory generally are “group cohesion”, “solidarity of society”, “agreement” and “mutual cooperation” among members of the society.

#### **Applying the Theory**

Society is made up of units, subunits, groups and institutions. These entities ought not to work in isolation of each other. They must agree to work in oneness and in unity of purpose without division; and every decision taken must be based on mutual cooperation and common agreement. Common ideas beget a consensus.

Political parties are entities and institutions that make up the society. Within them as institutions are the members who must agree to work in harmony, mutual cooperation and agreement to promote cohesiveness and togetherness. No single person should dare isolate him/herself from the group; the group in turn should not short-change or deprive any member of the group to avoid a malicious situation which can generate rancour and conflict. Everyone should be part of the decision, and every decision should be taken by everybody. That is consensus!

The term consensus according to Nickerson, (2022, p.1) is used in sociology to describe theories that stress the importance of togetherness, cohesion and solidarity. She argues that it is a core principle of social life which connotes agreement. She further says that the term is traceable to the “philosophical tradition works of Plato and Rousseau; who argued for structures that maintain the consensus of society”. Tracing the origin of the word, Nickerson recalled that the first to synthesize the term consensus as a sociological theory was Emile Durkheim in 1893-1897, who came up with the term Functionalism which argues that “all institutions within a society serve an essential purpose”. Nickerson, (2022, p.1) also posited the views of another proponent, Merton who expounded on Durkheim’s functionalist theory. In presenting Merton’s view, she stated that institution can be dysfunctional, but nevertheless, all are still within consensus theories. Others such as criminologists also used the consensus theory.

Social sciences have so many fields and for the mere fact that it is a multidisciplinary field, the concept of consensus has been widely coined and applied in almost all the social sciences to portray the same meaning. Hence, in political science the term and the meaning haven’t change. It still means a common agreement among group of people over decision making. On the issue of whether the four political parties use the concept as the political or democratic term or not, it could be said, all the four political parties APC, PDP, LP and NNPP applied the concept in the line of politics, but whether the parties applied the term rightly can only be answered as this study has evaluated and, interrogated through the arrays of literature, this study has employed.

## **5. Conclusion**

Going by the definition of the concept of consensus, it commonly refers to agreement reached by everybody in a group over an issue or something. In all fairness to the political parties in Nigeria, the term can be a desirable political ‘*Koinonia*’, designed to reduce and address rancour, divisiveness or tension that would arise among those wishing to contest various elective positions. No matter what, if the aim is to achieve its purpose, then collective agreement among the various interest groups must be considered.

According to Bolaji, (2022) “the moment the interest of a member is perceived short-changed, then the consensual process will irretrievably collapse like a pack of cards”. He again said that the political concept of consensus is not a new Lexicon in the nation’s political history. It is



just that in the past, party leaders had tactfully deployed the concept undemocratically to elbow out popular contenders and aspirants in favour of their cronies who most times are not popular and also not the people's choice.

The chief patronage of these ugly feats of abuse of power is the executives who used their executive authority to hold on state resources and muscle out the less privileged party members. This arbitrary use of power was seen and also demonstrated by PDP under former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (2014, party primary election) and President Buhari when he vetoed the amendments to the electoral law severally. Of course, both the Federal and the State Legislators are often seen as powerless and always doing the bidding of the executives hence, in their own little way of protest decided in 2010 to pass legislations that tend to interfere with the internal management of the parties (Owete, 2014, Bolaji, 2022).

For fear of the legislators not interfering before Mr. President signing the Electoral Act into law, the President was persuaded based on a compromise that the legislative arm would later renege on. According to Bolaji, (2022), President Buhari never liked Section 84(12) which seeks to remove the influence of the executives and its appointees in the party primary process, and that of Section 84(9) and (10) which empowers him to have preference for a consensus candidate.

According to Section 84(9) of the Electoral Act 2022, "A political party that adopts a consensus candidate shall secure the written consent of all cleared aspirants for the position, indicating their voluntary withdrawal from the race and their endorsement of the consensus candidate. No wonder APC cleverly brought in "Form 18", the essence of this section was delicate to ensure and to preserve the democratic content of the consensual policy. This is where the lexicon and the meaning of consensus started changing. The President and his cohorts never wanted some of the party members to contest, that they should withdraw, using "Form 18" against their will, but still want them to feel as if they are the ones who wants to withdraw voluntarily from the race; so that they can field their choice candidate without good agreement, thereby making the electorates believe that they are withdrawing and given their support for a consensus candidate. This is a misuse of the concept or grammar called CONSENSUS. The arbitrary use of power to subtly make some people leave or abandon their political pursuit, ambition or aspirations without coming into having mutual understanding with the persons concern, is tantamount to twisting and turning the operational meaning of the word, different from its original meaning.

Whichever angle the word is viewed from, be it as a political jargon or from any other field in the social science, the word consensus still portray the same meanings, which does not need to be applied wittingly and purposefully to undo some level of people. Therefore, this paper wish to suggest that, party chieftains should apply the concept properly, by consulting widely before coming up with a choice candidate who will represent the party very well, so that the dividends of democracy will be felt, and not be sacrificed on the altar of ‘puppet-godson’ who will be doing the bidding of the ill-gotten godfather(s) to the detriment of the electorates, if he eventually emerges as the general winner at general poll.



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