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## Political Parties And Internal Party Democracy In Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

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### Introduction.

Political parties are veritable and indispensable institutions in a democratic society. The functions of political parties are central to the operations of democracy. Some of the functions are interest articulation and aggregation, facilitating popular participation through elections, citizenship education, representation and political recruitment, opposition etc (Duverger 1954, Downs, 1957; Disraeli, 2009).

Nigerian political parties have been confronted by many challenges due to their level of internal democracy, which weakens their expected roles in democratic politics. In Nigeria, an overwhelming clamour for the enforcement of the doctrines of internal democracy exists among the political parties. This is especially with respect to the way and manner primary elections are being conducted. This results in electoral malpractices at the general elections. There is much evidence that many Nigerians are of the view that internal democracy boosts the integrity of elections and advance the quality of leadership, political stability, legitimacy and economic development (Momoh, 2010; Omolusi, 2013).

It has become apparent of late that many political parties in Nigeria circumvent an open system that would enable members of the party to participate in the decision making process as well as provide them with unfettered opportunity to take part in elections on the party's platform (Mbah, 2011). Since 1999, Nigeria has recorded bitter and

rancorous struggles within the parties as well as violent internal party relations (Tenuche, 2011; Yusuf, 2015).

There appears to be democracy deficit in the internal activities of the parties as influential forces often hijack their internal mechanisms and procedures (Adejumobi, 2007: 43). To be sure, since 1999, Nigeria has witnessed more worrisome undemocratic operations in party politics.

There are comprehensive provisions in the 1999 Constitution aimed at regulating the operations of political parties . In Section 222-229, it enunciated several provisions on the guidelines for party operations. Section 223(1a) specifically provides for adherence to the principles of internal party democracy by political parties. It declares succinctly that "the constitution and rules of the political party shall provide for the periodic election on a democratic basis of the principal officers and members of the executive committee or other governing body of the political party.

As a matter of fact, the lack of internal party democracy in the nomination of party flag bearers for election wanes party harmony and institutionalization, and negates party cohesiveness and by extension, consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. It culminates in party fragmentation and aggrieved parties could begin to work against the party goals. It also proliferates

court cases in the electoral process. It weakens and in some cases abolishes the commitment of party big wigs and those of their supporters and this negatively affects party cohesion, durability and performance. Strictly speaking, absence of internal party democracy in Nigerian political parties has resulted in party wrangling, war of attrition, recrimination, acrimony, coordination dilemma, cross-carpeting among others (Yusuf, 2015).

Some critical factors that constitute a bane to 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, political violence and the attendant politically inclined assassination intimidation and harassment of opposition candidates and their supporters especially during campaigns as well as absence of internal democracy in political parties. Democratic consolidation can only be accomplished in Nigeria if the teething problems outlined, particularly the level of internal party democracy in the political parties are profoundly addressed (Ojukwu and Olaifa, 2011).

### **Methodology.**

The methodology adopted is qualitative, using historical, descriptive and analysis. The 2006 and 2010 Electoral Acts, theses, journals, textbooks, commentaries of some national dailies and other related literature were consulted. Politicians (e.g local government, state party chairmen, secretaries and other EXCO members, members of the state Houses of assembly, National Assembly) and academicians (especially those in the field of political science, and those who play ad hoc roles during elections, journalists who

cover elections) were interviewed to get a robust insight.

### **Literature Review.**

**Political Parties:** There is no universally acceptable definition of a political party. A political party "is a group of officials or would-be officials who are linked with a sizeable group of citizens into an organisation, a chief object of this organisation is to ensure that its officials attain power or are maintained in power" (Shively,2001:234). As could be deduced from this definition, a political party is made up a wide range of actors that can include officials who actually attain power to individuals who regularly vote for the party and people who spend time and money for electioneering campaign for a party member. In other words, a party is composed of people who hold office and those who sustain them in office. What distinguishes a political party from other associations is its desire to attain power and retain it for as long as is democratically realistic.

Political parties enable their leaders to win and/or retain political office and power according to the rules and procedures of the society in which they operate. In democratic systems, power is a function of contesting and winning elections and the activities are geared towards the attainment of these goals (Downs, 1957).

Parties both strive to be in control of government and to shape public acceptance of this control and in that process, they perform a critical role of shaping the character of the relationship between the rulers and the ruled. Political parties are commonly associated in the popular mind with democracy, but ,surprisingly, they are prevalent



in the non democratic world as well (Gandhi, 2008).

### **Internal Party Democracy.**

Internal democracy in political parties refers to the level and methods of including party members in the decision making and deliberation within the party hierarchy. There is an overwhelming belief that internal party democracy enhances citizens' political competencies and/or producing more capable representatives which ultimately ensures that the party produce improved policies and programmes. Some antagonists argue that excessive democratisation may obstruct the party from keeping their electoral promises and also neutralize the power of the party's inner leadership (Scarrow, 2005).

In line with the above, Pennings and Hazan (2001) aver that when party leaders exercise exclusive preserve in candidate selection, the degree of cohesion and unity tend to increase. On the other hand, when candidate selection is beyond the control of party leadership, local activists could select candidates whose policy preferences are diametrically opposed to those of the party leadership. Consequently, the leadership would not be able to regulate the behaviour of those who represent the party and that would influence its legislative voting patterns. Classical illustrations from countries such as Israel suggest that enforcing more inclusive methods of candidate selection may drastically weaken legislative party cohesion and results in the disintegration of institutionalised parties.(Rahat and Hazan, 2001).

Broadly speaking, the consequences of liberalising the candidate selection procedure is

not comprehensive as a result of the fact that the degree of democratisation vary. It implies that modest degree of democratisation are likely to provide some benefits to political parties. Alternatively, radical forms have the tendency of disrupting party discipline and unity (Pennings and Hazan, 2001).

Democratic ethos are fundamental to any democratic sustenance and the development of the party system. It is not plausible to be in a democratic dispensation and yet ignore the doctrines of democracy within the party. Voters are very perceptible and parties who fail to adopt democratic ideals could be flushed out during elections. Internal party democracy has monumental impact on democratic consolidation and representation. Internal party matters such as the recruitment of members, recruitment, socialisation, training, discipline and resources of the party have immense influence on the party.

Internal organisational factors such as political skills, recruitment approaches, centralisation, party discipline and rules of collaboration respond to a lot of external factors. In societies where political parties are weak or do not exist political activities are likely to be hijacked by selfish individuals whose tendencies undermine the process of nation-building process and democratisation (Omilusi, 2016).

Since the return to democracy in 1999, the requirements for party formation and registration in Nigeria remain open. However, the internal activities and management of the parties are replete with undemocratic tendencies. As matter of fact, a few affluent politicians have hijacked the parties to meet their selfish interests thus undermining the parties' ability to perform their

functions in the democratic process. As such, the fundamental roles of interest articulation, aggregation and political education are being extensively unattended to. The effect is that parties have become tools for acquisition of power and misappropriation. This indicates serious consequences for internal party operations (Omoweh, 2012). Mba (2011) contends that since 1999, political parties have been experiencing.

A cursory look at the internal activities of the political parties show serious disregard for internal party democracy. They are alleged to be violating the provisions of their constitutions and fail to follow laid down rules. As such, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2006: 7) submits that:

At the party congresses, leaders are elected and candidates are nominated by elective positions. The elections, however are always predetermined and party bosses tend to have the final say in the selection of leaders.

The type of scenario above leads the continual internal party stalemate that the country has witnessed. Party barons are adamant to enforce internal party democracy, a circumstance that leads to frequent squabbles and mitigate the development of parties as popular institutions. Over the years, these party barons have devised strategists for frustrating popular aspirants from party position and avoid them from being nominated for elective positions.

Omilusi (2016) asserts that Nigerian political parties have a wide range of strategies to short change people and eliminate them from party primaries. These techniques include: forcing

people to support a preferred candidate while the rest are compelled to withdraw from the contest; zoning the position to the ward, constituency or local government of the anointed candidate to foreclose the chances of contestants from outside the area; violent attacks on the opponents or those who are perceived to be real or imaginary threats to the party barons; use of money to bribe voters or delegates in order to influence their voting behaviour and exclude those who cannot sustain the tempo; alteration or falsification of result to produce intended result. In this case the loser could be announced as the winner by polling officials who have already been bribed to "doctor" the result (Omilusi, 2016),

The relative neglect of the internal life of political parties is caused by the fact that these organisations have long been commonly regarded in liberal theory as private organisations, which should be entitled to compete freely in the electoral marketplace and govern their own internal structures and processes. In view of this, any legal regulation by the state, or any external interference was viewed as having the tendency to distort or undermine pluralist party competition (Salih, M A M, 2016).

Tenuche (2011), affirms that "the immediate fall out of the compromised primary elections since the commencement of the Fourth Republic has been tragic for the democratic project in Nigeria. Some of these include the bitter conflicts between "godfathers" and their "anointed political sons", gruesome murder of candidates, inter-party violent conflicts, carpet-crossing, ballot snatching and kidnapping and elongated judicial processes that ended up annulling the election of those that claimed victory at the polls". Azazi (2012) asserts

that "the escalation of the atrocities perpetrated by the "Boko Haram" insurgents in some parts of the country is a corollary of the absence of internal democracy in the Peoples Democratic Party. The interference of the political leaders in the internal affairs of the political parties is facilitated by their control of the state resources which they use to influence party decisions to their advantage (Omoruyi, 2016).

Taking a critical look at the dearth of internal democracy in Nigeria's political parties, Ojukwu and Olaifa (2011), affirm that such restricted politics is dangerous as it often results in politics of war not of peace, of acrimony, hatred and mudslinging not of love and brotherhood, of anarchy and discord not of orderliness and concord, of division and disunity and not of cooperation, consensus and unity, not of integrity and patriotism; it is the politics of rascality, not maturity, of blackmail and near gangsterism not of constructive and honest contribution.

Matlosa and Shale, (2008), suggest that the causes of intra-party conflict are favouritism, promoting one's kith and kin, unequal sharing of resources, lack of regular meeting, centralised authority, party discipline, interparty relations, internal party democracy and processes, violent political ecology, party ownership, membership defection and lack of political education are challenges bedevilling democratic consolidation in Nigeria. As a result, political parties rarely embark on issue-based programmes and policies (Simbine, 2013).

### **Democratic Consolidation**

Transitioning to democracy does not in and of itself mean that democracy will last (Schmitter,

1994). Some countries may have a successful democratic transition only to revert into authoritarianism in the future (Mayer et al, 2009). To that extent, it is pertinent to examine not only those factors that lead to the transition but also those factors that would make it to be secure or consolidated (Shin, 1994). There is no universally acceptable criteria for measuring or ascertaining a consolidated democracy (Mayer et al, 2009). A consolidated democracy is one in which no major groups want to overthrow it, the people want to keep it (even in times of crisis), and democratic rules have been institutionalised (Linz and Stepan, 1996).

Held (1993), posits that a genuinely consolidated is perhaps best judged to be one in which the alternation of parties in power is regular accepted. The case of Nigeria where election results are usually hotly contested questions the viability of the consolidation.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Since the commencement of Nigeria's Fourth Republic political parties which ought to play critical roles in democratic consolidation are in themselves undemocratic (Simbine, 2004). The dismal performance of the political parties was aptly captured by Uwais's committee on election reform as cited by Ibeanu (2013:5) as follows

"one of the most crucial and yet least developed democratic institutions is the political party system. There are currently 50 (which rose to over 63 but now scaled down to 25 in 2013) registered political parties in the country, most of which are an assemblage of people who share the same level of determination to use the party platform to get power. As such, it is difficult to identify



programmes or ideologies. The structure of the political parties is such that internal democracy is virtually absent. The political parties are weak and unable to effectively carry out political education and discipline".

The practice in Nigeria is that political barons and godfathers take decisions on behalf of party members who have no say in the running of party affairs. It is actually an aberration to talk of party members in Nigeria. Membership cards are given to barons and godfathers who keep them until the need to use them arises, usually for party conventions. He suggests that Nigerian political parties must take the challenge of democracy. Parties must begin to actively recruit members and above all respect them. This, indeed, poses a tremendous threat to healthy political competition and the growth of democracy in Nigeria Jibrin (2016).

The abysmal dearth of internal party democracy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic has resulted in defection, antiparty activities, politically related killings, litigation struggles etc. The result of this trend is that it negates party discipline and institutionalization, political stability, and democratic consolidation. Conscious efforts must be made by all stakeholders in the democratic process to ensure the enforcement of internal party democracy in the candidate nomination process, party leadership elections and positions as well as other facets of party activities in order to guarantee democratic consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic and beyond.

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