



Internal Party Democracy and Institutionalization of Political Parties in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

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ABSTRACT

This paper interrogates the connection between the level of internal party democracy which exists in Nigeria's Fourth Republic political parties and their propensity to become institutionalised. The objective is to unravel the reason for their inability to make effective contribution the deepening of democracy in the country. The paper is descriptive and conceptual. It got insights from secondary data which includes journal articles, national dailies, internet, magazines and textbooks. The data gathered were analysed under various themes. The paper contends that Nigeria's Fourth Republic political parties do not adhere to the tenets of internal party democracy, thus undermining the prospects of their institutionalisation and negates the performance of their democratic functions. The paper offers valuable suggestions that could enhance the level of internal party democracy in the parties, propel them towards institutionalisation and most fundamentally contribute optimally to the consolidation of democracy in the Fourth Republic and beyond.

KEYWORDS

Internal party democracy, political parties, Democratic consolidation, Fourth Republic, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The origin of political parties in Nigeria could be traced to the colonial epoch (Dode, 2010). The eventual stiff opposition to foreign rule by the country's nationalist movements metamorphosed into political associations in order to contest elections into the legislative council as Nigeria progressed towards independence. The first political party that was formed in Nigeria is the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) with Herbert Macaulay as the founding father. Established in 1923, the motive of the founding father was to ensure that the party keyed into the advantages offered by the new Clifford Constitution; the NNDP successfully mobilised the various interest groups in Lagos into one political entity to enhance its political strength (The Tide, 2010).

The NNDP competed for many seats in the 1922 elections into the Lagos Legislative Council and won three seats. In the subsequent elections which were conducted in 1923, 1928 and 1933, the party won all the seats. Even though the party's major role was to fill the legislative seats, it had the overall objective of promoting the growth of democratic governance in Nigeria, ensuring greater participation in the realms of social, economic as well as educational advancement of the country. The political dominance of the NNDP in Lagos continued until 1938 when it was completely defeated by the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) (Meredith, 2005).

Political parties play crucial functions in a democracy (Hofmeister & Grabow, 2011). As a result of the differences in terms of how they emerge, their organization, social base, ideology, among others, arriving at a definite definition of political parties is a herculean task (Smith, 1996). However, there is relative consensus on what constitutes parties and the significant roles they play in a democratic set up (Matlosa, 2007; Ojo, 2008). In other words, there is a consensus in the existing literature on democratization that parties undertake important roles in democratization. Since they are the link between the people and government, their role is particularly essential in the evolving democracies after the Third Wave (Bratton, 2014).

The functions of political parties are essential to the realization of true democracy (Ibeanu, 2013). Some of the key tasks that political parties are expected to play in a democracy are: to solicit and make comprehensive salient public policy and public needs as well as problems recognized by members and supporters, enlightening electorates and citizens on the workings of the political and electoral process and engender general political norms, moderate contradictory demands and change them into public policies, encourage and organize citizens into taking part in political resolution and convert their beliefs into feasible policy alternatives, directing public views from governed to the government, to recruit and train candidates preparatory for public engagements, among others.

Nigerian political parties have been bedevilled by many challenges as a result of their level of internal democracy, thus undermining their expected roles in consolidating its democracy (Alfa et al, 2017). This is more so given the fact the state of internal party democracy in the Fourth Republic parties has a direct link with party institutionalization and democratic consolidation (Omotola, 2009). There is abundance of evidence that many Nigerians are of the view that internal party democracy enhances the integrity of elections and improve the worth of leadership, political stability, legitimacy and economic progress (Momoh, 2010, Omilusi, 2013).

Political parties in Nigeria rarely adopt a transparent process that enables party members to partake in the decision making and at the same time provide them unrestrained opportunity to contest in elections that would have afforded them the opportunity to be elected as their party's candidates (Mbah, 2011). Since 1999, Nigeria has experienced bitter and rancorous struggles within the parties and violent internal party relations (Tenuche, 2011; Adesote & Abimbola, 2014; Yusuf, 2015).

Internal party conflicts are caused mainly by the avarice of the political elites for political power which creates the access to primitive capital accumulation (Omoweh, 2012). This ugly practice in the way and manner political parties operate undermine democratic consolidation. This is the antithesis of the critical roles political parties are expected to play in the democratic process. The powerful individuals in the parties always control their internal operations (Adejumobi, 2007). As a matter of fact, since 1999, Nigeria has witnessed growing and disturbing undemocratic conduct of political parties. These include the application of undemocratic methods in nominating party flag bearers during primary elections (IDEA, 2007, Omilusi, 2013).

The 1999 Constitution has explicit provisions on how political parties should be regulated (Section 222-229). The constitution provides a number of provisions relating to political parties. In the Third Schedule Sections 14 and 15, it also addresses the functions of the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, the electoral umpire with regards to how political parties are to be regulated. Section 223(1a) of the constitution specifically provides for adherence to the tenets of internal party democracy by political parties and declares that the constitution and rules of the political party shall ensure the conduct of periodic election on a democratic basis of the principal officers and members of the executive committee or other governing body of the political party.

The lack of internal democracy in the nomination of party candidates for election weakens party unity and institutionalization, and negatively affects party cohesiveness and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. It leads to fragmentation of parties and anti-party activities. It also opens up litigation struggles beclouding the electoral process. It reduces the commitment of party stalwarts and those of their supporters which negatively affects party cohesion, stability and performance. In other words, the absence of internal party democracy in Nigerian political parties has led to internal

party disputes, war of attrition, reproach, acrimony, coordination dilemma, cross-carpeting among others (Yusuf, 2015).

Some of the fundamental problems that militate against credible election and democratic consolidation in Nigeria are lack of an informed electorate due to high level of illiteracy, ignorance and inadequate political education, abuse of power of incumbency, intimidation and harassment of opposition candidates and their supporters especially during campaigns, lack of internal democracy in political parties and lack of ideological and institutionalized parties (Collier & Vincente, 2014; Omotola, 2009).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Internal Party Democracy

A party is said to be internally democratic if its organizational structure is characterized by participation and inclusiveness which are catalysts of democratic consolidation (Okhaide, 2012). The first category entails the conduct of free, fair credible and regular elections to fill party official positions as well as those to be fielded as parties' candidates in the general elections. Secondly, it involves equal and open participation of all cadres of the party in the affairs of the party so much so that the interests of all and sundry are well represented.

According to Mimpen (2007), two essential instruments of internal party democracy abound; the first entails organising free, fair and periodic elections of internal party positions and candidates for representative offices. Secondly, there must be equal and open participation of all the members and groups in such a manner that would ensure that their interests are fairly represented (Scarrow, 2005, Salih, 2006).

Another feature of internal party democracy is inclusiveness. This implies the broadness of the party's decision-making circle. In the view of Scarrow (2005), inclusiveness guarantees equal participation of all members of the party in taking important decisions like the choice of party leadership and nomination of candidates to fly the party's flags in general elections. Consequently, more inclusive parties would present the platform for open deliberation before the time for actual decision-making processes (Hofmeister & Grabow, 2011).

The third hallmark is the degree of party institutionalisation. This implies the extent to which internal decisions and processes are formalised as well as the extent to which the party's collaborative structures pervade its target constituency. Internally democratic parties are characteristically institutionalised due to the fact that the rule of participation are required in order to ascertain those who are qualified to participate and how people can emerge as winners in the party's internal elections (Matlosa, 2004, Mersel, 2006, Mimpen, 2007).

A political party lacks internal democracy, for example, if it does not hold open and transparent elections into leadership positions among the members or proscribes the establishment of factions within the party. To that extent, therefore, the structure of such a party is vertical because the flow of authority is from top, that is from the leadership to the bottom and not horizontally from party members at the bottom to the leadership (Mersel, 2006).

Essence of Internal Party Democracy in Political Parties

The imposition of internal party democracy is justified on the grounds that political parties perform representative and participatory functions (Mimpen, 2007). In contemporary democracy, political parties are expected to play the fundamental roles of harmonizing the societal ideologies and demands (Mersel, 2006). The implication, therefore, is that political parties are central to democracy. Internal party democracy is necessary so as to increase the influence and contribution of the citizens who are politically active in the party. It is essential that political parties in a democratic state be devoid of undemocratic structures. There are legal provisions in many countries which mandate their political parties to adhere to their intraparty democratic processes. In practice, however, these are often flouted (Hofmeister & Grabow, 2011).

Hofmeister & Gabrow (2011) outlined the following results of the observance of the principles of internal party democracy:

1. It promotes the participation of the entire members in the internal affairs of the party.
2. It makes it possible for the members to express their views within the party.
3. It enhances active participation of the subgroups such as women, physically challenged, youths, minorities, etc.
4. Tolerance and accommodation of divergent opinions in as much as they are within the ambience of the basic programs of the party.
5. Adherence to the rules and regulations for the participation of members and intraparty decision-making processes.
6. The party leadership exhibits respect in its dealings with the ordinary members of the party.

Another implication of internal party democracy is that the various groups within the party would be able to largely express their opinions and grievances publicly. A party should not discourage this outright even though it is an indication of weaknesses for the party not to be able to mitigate open confrontation (Kristina, 2011). In extreme cases, it is practically possible for the differences between the politicians to assume a dimension that it beclouds the programmatic foresight of the party. Internal differences could refine political deliberations. It could also reinforce the party if it does not stifle it in the name of enforcing its quest for unity.

It could therefore be seen that there is abundant justification necessitating the adoption of internal party democracy in political parties. While some are as a result of the need to promote and secure democracy from the party, others derive from the need to advance the rights and liberty of individual members within the party and subsequently promote the country's democratic processes and ethos (Mimpen, 2007).

Favourable arguments to support the usefulness of intra-party democracy originated from the believe that democracy as a governmental arrangement create a platform for the citizens to participate actively in decisions affecting them in the society (Makinda,1996),and guarantees fundamental liberty which is a pre-requisite for open political competition. This perspective is a nuance of participatory as well as deliberative democracy which places premium on the essential hallmarks of participation and contestation (Maiyo,2008).

Gauja (2006) argued that intra-party democracy is desirable because it enhances political egalitarianism by providing impartial ground in candidate selection and development of policies within the party, facilitates legitimate control of government by extending democratic ideals such as accommodation, transparency and accountability to party structures and organisations and enhances the standard of public debate through the entrenchment of inclusive and deliberative practices within political parties.

Party Institutionalization

A party is institutionalized if it is represented in the mind of the public and operates as a social organization regardless of its transient leaders and manifest regular modes of behaviour cherished by those that associate with it (Janda, 2006). According to Mainwaring & Scully (1995), stable roots of a party in the society and stable patterns of competition are prominent in societies that parties are well entrenched.

Mainwaring and Torcal (2006) assert that "an institutionalized party system, then is one in which actors develop expectations and behaviours based on the premise that the fundamental contours and rules of party competition and behaviour will prevail into unforeseeable future. In an institutionalized party system, there is stability in who the main parties are and how they behave".

The critical pillars of institutionalization, therefore, are the extent of consolidation, regularity, predictability and systemness of political competition or party politics. Though Mainwaring & Torcal (2006) emphatically focused on party system institutionalization, the various dimensions by which this was analysed implies consolidation and stable patterns of interactions between parties. Stability and forms of competition among parties depend largely on factors such as organizational development, independence of party organizations as well as the extent to which they are rooted and viewed as legitimate within the society in which they operate (Webb & Holliday, 2002).

The crucial contribution that political parties can make to the process of democratic consolidation has become almost an article of faith. This assertion has been recently confirmed by Burnell (2004), Scarrow (2005) and Janda (2006). In addition to the overwhelming consensus on the crucial role of political parties in a democratic system, another major requirement is the extent to which they are institutionalized (Lewis, 1994).

Judging from the foregoing, party institutionalization could be viewed as the process whereby the party becomes engraved in the people's behavioural attitude or culture (Randall, 2006). It is therefore exigent to differentiate between the internal and external dimensions of party institutionalization. The internal aspects imply intraparty matters while external aspects relates to the relationship a party has with the society in which it operates as well as other institutions (Randall & Svasand, 2002).

The State of Internal Party Democracy in Nigerian Political Parties.

The affluent play major roles in the formation of political parties in Nigeria. The operations of political parties are capital intensive and only the rich can afford it while the masses are meant to enhance the numerical strength of the party (Katsina, 2013). Since the rich and the powerful control, the party, they wield great influence in the nomination of candidates for internal party positions as well as those to be featured in the general elections (Alfa et al, 2017).

Olusegun Obasanjo won the 1999 Presidential election on the platform of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) (Akinloye, 2016). According to the provisions of the 1999 Constitution, the president is eligible to occupy the position for a period of four years. At the expiration of the tenure, if the incumbent secures his party's mandate, he could re-contest and if he emerges victorious, he could occupy the position for another four years so long as he is not removed from the office through impeachment, does not die in office or becomes permanently incapacitated (1999 Constitution 130-152).

However, as Obasanjo was about to finish his two constitutionally permissible tenures, he began to initiate steps to have the constitution amended in order to inject the "third term" clause and pave way for him to contest in the 2007 elections in violation of the constitution (Kura, 2009). He lobbied the National Assembly and powerful political actors. The bid attracted widespread condemnation from the politicians, civil society organisations, human rights activists among others (Osumah & Ikelegbe, 2009). Even his own vice, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar was opposed to the ambition, a development which strained their relationship (Isumonah, 2012).

Obasanjo used his power to manipulate a lot of processes. For instance, he literally masterminded the emergence of party chairmen to ensure that his loyalists manned the affairs of the party (Salih, 2012). He removed and prevented the emergence of those opposed to his ambition and orchestrated the re-registration exercise of the PDP during which his opponents, including his vice, Atiku Abubakar was

de-registered and frustrated out of the party (Katsina, 2016). Incidentally, his bid to perpetuate his rule failed to materialise (Ilfte, 2011).

Following the failure of his third term bid, Obasanjo used his incumbency influence to mastermind the emergence of governorship candidates of the PDP as well as the choice Umar Musa Yar'adua as the candidate of the PDP in the presidential election and his victory in the 2007 presidential elections which Obasanjo described as a 'do or die affair' (Jaja & Alumona, 2011). The death of Yar'adua in office midway into his administration after a protracted illness led to the assumption to power of his deputy, Goodluck Jonathan (Adeniyi, 2017).

As his tenure drew to an end, a session of PDP stakeholders was convened with the singular motive to unveil the intention of the incumbent president to participate in the party's presidential primaries in view of the 2011 general elections (Adeniyi, 2017). This was in breach of an unwritten zoning arrangement that when President Jonathan completes the tenure of the late president Yar'adua, only a Northerner would be eligible to contest for the presidency in the succeeding dispensation. This decision generated disquiet especially from members of the northern extraction. For instance, Alhaji Adamu Ciroma, a powerful political elite of northern stock contends that since the PDP zoning arrangement was borne out of the quest to entrench equity and fairness, it was not tenable for President Goodluck Jonathan to moot the plan to contest after completing the tenure of his master who died on May 5, 2010 (Adeniyi, 2017).

As the presidential primaries approached, tension rose, and the issue was far from being resolved. The convincing plea of Yayale Ahmed, a prominent northern politician and Okwesilieze Nwodo, then PDP National Chairman pacified the northern members and they concluded that Jonathan be allowed to use his discretion as the said zoning formula could not be said to be superior to the provision of the Nigerian Constitution on the matter. This was however, later opposed by some aggrieved party members. For instance, in a letter to Nwodo, former president IBB, a top member of the party, expressed his anger about Jonathan's candidacy, describing it as a breach and threatened defection after Jonathan eventually collected his nomination form to contest the election (Adeniyi, 2017).

Riding on the power of incumbency, with the support of his loyalists, Jonathan declared that the zoning arrangement was only in respect of the offices that were within the confines of the party. The president influenced the removal of Section 87(8) from the Electoral Act 2010. He therefore masterminded the insertion of the provisions that state that "any political party which adopts the indirect primary system shall enshrine in its constitution or operational guidelines (a) those who shall be delegates at its congress or convention (b) concerning the democratically elected delegates, the modalities for the election of such delegates" (Electoral Act, 2010, as amended). This was intended to

weaken the influence of State Governors opposed to Jonathan's presidency. This later turned out to have misfired (Adeniyi, 2017).

The president had 21 state governors on his side and a consensus was reached to allow him contest in consonant with the principle of incumbency globally but not without the string that he should not attempt to seek re-election in 2015. He therefore won the primaries. On February 1, 2011, Jonathan further concretized the resolve when he announced publicly that he would not thwart the zoning arrangement and as such would not seek re-election in 2015. This was at Adis Ababa and that really gave a boost to his support in the north (Adeniyi, 2017).

Jonathan eventually won the presidential election, defeating three candidates of northern origin, Muhammadu Buhari (CPC), Nuhu Ribadu (ACN), and Ibrahim Shekarau (ANPP). He secured over 50% of the overall South-South votes (his place of origin) and South-East while losing in the North-East and North-West. The announcement of the results led to violent protests in the north, especially championed by Buhari's supporters (INEC, 2015, Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2016).

It is pertinent to note that, President Jonathan dissipated most of his time in office fighting several members of his party and many of his real and perceived opponents defected from the PDP, including those from his home state of Bayelsa where he had to impose his preferred candidate, Seriake Dickson after having used the PDP National Working Committee (NWC) to execute his plan and Timipre Sylva, the incumbent, was screened out and disallowed from even contesting the governorship primaries even though he had won earlier! From that moment, Sylva became a strong opponent of Jonathan (Adeniyi, 2017, Alfa et al, 2017).

As Obasanjo (2015) lamented "instead of taking steps to promote Nigeria's interest, Jonathan was merely pursuing selfish interests by destroying his own party, polarizing the country along regional and religious lines and ridiculing Nigeria in the comity of nations" (p. 50). Obasanjo added, "For you (referring to Jonathan) to allow yourself to be 'possessed', so to say, to the exclusion of most of the rest of Nigerians as an 'Ijaw man' (Jonathan's ethnic nationality) is a mistake that should never have been allowed to happen...to allow or tacitly encourage people of Ijaw nation to throw insults on other Nigerians from other parts of the country and threaten fire and brimstone to protect your interest as an Ijaw man is myopic and your, not openly quieting them is even more unfortunate" (p. 50).

Even though Jonathan manipulated his way to emerge as the 'consensus candidate' of the PDP, the fact that he promised the party's stakeholders and powerful elites and voiced it before the international community that he would not re-contest attracted a great opposition to his jettisoning that arrangement. Prior to the election, the President's handlers decided to adopt the strategy of his emergence as a consensus candidate, reminiscent of the Abacha era, and evaded primaries having edged out other contenders. More so, the party's congresses conducted to elect gubernatorial

candidates became acrimonious due to the fact that the incumbent governors manipulated the process to ensure the emergence of their preferred candidates. In many instances, aspirants who lost defected to the opposition APC. This included even ministers who served in Jonathan's cabinet that resigned to prosecute their political ambition (Thurston, 2015, Adeniyi, 2017).

To exacerbate an already volatile situation, Jonathan continued to disrupt the internal affairs of the PDP and its leadership. For instance, he orchestrated the fast removal of Vincent Ogbulafor and Okwesilieze Nwodo and masterminded the emergence of Haliru Bello in the phase of his regime. He also manipulated the emergence of Bamanga Tukur even though he was not the choice of the North-East even though it was their turn to present a candidate in line with the party's zoning arrangement (Akubo & Yakubu, 2014). In spite of different forms of manipulations, postponement, intrigues and other tactics at the disposal of an incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan and his party, the PDP lost the 2015 Presidential elections to the opposition APC (INEC, 2015).

CONCLUSION

It is essential that parties be institutionalized in order to be well positioned to carry out the democratic functions. The degree of party institutionalization and their institutional strength largely determine their capacity to perform their democratic roles and contribute to democratic consolidation. If they attain an appreciable level of institutionalization, political parties can serve as instruments of mediation for the management of diverse ideas, interests and perceptions of political issues at any given time. When this is lacking, the democratic system could be perverted, or outrightly eroded (Omotola, 2010). Institutionalization is important to ensure that candidates for public offices are nurtured from within the parties instead of being launched from outside the actual party organisation (Randall & Svasand, 2002b).

Since Nigeria returned to democratic governance on May 29 1999, the country's political climate has been characterised by dearth of internal party democracy which has occasioned a myriad of factions, defection and abuse of incumbency. In view of this, political contestation and engagements have generated crises instead of being instruments of cohesion and national development (Odibachi, 2010). The fall out of these trends is that it leads to imposition of candidates and party leadership, intimidation of opposition politicians, politically motivated killings and lopsided fight against corruption.

In spite of the constitutional provisions that the internal operations of the parties must conform to the tenets of internal party democracy with INEC as the umpire and the respective political parties claiming to uphold the principles, the practical implementation of the doctrines remains largely elusive (Nwankwo, 2005).

Internal party democracy remains a mirage among the political parties as the powerful members hijack the affairs of the party and impose their loyalists and sycophants as party candidates for elections thereby subverting the popular will of the people. This has caused profound intraparty wrangling in the political parties.

Efficient intraparty and inter party deliberations that would entrench a culture of cooperation and iron out areas of conflict and provide a level playing ground should be carried out.

A new political culture and legal framework should be cultivated to anchor party politics on the basis of constitutional government, separation of powers and the rule of law.

The party structure and mode of administration should be decentralised with the various strata enjoying a measure of autonomy within its area of competition as enshrined in the party's constitution with clauses that would guarantee checks and balances by the other echelons of the party.

Intraparty democracy should be observed in the affairs of party particularly in their processes of candidate selection or nomination.

Party discipline and due process should be enforced to enhance cohesion as these are the bedrock upon which democratic consolidation is build. To achieve this, the prescriptions that would lead to the attainment of an enviable democratic system, the provisions of Chapters 1 & 5 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria should be religiously observed by the political parties.

As veritable tools for managing diversity, the composition of delegates to party Congresses and Conventions at the ward, local government, state national levels should reflect the various groups in the party and anchored on elective democratic principles.

The primaries of the party should be conducted in a credible and transparent manner. In this case, the role of the National Executive Committees should be to provide guidelines on how the primaries should be conducted in order to ensure uniformity and not to foist its dictates on other levels and structures. As such, it should be the prerogative of the relevant party congresses to organise the primaries.

When these prescriptions are enforced, parties will become internally democratic, adequately institutionalized and well positioned to perform their roles and contribute to democratic stability and consolidation in Nigeria.

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