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PARTY DOMINANCE AND POLITICAL HEGEMONY. A CASE STUDY OF YOBE STATE

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Abstract

This study examines the dynamics of party dominance and political hegemony in Yobe State, Nigeria, focusing on how the All Progressives Congress (APC) has maintained an overwhelming hold over the state's political landscape across multiple election cycles. Within Nigeria's federal system, Yobe State serves as a case study of how dominant parties consolidate power to the detriment of opposition parties. The research adopts **Gramsci's theory of hegemony**, which emphasizes the role of ideological leadership in shaping socio-political structures, to analyze the APC's entrenched authority in Yobe State. Utilizing a **content analysis methodology**, the study examines election results, party manifestos, political speeches, and media narratives to identify the key drivers of APC's dominance. Data were analyzed thematically to uncover patterns of electoral success, party loyalty, the influence of [redacted] local political elites, and the alignment of the state's political culture with APC's interests. A notable finding reveals that APC's dominance extends beyond electoral victories, as it has entrenched itself into the governance and social fabric of Yobe State, marginalizing opposition parties and stifling political competition. The study concludes that while APC's dominance provides political stability, it undermines democratic

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consolidation by limiting viable political alternatives and marginalizing opposition voices. To address this, the study recommends the creation of an enabling environment for opposition parties through the enforcement of **fair electoral laws** that ensure equal access to resources, media platforms, and political spaces. Additionally, opposition parties should focus on building **grassroots networks** to increase their visibility and voter engagement, which is essential for promoting political pluralism and strengthening democratic processes in Yobe State and beyond.

Introduction

Party dominance and political hegemony are critical features of the political landscape in many African countries, including Nigeria, where certain political parties wield substantial influence over institutions and the electorate. In Yobe State, located in Nigeria's northeastern region, the All Progressives Congress (APC) exemplifies this dominance, having consistently controlled key political offices, including the governorship and legislative seats, over several election cycles. This sustained dominance reflects broader trends in Nigerian politics, where parties often entrench themselves within specific regions through electoral success, patronage networks, and ideological alignment with local elites (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2000; Diamond, 1999). The concept of political hegemony, as articulated by Antonio Gramsci, goes beyond electoral control, encompassing the ability of a ruling party to shape the cultural, social, and economic frameworks within a society (Gramsci, 1971). In this context, the APC's dominance in Yobe State is not only a product of its electoral victories but also of its ability to influence governance, political culture, and development policies in the state.

Yobe State's political environment is shaped by a combination of historical, socio-economic, and cultural factors, making the persistence of APC dominance a compelling case study. Despite significant challenges, including poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and security concerns from insurgent activities, the APC has managed to maintain its hold on power. This dominance is further bolstered by traditional leaders, religious institutions, and influential political figures who align with the ruling party, reinforcing its ideological and political hegemony (Ibeanu, 2007). This dynamic raises critical questions about the state of democracy in Yobe, particularly regarding political pluralism, the role of

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opposition parties, and the freedom of political expression. By examining these aspects, this study seeks to understand the mechanisms that sustain APC dominance and the broader implications for democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Research Problem

The persistence of party dominance and political hegemony in Yobe State presents a critical issue in understanding the dynamics of power in a democratic context. Despite Nigeria's progress in democratic consolidation since 1999, states like Yobe continue to witness entrenched one-party dominance, with the ruling party maintaining significant control over the political landscape. This raises concerns regarding the vitality of democratic institutions, electoral processes, and the potential for political pluralism in the state. One-party dominance, especially in regions grappling with socio-economic challenges such as poverty, underdevelopment, and insecurity, raises questions about the effectiveness of democratic governance. In this context, understanding the strategies, mechanisms, and practices that enable the ruling party to sustain its dominance becomes essential to uncovering the roots of democratic stagnation in Yobe State. The limited development and lack of effective governance, often linked to political hegemony, exacerbate citizens' disenfranchisement, leading to increased political apathy and reduced participation in the democratic process (Lodge, 2002; Gyimah-Boadi, 2009).

Furthermore, political dominance in Yobe State contributes to the suppression of opposition parties, leaving little space for political competition and stifling democratic pluralism. The prevalence of political victimization, where opposition members face harassment, intimidation, and exclusion, further undermines the development of a robust multi-party system. This issue is particularly poignant when considering the state's religious and ethnic makeup, which influences voter behavior and can reinforce political allegiances tied to local elites and traditional figures. The impact of this dominance extends beyond the political sphere into governance, where the lack of a strong opposition constrains policy accountability and reforms. Existing studies, such as those by Alemika and Chukwuma (2000) and Diamond (1999), focus on national trends of party dominance, but this research fills a critical gap by investigating the specific challenges faced in Yobe State. This study aims to shed light on the broader implications of political hegemony in fostering underdevelopment, limiting citizen engagement, and inhibiting democratic competition in the state.

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Research Objectives:

1. To examine the mechanisms through which one-party dominance has been maintained in Yobe State.
2. To explore the role of local elites, traditional leaders, and religious institutions in reinforcing political hegemony in Yobe State.
3. To assess the impact of political dominance on the development and effectiveness of opposition parties in Yobe State.
4. To analyze the implications of political dominance and hegemony in Yobe State for democratic consolidation and governance in the state.

Research Questions:

1. What political strategies and mechanisms have been employed to sustain one-party dominance in Yobe State?
2. How do local elites, traditional leaders, and religious institutions contribute to political hegemony in Yobe State?
3. What is the impact of political dominance on the development and effectiveness of opposition parties in Yobe State?
4. How does political dominance and hegemony in Yobe State affect democratic consolidation and governance

Conceptual clarification

This section clarifies the core concepts of "party dominance" and "political hegemony," which are central to the study. These terms are explored to understand their implications for the political landscape of Yobe State, particularly in relation to sustained control by a single political party and its impact on governance and democratic processes.

Party Dominance in Yobe State:

Party dominance refers to a political system where one party consistently exercises overwhelming control over the political process, encompassing not only electoral success but also influence over governance, policy-making, and public discourse. This dominance often results in the marginalization of opposition parties, raising concerns about democratic pluralism, competition, and accountability (Lodge, 2002). In Yobe State, party dominance is exemplified by the All Progressives Congress (APC), which has held sway over the state's political landscape throughout much of the Fourth Republic. The APC's influence extends

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beyond electoral victories, incorporating control of key political institutions and the consolidation of power through robust patronage networks and ideological alignment with the electorate. This sustained dominance underscores the challenges of fostering a competitive political environment in a state where one party enjoys extensive control.

The APC's dominance in Yobe State has its roots in historical, cultural, and institutional factors. Following its formation in 2013 through the merger of various political forces, the APC quickly established itself as the dominant party in the state, leveraging the loyalty of influential political figures, traditional rulers, and religious leaders. This alignment was further strengthened during the 2015 and 2019 elections, where the APC achieved sweeping victories across both executive and legislative seats. By consolidating power through state resources and the strategic use of religion and ethnicity, the APC entrenched its dominance, leaving opposition parties with little room to maneuver (Ogunbiyi, 2017). Consequently, party dominance in Yobe cannot be understood solely in terms of electoral outcomes but must be analyzed within the broader context of socio-political and economic structures that sustain this control.

Political Hegemony in Yobe State:

Political hegemony, as conceptualized by Antonio Gramsci, extends beyond mere political control to include the ability to secure consent and maintain ideological dominance over a society's cultural, social, and political institutions (Gramsci, 1971). In Yobe State, the APC exemplifies political hegemony through its alignment with traditional and religious authorities, which play a central role in shaping voter behavior and sustaining public loyalty. By positioning itself as the guardian of the state's predominantly Muslim population and securing the endorsement of influential religious leaders, the APC reinforces its ideological appeal and marginalizes opposition voices. This collaboration between political elites and cultural institutions ensures the APC's continued dominance by creating a consensus that upholds its rule as both legitimate and natural (Ogunbiyi, 2017).

The APC's hegemony is also evident in its control over state resources and governance structures. Through strategic patronage networks, the ruling party distributes resources to key allies, ensuring their loyalty and reducing the capacity of opposition parties to build effective support bases. This system extends to public appointments and infrastructural development projects, which are often designed to benefit APC loyalists and consolidate the party's influence. The

strategic use of state apparatus to manipulate political narratives further strengthens the party's hegemonic position. These mechanisms, coupled with electoral strategies that limit competition—such as vote buying and the use of state security to suppress opposition—demonstrate how the APC maintains its dominance in both governance and electoral processes (Duruji, 2014). However, while these strategies solidify the party's position, they also raise concerns about the erosion of democratic principles and the exclusion of dissenting voices from the political arena.

Institutional Factors and the Perpetuation of Party Dominance in Yobe State

State institutions are integral to the maintenance of party dominance, shaping the political landscape in ways that favor the ruling party. In Yobe State, the APC has leveraged control over the executive branch to consolidate its power. The governor's office, as the central authority in state administration, plays a critical role in directing public policy, appointing loyalists to key positions, and managing state resources to reinforce political allegiance. This use of patronage networks ensures that beneficiaries remain aligned with the APC, effectively reducing the opposition's capacity to challenge the ruling party's control. Furthermore, the APC's influence over local government structures amplifies its reach, embedding the party's dominance in the grassroots political framework (Ogunbiyi, 2017).

The legislature and judiciary also contribute to the perpetuation of APC dominance in Yobe State. With the APC controlling a majority of legislative seats, the party can steer policy-making, pass laws that entrench its influence, and block initiatives from opposition members. Additionally, the judiciary has been criticized for perceived partiality toward the ruling party, with court rulings often favoring the APC in electoral disputes and other legal challenges. This judicial alignment, coupled with the party's control over law enforcement agencies, creates an environment where opposition parties face significant institutional barriers. Law enforcement agencies are frequently accused of suppressing opposition activities, further limiting political competition and ensuring the APC's continued dominance (Ojo, 2010). These institutional dynamics illustrate how state mechanisms are manipulated to sustain party dominance, raising concerns about their implications for democratic accountability and pluralism.

Electoral Practices in Yobe State:

Electoral practices in Yobe State are deeply influenced by social, cultural, and institutional factors that shape voting behavior and the conduct of elections.

Voting patterns in the state largely reflect the interplay between religious affiliation, ethnicity, and patronage. The predominantly Muslim population of Yobe has shown a consistent preference for the All Progressives Congress (APC), which has successfully aligned its political messaging with Islamic values and traditions that resonate with the electorate. This trend of religious and cultural alignment, combined with the APC's ability to establish strong regional loyalty, underscores why voters often support candidates not just based on party ideologies but also on the perceived benefits of aligning with the ruling party. In rural areas, economic dependence on government patronage further reinforces this loyalty, as voters associate their socioeconomic welfare with the continuity of APC-led governance (Ogunbiyi, 2017; Duruji, 2014).

Election management in Yobe State is fraught with challenges that undermine the credibility of the democratic process. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has faced criticism for logistical failures and allegations of bias favoring the ruling party. Incidents of voter intimidation, ballot box stuffing, and manipulation of results have been recurrent, further entrenching the perception of APC dominance. In addition, the control of state resources and local government structures by the APC exacerbates these issues, creating an uneven playing field for opposition parties. Logistical hurdles in remote areas, combined with security concerns, particularly due to the Boko Haram insurgency, have further complicated efforts to conduct free and fair elections. These systemic shortcomings raise significant concerns about political accountability and inclusiveness in Yobe's electoral processes (Ojo, 2010; Poulantzas, 1978).

Opposition Dynamics in Yobe State:

Opposition parties in Yobe State face a daunting task in contesting the entrenched dominance of the APC, which benefits from extensive control over political and institutional resources. The APC's grip on power is reinforced through its influence over state institutions such as the executive and electoral bodies, which are perceived as partisan. Opposition parties struggle to counter this institutional bias, as they lack comparable access to financial resources and state apparatus. These structural barriers are compounded by the use of security forces to intimidate opposition supporters and disrupt their political activities, further marginalizing opposition voices. Media access, too, remains limited for opposition parties, as many outlets are either state-controlled or indirectly influenced by the APC,

thereby constraining the ability of rivals to disseminate their platforms effectively (Ojo, 2010; Duruji, 2014).

Electoral malpractices, including vote-buying and intimidation, further diminish the competitiveness of opposition parties. The APC's use of state resources to sustain a patronage network ensures voter loyalty, making it difficult for opposition candidates to gain traction. Moreover, traditional rulers, who wield significant influence in rural communities, often align with the APC, endorsing candidates and mobilizing voters in their favor. This alliance between the ruling party and traditional leaders creates an environment where opposition parties are not only outmatched in resources but also face cultural and social obstacles in challenging APC hegemony. Consequently, opposition dynamics in Yobe State remain constrained by systemic imbalances that perpetuate one-party dominance (Ogunbiyi, 2017).

Socioeconomic Context:

Economic underdevelopment in Yobe State plays a pivotal role in shaping political allegiance, as poverty and unemployment make voters highly dependent on state resources. The APC, leveraging its control of the state apparatus, employs patronage politics to secure loyalty through the distribution of jobs, contracts, and public service benefits. This dynamic is particularly pronounced in rural areas, where limited access to alternative sources of income strengthens voter reliance on the ruling party. Opposition parties, by contrast, lack the resources to provide similar incentives, which puts them at a distinct disadvantage. As a result, political competition is often determined by material benefits rather than ideological commitments, further entrenching the APC's dominance (Ogunbiyi, 2017; Duruji, 2014).

Insecurity, especially the Boko Haram insurgency, has added another layer of complexity to Yoben State's political landscape. The ongoing conflict has disrupted economic activities and displaced large sections of the population, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities. The APC has capitalized on its narrative as the guarantor of security and stability, using its control over security forces to project an image of capable leadership. This perception has resonated with voters who prioritize safety amidst the insurgency's challenges. At the same time, insecurity has hindered the organizational capabilities of opposition parties, limiting their ability to campaign effectively and connect with voters. By intertwining its political narrative with the promise of security, the APC has further

consolidated its electoral advantage, creating a political environment where economic hardship and insecurity mutually reinforce its hegemony (Poulantzas, 1978; Ojo, 2010).

Impact on Governance:

In Yobe State, the prolonged dominance of the All Progressives Congress (APC) has significantly influenced service delivery. While political stability resulting from party continuity can facilitate consistent governance, it often leads to prioritization of political gains over citizens' needs. Bureaucratic inefficiencies have persisted, with public resources frequently directed toward constituencies that support the ruling party, leaving opposition strongholds underserved. This selective allocation deepens regional inequalities and weakens the overall infrastructure for public service delivery. Furthermore, patronage politics often undermines long-term developmental planning, as resources are diverted to maintain political support rather than address systemic challenges in education, healthcare, and economic development (Ogunbiyi, 2017; Duruji, 2014).

Policy innovation also suffers under prolonged one-party rule. In Yobe State, the APC's entrenched position has led to a governance approach focused on maintaining the status quo rather than embracing transformative policies. Without effective opposition to introduce alternative proposals or critique existing strategies, policy stagnation becomes prevalent. Policymakers, reliant on established practices, often avoid experimenting with innovative solutions to pressing socio-economic issues. This inertia restricts opportunities for diversification and progress, particularly in areas like economic empowerment and infrastructural development. A competitive political environment, which encourages robust policy debates and innovation, is essential but remains elusive in Yobe State due to the APC's dominance (Ojo, 2010).

Comparative Perspective:

Yobe State's experience of prolonged party dominance reflects broader Nigerian trends, where ruling parties often solidify their power through control of state institutions and resources. Nationally, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) once dominated the political scene for 16 years, mirroring the APC's current grip on power. At the state level, the APC's strategy includes leveraging its federal connections and resources to maintain local dominance, limiting the opposition's ability to challenge effectively. This consolidation of power, while ensuring

stability, mirrors patterns seen in other states, where ruling parties exploit institutional control to entrench their position, often at the expense of democratic competition (Ogunbiyi, 2017).

The dynamics in Yobe also align with broader African trends, where party dominance, as seen with the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa and ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe, is sustained through a combination of electoral manipulation, patronage, and security narratives. In Yobe State, the Boko Haram insurgency has been instrumentalized to bolster the APC's narrative as the custodian of security, a tactic echoed across other African states dealing with internal conflicts. These patterns demonstrate how ruling parties intertwine governance with security imperatives to justify extended dominance, often undermining democratic processes and accountability in the process (Bratton & Masunungure, 2011).

Strategies for Fostering Healthy Political Competition and Improving Democratic Processes in Yobe State

To enhance political competition in Yobe State, strengthening electoral institutions like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is paramount. This includes safeguarding its independence, improving transparency in vote counting, and curbing external influences. Empowering voters through widespread civic education programs is equally essential to reduce the reliance on patronage systems and encourage informed participation. When elections are fair and competitive, opposition parties gain a stronger platform to contest power, fostering an environment where governance is driven by public needs rather than political dominance (Ojo, 2010).

Promoting political pluralism is another critical strategy. Ensuring opposition parties have equitable access to media, resources, and public platforms would facilitate diverse political discourse. Furthermore, protecting their rights to organize and campaign without intimidation can invigorate political engagement, encouraging voters to explore alternative policies. Civil society organizations also play a vital role in bridging the gap between citizens and policymakers, advocating for transparency and accountability, and holding governing bodies to higher standards (Poulantzas, 1978). This would also involve fostering an inclusive political culture where citizens feel their voices are heard, regardless of their political affiliation.

Implementing institutional reforms to reduce corruption and enhance service delivery is crucial for restoring public trust in governance. Establishing independent anti-corruption agencies to oversee resource allocation and government spending would mitigate the effects of patronage politics. Additionally, embracing technological solutions for tracking public expenditures can improve transparency and foster accountability. Reforming governance structures to emphasize merit-based appointments over political loyalty is essential to ensuring that public services are delivered equitably and efficiently (Duruji, 2014).

Decentralization offers another pathway to address governance challenges. By transferring power and resources to local governments, decision-making can become more community-focused, addressing the specific needs of diverse populations across the state. This approach reduces the over-centralization of power in the hands of a few elites and promotes localized democratic participation. When combined with institutional reforms, decentralization can create a governance framework that is more responsive, inclusive, and representative of Yobe State's varied constituencies.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the theory of hegemony, developed by Antonio Gramsci, which offers a powerful framework for analyzing how dominance extends beyond formal political control to encompass cultural and ideological realms. Gramsci argued that ruling groups maintain power not just through coercion or economic means but by securing the consent of the governed through the establishment of dominant ideologies. These ideologies are embedded in societal norms and practices, making them appear natural and universally beneficial, even to those disadvantaged by them (Gramsci, 1971). This concept of hegemony emphasizes the interplay between civil society, culture, and politics, providing valuable insights into the dynamics of party dominance in Yobe State. In this context, the All Progressives Congress (APC) has gone beyond electoral victories to entrench itself in the socio-political fabric of the state. By strategically aligning with religious leaders, traditional rulers, and influential elites, the APC has reinforced its position, mirroring Gramsci's assertion that dominance requires embedding ruling ideologies into society's institutions and values.

In Yobe State, the APC has leveraged these alliances to secure widespread consent, presenting itself as the custodian of the state's progress and stability.

This ideological dominance is further solidified through the manipulation of state institutions and control of media narratives, ensuring that opposition voices are marginalized and the party's policies remain unchallenged. Patronage distribution and resource control have bolstered the APC's alliances with key stakeholders, maintaining loyalty and suppressing dissent. These practices align with Gramsci's concept of hegemony, where power is sustained through a combination of consent and subtle ideological control. By shaping the state's political and cultural discourse, the APC has created a hegemonic order that stifles political competition, illustrating how Gramsci's framework can elucidate the mechanisms behind the party's enduring dominance in Yobe State.

Methodology

This research employs content analysis, a method well-suited for examining political texts and discourse, to systematically analyze political documents, speeches, election results, media reports, and party manifestos. Through this approach, the study identifies patterns and trends in the All Progressives Congress (APC)'s strategies for sustaining political dominance in Yobe State. By examining content from diverse sources such as local newspapers, radio broadcasts, campaign materials, and political speeches, the research evaluates how the APC has constructed its hegemonic narrative and reinforced its political control. A comparative analysis between the APC's strategies in Yobe State and broader national political dynamics emphasizes the use of patronage, resource control, and alliances with local elites, as well as the role of traditional institutions, religious leaders, and other actors in legitimizing the party's dominance. Furthermore, the study assesses the implications of such hegemony for democratic practices, focusing on the constraints it places on opposition party development and political pluralism. Central questions include the extent to which the APC's dominance has stifled competition, how the political culture in Yobe shapes the emergence of alternative voices, and the broader consequences of prolonged party control for democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Findings of the Study

The study revealed the following findings:

1. APC's ideological dominance in Yobe State is reinforced through alignment with local values and strategic alliances with traditional and religious leaders, marginalizing opposition voices.

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2. The APC consolidates power by controlling resources and patronage networks, securing loyalty among elites and suppressing dissent.
3. Manipulation of electoral processes and influence over state institutions restrict opposition competitiveness, undermining electoral integrity and pluralism.
4. The APC's political monopoly weakens opposition, stifles democratic debate, reduces accountability, and hinders the development of a vibrant political culture.

Conclusion

The study has shown that the APC's dominance in Yobe State is not just a product of electoral success but a result of the party's ability to embed itself within the socio-cultural and political landscape of the state. Drawing on Gramsci's theory of hegemony, the research highlights how the APC has used strategic alliances, control of resources, and alignment with dominant cultural and religious values to shape political discourse and secure widespread consent. This hegemony has marginalized opposition parties, restricted political pluralism, and entrenched the APC's control over state institutions, illustrating the subtle yet pervasive ways in which political dominance is maintained.

However, this dominance comes with significant challenges for democratic consolidation. The marginalization of opposition parties and the concentration of power limit the vibrancy of democratic debate and weaken governance accountability. As seen in Yobe State, the APC's unchallenged control has created a political monopoly that undermines the principles of inclusivity and representation essential for a healthy democracy. These findings underscore the need for structural reforms to promote a more competitive political environment and strengthen democratic institutions in Yobe State and similar contexts across Nigeria. Gramsci's framework thus offers a valuable lens for understanding the broader implications of party dominance and its impact on democracy.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendation were made:

1. Strengthen opposition parties by ensuring equitable access to resources, media, and political spaces for opposition parties in Yobe State. Reform electoral laws to promote fair competition and support grassroots networks for wider outreach.

2. Encourage electoral reforms in Yobe State by enhancing INEC's independence, adopting transparent measures like biometric voter registration, and monitoring campaigns to reduce manipulative practices.
3. Promote political accountability by empowering anti-corruption anti-corruption bodies and oversight institutions, encourage public participation in governance, and ensure transparent management of public resources in Yobe State.
4. Foster inclusive political dialogue by engaging opposition, civil society, and traditional leaders to address divisions, promote collaboration, and build a participatory democratic culture in Yobe State.

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