

PARTY PRIMARY ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: PDP AND APC IN FOCUS

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ABSTRACT: Political parties' primary election in a democratic society is expected to take place under an electoral process that can be adjudged as free, fair, credible, transparent and inclusive. The experience from party primary election in Nigerian political parties especially Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressives Congress (APC) revealed that they were deeply marked with irregularities as they were products of imposition of candidates by the party elite which have serious implications on democratic development in Nigeria. With the primary objective of assessing primary elections in PDP and APC and their implication for democratic development in Nigeria, the study utilized primary and secondary data, and employed elite theory as a framework of analysis. The descriptive analysis of data established that primary elections in PDP and APC were not democratic as they were based on imposition of candidates by the party elite which have seriously undermined democratic development in Nigeria. Among others, the paper recommended the sustainability of the new Electoral Act of 2021 by the stakeholders in the Nigerian political system, as well as the adoption of direct primary election that is anchored on democratic principles, strengthening the judicial institutions for effective prosecution of offenders and defaulters of the Electorate Act.

Keywords: Political Party, Party Primary Election, Democratic Development

INTRODUCTION

Political parties are vital institutions in every democratic setting. Party activities in Nigeria began during colonial era (Ali & Isah, 2018; Uchegbue, 2019). From colonial era to independence and post independence Nigeria, the country has witnessed tremendous increase in the number of political events as well as political parties which offered people the opportunity to participate in democratic governance (Wilson, 2014). However, the role of political parties in a democratic society cannot be overemphasized. It involves among others the justification of political authority, recruitment and removal of leaders, mobilization of opinions, ordering of public policy and balancing of group interest (Dowse, 1971). As essential components of a democratic society, political parties constitute a platform from which leaders are chosen through elections to manage the affairs of the state (Ubi, 2007).

Arguably, democratic development is largely dependent on how effective and efficient political parties conduct their primary election. It is expected that primary election in a political party should be anchored on democratic principles. It should at least be transparent, credible and inclusive (Okhalde, 2012; Adebisi, 2019). Through this process, political parties can foster quality political leadership and present voters with coherent electoral choices (Scarrow, 2005).

It is important to note that since 1999 when democratic institutions were restored in Nigeria, till date, what holds sway in party primaries of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressives Congress (APC) is deliberate imposition of candidates by the party elite at the expense of other aspirants or candidates who might have contested and probably emerged winner. This undermines the very essence of democracy, and often generates post primary election disputes which culminate into litigation through which aggrieved candidates seek redress, while others either defect to other political parties or institutionalize violence (Adebiyi, 2019). This has serious implications for party stability and democratic development in Nigeria.

Against the foregoing, the paper is aimed at assessing party primary elections in PDP and APC and their implication for democratic development in Nigeria.

Statement of Problem

Despite the emphasis on sustainability of internal party democracy in Nigeria since 1999, virtually all the party primary elections conducted by Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressives Congress (APC) were products of imposition of candidates by the party elite or god-fathers (Obi, 2005). The process of selecting party candidates through imposition is a threat to democratic development and stability in Nigeria (Ajayi, 2020) as indicated by non-inclusive systems of participation and decision making, lack of opportunities for broad input, absence of a defined structure, rules and processes, denial of individual and group rights and weak mechanisms for redressing grievances (Ikelegbe, 2013). Accordingly, Okpala (2014) writes that undemocratic practices in the political parties in Nigeria such as imposition of candidates in the party primary election are largely accountable for intra-party crisis, political violence and assassination, defection of party members, litigations and weak leadership and representation. This probably explains why Agbakoba (2008) criticized the approaches and measures adopted by political parties like Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in most of their primaries both at the national and state levels as incongruent to a democratic government as they were characterized with irregularities.

Undoubtedly, imposition of candidates in the party primary election by a few elite who are very prominent, powerful and influential in the political parties in Nigeria is largely linked to lack of internal party democracy which generally undermines democratic development. It is however, expected that party primary election should not only be determined by the majority of the party members but should be seen to be transparent, credible and participatory for enhanced democratic development.

Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of this research, the elite theory is adopted to explain and support the topic under investigation. Elite theory is a theory of the state that seeks to describe and explain power relationships in a society. The theory posits that a small minority, consisting of members of the economic elite and policy -planning networks, holds the most power—and that this power is independent of democratic elections, (Scott, 1979). The theory was propounded by Vilfredo & Mosca in 1935 in the law of elite's rotation, which asserts that power is rotated among the elite. This means that the elite are substituted by another group of elite. Hence, the masses are unavoidably ruled by the few elite at the expense of the former. Put differently, elite theory sees political elite as players governing the state and national

resources, as well as occupying key positions related to power networks (Yamokoski & Dubrow, 2008).

Thus, the perception of elite is more carefully connected to the Weberian knowledge of power, understood as the competence of executing one's will, even against the will of the general populace (Weber, 1922). It is understood that power can be accomplished through material and/or figurative resources. Subsequently, elite can simply be defined as those in control of capital (Reis, 2005). Therefore, the focus of this theory is that power is elite concentrated; the elite are unified; the non-elite are diverse and powerless; elite's interests are unified due to common backgrounds and positions, and the defining characteristic of power is institutional position (Deric, 2011).

Interestingly, the above theory is very useful in understanding how party primary election is conducted and its implication for democratic development in Nigeria. In Nigeria, primary election is determined and controlled by the party elite through imposition of candidates of their choice and interest especially in PDP and APC. The aforementioned factor is not healthy for democratic development in Nigeria and has remained a recurring decimal. Be this as it may, democracy ought to begin from political parties particularly on how they choose their candidates in party primary election. The experience of the parties under study revealed that the primary election is the exclusive reserve of the party elite which is a violation of democratic principles.

Methodology

This study relied mainly on secondary sources for data collection, especially in assessing PDP and APC primary elections. Added to this, the researcher equally gathered information through direct observation and interaction with relevant players in party politics in relation to primary election as well as the documentary evidence they provided with regard to the primary elections of the political parties under study.

Clarification of Concepts

Political Party: A political party has been given several definitions. Among the definitions is one offered by Appadorai (1968) who sees it as organized group of citizens who act together as a political unit, having distinctive aims and opinions on the leading political question of controversy in the state, and who by acting together as a political unit, seek to obtain control of the government. Similarly, Lapalombara & Anderson (2011) define a political party as any political group, in possession of an official label and a formal organization that links center to locality, that presents, and is capable of placing through elections (free or non-free) candidates for public office.

Ball (1977) has suggested that political parties have common attributes which include: (i) It is a corporate body with clear identity, functions, ideology and objective (ii) The group is organized, which implies that it is structured with various levels of authority (iii) The aim of the group is to control political power.

It follows from the foregoing that a political party is a legal organization that comprises people with common political beliefs, ideology and interest, who prepare and present candidates for election with the purpose of winning election and exercising political power.

However, there are key elements that make a political party different from other human associations as Nwolise (2018) would have us believe. They include: (i) playing party politics (ii) nominating candidates for election (iii) organizing political campaigns (iv) competing in elections (v) forming and running government if election is won (vi) exercising political power in all its ramifications especially in public policy determination, use of the coercive apparatuses of the state, and management of national resources (vii) serving as opposition voice when not in power (Nwolise, 2018, p. 16).

By and large, political parties are the bedrock of democracy. They are lubricant that greases the wheels of democracy. However, the character and nature of political elite in the political parties in relation to party primary election has a lot of implications for democratic development in Nigerian democracy.

Party Primary Elections: In most countries of the world, elections form a two-step process and are used together to determine the winner. The first of these is the primary election. This election serves as a party nomination for a political position. Smith (2011) posits that party primary election is a process by which voters can indicate their preference for their party's candidate, or a candidate in general, in an oncoming general election or local elections. Depending on the administrative divisions within a country, voters might consist of the general public in what is called an open primary, or solely the members of a political party in what is called a closed primary. American Heritage Dictionary (2014) defines primary election as an election held to either narrow the field of candidates for a given elective office or to determine the nominees for political parties in advance of a general election. Primary elections can take several different forms. In a partisan primary, voters select a candidate to be a political party's nominee for a given office in the corresponding general election (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2011). Therefore, a primary election is election conducted by a political party, in which voters of that particular party choose among contending party members for a political position to be the party's flag bearer or party's candidate in a general election. It is thus the first in election process used by a party to narrow down candidates contesting for a given elective position within polity, and whoever that is chosen becomes the party's candidate nominated for the general election.

Democratic Development: Democratic development is made up of two concepts, namely: democracy and development.

Democracy is believed to have originated from Greek. Democracy is a combination of two words—demos and kratos. The former means people, while the latter is rule, and what we mean by democracy in English is rule of the people (Nitisha, 2017). Held (1987) sees democracy as a form of government in which, in contradiction to monarchies and aristocracies, the people rule. He further shows that 'democracy entails a political community in which there is some form of political equality among the people. Precisely stated, democracy is the rule by the people. The notion of democracy has evolved over time, and the common form of democracy today is a representative democracy where the people elect government officials to govern on their behalf such as in a parliamentary or presidential democracy (Andranik, 2020). Popper (1988) defined democracy in contrast to dictatorship or tyranny, focusing on opportunities for the people to control their leaders and oust them without the need for a revolution. However, of all the definitions of democracy, the study aligned itself with the definition of the former U.S. President, Abraham Lincoln (1864). Who defined democracy as the government of the people, by the people and for the people. Thus,

this definition implies that, those who will be members of the government must come from and among the general public; that is, people and the functions of the government must aim at satisfying the general welfare or upliftment of the people. Democracy is therefore government that is people inspired and oriented.

Besides that, the major principles of modern democracy are popular consultation, popular participation and political equality, popular accountability, rule of law, freedom of the press, credible electoral process, fundamental human rights, independence of the judiciary (Ekemam, 2013; Ezeanyika, 2006, Ogunna, 2003; Appadorai, 2006; Corry & Hodgetts, 1959; Ranney & Kendall, 1956).

On the other hand, development may mean different things to different scholars. But for Todaro (1981), development is a multi-dimensional process involving the reorganization and reorientation of the entire economic and social system, thus, a process of improving the quality of all human lives. The Society for International Development; Israel Branch, (2018), defines development as a process that creates growth, progress, positive change or the addition of physical, economic, environmental, social and demographic components. Therefore, for them, the purpose of development is to increase the level of quality of life of the population, creating or expansion of local, regional income and employment opportunities, without damaging the resources of the environment. In his contribution, Pearson (1992) posits that development involves an improvement in qualitative, quantitative or both - in the use of available resources. It comprises social, political and economic betterment.

Democratic development is therefore a concept that is large in scope. It implies internalization of democratic culture and the institutionalization of democratic best practices in terms of adherence to the rule of law, free and fair elections, individual freedom and equality, respect to the verdict of the electorate, majority decision and independence of the judiciary. For Schedler (1998 cited in Ojo, 2006) and Mijah & Adamu (2018), democratic development means the diffusion of democratic culture and values, the routinization of civilian democracy, popular legitimacy and decisions, and stabilization of electoral process and rules, internal party democracy, etc.

Assessment of Party Primary Elections in Nigeria

Since the return of democratic governance in 1999, the conduct of primary elections by political parties in Nigeria and more especially by the two political parties under focus has not been without tales of woe, intrigues, manipulations and imposition of candidates. It has remained a total disregard of the framework for the conduct of party primaries as enshrined in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as well as the Electoral Act and Guidelines of the Independent National Electoral Commission. Adeoye (2009) lamented the regular use of undemocratic process in the conduct of primary elections where candidates were hand-picked and hoisted on members by the party elite (the governors, godfathers, party stalwarts and money bags) within the political parties. It is sad to note that most often; these preferred candidates in the political parties were not thoroughly investigated, scrutinized just like in developed countries to ascertain the authenticity of their credentials, their personalities, capabilities and capacities. As a matter of fact, a majority of them lack credibility and have questionable characters. Alabi & Tunde (2013) assert that the processes of emergence of party flag bearers/candidates over time have not really given opportunity for

the best and preferred candidates to emerge because their political party failed to conduct free and fair primary elections, as there was flagrant imposition of aspirant as party flag bearers thereby disfranchising other party members who would have participated in a free and fair primary election. In all, the masses had no other options than to vote for whomever that emerges as the party candidate in the general election.

Prior to the electoral law amended in 2010, party primary election was considered purely as internal affair of each political party without any external interference or check. As a result, impunity was the order of the day. For instance, the People's Democratic Party of Nigeria 2007 primaries in Imo and River States were characterized with flagrant abuse of power by the leaders of the party, both at the state and federal levels. There were lots of unlawful substitution of names of those that really won the gubernatorial primary elections with the names of preferred candidates who didn't win elections. With this development, some aggrieved candidates approached the court after winning elections and their names substituted. Giving instance of the Supreme Court rulings, National Judicial Institute report (2007) in *Engineer Charles Ugwu & Anor V. Senator Ifeanyi Ararume & Anor (SC.63/2007)* (2007), Nigeria Supreme Court held (NGSC) that the gubernatorial hopeful in Imo State, Mr. Ifeanyi Ararume was substituted with Engineer Ugwu, the party's preferred PDP candidate after their party primary election was held. It was the same case in River State where, Mr. Rotimi Amechi was substituted with Mr. Celestine Omehia.

However, in the case of *Ugwu vs Ararume (2008)12NWLR (Pt1048)367*, the Supreme Court, in her wisdom held that the matters of raising political questions as how political party should organize its primaries or who should be its candidate at an election, is strictly a matter within the exclusive jurisdiction of political party which the court lacks the jurisdiction to interfere with, and that party primaries could come in form of election, appointment, selection or a combination thereof, thus giving judgment that a political party has the right to choose whoever it wants without the interference of any outsiders. The Supreme Court ruled in favour of Senator Ararume but he was later suspended by PDP for taking the party to court.

On his own part, Mr. Rotimi Amaechi, who was the preferred candidate in the PDP gubernatorial primary elections in Rivers State approached the court after Mr. Celestine Omehia was declared as the winner of the primary election and went ahead to win the gubernatorial election, had the court reversed itself by stating rightly that Rotimi Amechi was the rightful candidate that won the PDP party's primary and was thereafter recognized as the rightful winner of the gubernatorial primary elections, and thus was sworn in as the governor of River State. So, the judgment of court, seeing party primaries as internal affairs, impacted negatively on so many other party primaries conducted because parties still relied on the existing law of non-interference in party primaries from any external forces.

Equally, a similar scenario played out in Abia State when the former governor, Orji Uzor Kalu anointed and sponsored his godson, Theodore Ahamofula Orji, to become the governor of Abia State then. Theodore Ahamofula Orji was formerly a career civil servant who served in Government House, Umuahia in the Bureau of Budget and Planning and also in the Ministry of Agriculture. Thereafter, he served as the Chief of Staff to his godfather, Orji Uzor Kalu, before winning the governorship election on April 14, 2007 under the Progressive Peoples Alliance (PPA). He ruled Abia State from May 29th 2007 to May 29th 2015.

A similar scenario played out in Rivers and Akwa-Ibom States. In that of Rivers, despite the state's internal politics, particularly the bitter rivalry between Nyesom Wike, the incumbent governor, and Rotimi Amechi, his predecessor (who served from 2007 to 2015). The two former allies parted ways in 2013, notwithstanding the fact that Rotimi Amechi with few party leaders, facilitated the emergence of Nyesom Wike as gubernatorial candidate of PDP. But Amechi later defected from PDP to APC when their differences became irreconcilable, and subsequently, he drafted Dakuku Peterside as APC gubernatorial candidate to run against Wike, the PDP candidate in 2015 gubernatorial elections in Rivers State. This scenario almost grounded governance in River State, as state funds were used to prosecute frivolous cases, laundering of image and pacifying party members in the governor's camp.

Essentially, the 2006 Electoral Act as amended, drastically reduced the powers of INEC in a party's primary election. The Act stripped INEC of any major role in the parties' choice of candidates beyond being mere observers at primaries. This amendments according to Igin (2010) is a castration of INEC; making it unable to enforce internal democracy in various political parties. The parties adopted all sorts of undemocratic means to pick their candidates for the 2011 elections, and INEC had no option but to accept their lists. Because of that experience and other challenges posed by some provisions of the Electoral Act, the INEC ahead of the 2015 general elections made recommendations for amendments to the National Assembly which contributed to the enactment of the 2010 Electoral Act with the primary purpose of curbing the impunity of few political elite who always hijack primary elections through undemocratic process. However, Section 87 of the Act stipulates that a political party seeking to nominate candidates for elections shall hold primaries for aspirants to all elective positions through direct or indirect election, in which all the aspirants shall be given equal opportunity of being voted for by members of the political party, and that the aspirants with the highest number of votes at the end of voting will be declared the winner of the primaries of the party. Thereafter, the name of the winner will be forwarded to the Independent National Electoral Commission as the candidate for the party. Furthermore, the same section of the Act, states also that an aspirant who complains that any of the provision of this Act was not complied with in the selection or nomination of a candidate of a political party for election, may approach the Federal High Court or of High Court of a State to seek for redress.

Arguably, the Electoral Act of 2010, appears not to have been able to change the way and manner political parties conduct their primaries. Hence, Orisewezie (2011) writes that because of high scale of imposition of candidates across the political parties in 2011, Marwa, a former military governor of Lagos State, warned against imposition of candidates, and claimed that political parties in Nigeria are all perceived to be guilty of "selectocracy" in determining who emerges as parties' flag bearers. The same was the situation with the 2018 party primary elections in preparation for the 2019 general elections where majority of party big wigs were accused of indirectly creating political dynasties within political parties. Majority of them trained and armed thugs to make sure that their chosen candidate wins election at all cost, resulting in intra party crisis and lack of internal party democracy, which does not augur well for democratic development.

The Imo State PDP and APC gubernatorial primaries in 2018 were more pronounced. In APC, the former governor Rochas Okorocha, through undemocratic processes tried to impose his son inlaw, Uche Nwosu, on the party as the anointed gubernatorial candidate of APC, to the total disregard of the party's laid down regulations for the conduct of primaries. This

singular decision led to so many intra party conflicts, infractions and polarization of APC in the state. Writing on this, Ogundipe (2018) notes that there was a group backing the governor and his son in-law, called the “Rescue Mission” with a different party chairman, Mr. Nwafor, and on the other hand, a coalition group led by the former Deputy Governor, Prince Eze Madumere, with Chief Barr. Marcellinus Nlemigbo as the party Chairman. Several court cases were instituted using tax payers’ money, and finally, the coalition group, seeing the huge financial implications of the struggle, had to bring in Hope Uzodinma, former PDP stalwart who joined the coalition group to wrestle power from governor Rochas Okorocha. Later Senator Hope Uzodinma won the APC gubernatorial Primary, and Uche Nwosu was announced in another parallel primary as a winner. These actions were followed up with a lot of litigations within the party. Senator Hope Uzodinma was ruled by the Supreme Court as the APC winner of the governorship primaries as well as the winner of the gubernatorial election following the overturn of the governorship election won by PDP Candidate, Hon Emeka Ihedioha and ruled in favour of APC.

Enugu State was not left out on the imposition of candidate and flagrant use of undemocratic process in the conduct of party primary. As reported by Ogbonna (2019), the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has stopped recognizing Lawrence Ezeh as the senatorial candidate of All Progressives Congress (APC) for Enugu East, citing a court order and that on the final list of senatorial candidates for the 2019 general elections published on its website, the electoral body replaced Ezeh’s name with that of Adaku Ogbu-Aguocha, saying that the change came three weeks after Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) had concluded the National Assembly elections in which Ezeh was retained as the APC candidate contrary to the February 19, 2019 judgment of the Federal High Court Enugu which nullified his candidature. Ogbonna stated further that the court had declared that Ezeh was not properly nominated by the ruling party, being a member of opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) during the primary election of the APC, adding that the plaintiff, Ogbu-Aguocha, who came second in the APC senatorial primary election held on October 2, 2018, was the rightful candidate since Uchenna Ezemba, who won the primary had voluntarily stepped down. Ezemba had, shortly after the primary election, announced her withdrawal to pave the way for Ezeh, who lost his bid to clinch the PDP ticket and defected to the APC where he was given the party’s ticket. Consequently, Ogbu-Aguocha instituted a suit challenging the decision of the party to field Ezeh whom she said never contested in the APC primary and was not a member of the party, as of the time the primary election was held. Thus, she prayed the court to declare her the duly elected candidate of the APC since Ezemba, who emerged winner of the primary, had withdrawn from the contest. Justice Buba ordered APC to forward the name of the applicant to INEC as the recognized candidate.

In the case of Edo State, former APC National Chairman, Adams Oshiomohle, in 2020 tried to impose a candidate other than, Governor Obaseki in 2020 Edo State APC gubernatorial primary. Prior to the primary election, it was alleged that some party chieftains under the instructions of Oshiomohle used undemocratic process to screen out some contestants in the 2020 APC governorship primary election. The incumbent Governor of Edo State, Godwin Obaseki, who was going for his second tenure was screened out by the APC gubernatorial candidates screening committee in Edo State primary election, headed by Jonathan Ayuba, (Sahararepoters, 2020). The fight and show of power between Adams Oshiomohle and Governor Obaseki highly polarized APC in Edo state, and in June 2020, Obaseki with majority of his faithful defected to PDP, where he won the PDP gubernatorial primary and

eventually winner of the September, 2020 gubernatorial election by flooring Ize-Iyamu, the preferred APC candidate of Adams Oshiomohle .

Similarly, in 2019 gubernatorial election in Rivers State APC, the party lacked internal democracy. Rotimi Amaechi, the former Rivers State Governor, single handedly drafted Tonye Cole; a billionaire and co-founder of Sahara Energy; one of the indigenous oil and gas firms in Nigeria, as the APC's challenger to Wike in 2019, instead of supporting his former ally, Dakuku Peterside (Tonye, 2018). This triggered internal party crisis in APC in Rivers State between Rotimi Amaechi and group loyal to him on one hand and Dakuku Peterside and his group on the other hand. The crisis led to the disqualification of APC to participate in the 2019 gubernatorial election in Rivers State by INEC. However, the scenario changed the around middle of December, 2018, following a suit by a faction of APC challenging the conduct of the party's primaries in the state, the Appeal Court, however, nullified the primaries, invalidating Tonye Cole's governorship candidacy, as well as those of all others vying for seats in the Senate, House of Representatives and the state's House of Assembly of APC political party in Rivers State. The ruling also nullified the congresses that produced the party's ward, local government and state executives respectively.

Thus, the court nullifications made it impossible for APC to field any gubernatorial candidate during the 2019 general elections. In Rivers State in which PDP candidate, Nyesom Wike won.

Also, the same partisan rancour played out in Akwa-Ibom State, whereby the split between PDP Governor, Udom Emmanuel and his predecessor, Godswill Akpabio, led to the struggle for control of the state and its House of Assembly. It should be recalled that Udom Emmanuel, the state government secretary (2013-2014) in Akpabio's cabinet, was Akpabio's his anointed heir in 2015, and later won as the Akwa Ibom state governor under PDP. The relationship between Emmanuel Udom and Akpabio began to lose grip immediately the later became the Governor of Akwa Ibom State, which some observers attributed to the dispute over control of the state machinery and resources. Having been edged out of power in Peoples Democratic Party, Godswill Akpabio defected to APC on 8th August, 2018. He was instrumental to Nsima Ekere, who emerged as the APC's gubernatorial candidate in Akwa Ibom without due regards to internal party democracy.

Thus, with the use of undemocratic process in the conduct of the party primary elections, non credible politicians with questionable character are often elected to serve in government. The major concerns of these crops of politicians are returns on their investments after winning elections or appointed into public offices. The quest to make returns on their investment in politics is arguably responsible for gross embezzlement and misappropriation of public funds meant for provision of critical infrastructure that will benefit the masses. This has become the order of the day. With this, the future of good governance in Nigeria as country looks bleak. Hence, there is absolute need to critically change the status quo.

Party Primary Elections and Democratic Development in Nigeria

It is pertinent to argue that the use of non -democratic process in the conduct of party primary elections over the years has impacted negatively on democratic development in Nigeria. The import of the 2010 electoral act, coupled with the actions of party elite and chieftains has continued to affect the use of democratic process in the conduct of elections. The resultant

effects are imposition of candidates and lack of conducive environment or level playing grounds for members to participate in the electoral process. Majority of party members are sometimes restricted from active participation in politics, either as a voter or candidate for elective position. This situation favoured party chieftains, money bags and god fathers, who with impunity dictate who gets what, like ministerial positions and commissioners, as the case may be, including their portfolios. In a worst scenario, they become indirectly the substantive governor, whereas, the elected executive, stands in as a rubber stamp carrying out their biddings. However, if such governor or appointee refuses to do their bidding, that will mark the beginning of problems in that state.

For instance, this situation played out in Anambra state with emphasis on the case of Chris Ngige and Chris Uba in 2003. Albin-Lacky & Rawlence (2007), in their work entitled *Criminal politics: violence, godfathers and corruption in Nigeria: A Case study of Anambra State*, captured the intrigues between Chris Uba, a member of the PDP Board of Trustees and a godfather and sponsor to Chris Ngige, the PDP gubernatorial candidate and almost all the house members in Anambra State in 2003 election. The inability of Chris Ngige to comply with the contractual term reached with Chris Uba, for instance, the constant request of going to the treasury to take money to give to Chris Uba for granting the number of commissioners and portfolio requested by him led to the fallout of that situation resulted in the kidnap of Governor Chris Ngige by armed policemen, and he was forced at gun point to sign a “letter of resignation”. His government equally came under siege also when armed men with firearms and crude explosives attacked government house. The policemen who were attached to the government house Awka stood aside and watched government properties destroyed and looted while about a few people were killed during the violent clashes. This continued until March 2006, when a Federal Court of Appeal ruled that Governor Chris Ngige’s 2003 gubernatorial election victory was fraudulent and therefore null and void. The result was Ngige’s replacement with his 2003 electoral opponent, Peter Obi from the opposition party; All-Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA). Thus, scenario as this played out in most states in the country, when candidates emerged through undemocratic party primary elections plunging the party into crisis.

In 2019 Imo State witnessed the same crisis during the tenure of the immediate past Governor, Rochas Okorocha, when he mobilized state resources to impose his son inlaw, Uche Nwosu as the flag bearer of APC in the governorship primary elections. As reported by *Thisday*, (2019), All-Progressives Congress in Imo State became a battle field as Okorocha tried to impose Nwosu, on the party, an action fervently resisted by some faction of APC in the state and the national leadership of the party who pronounced Senator Hope Uzodinma, the party’s flag -bearer. Within this period, it was alleged by the opposition party, the PDP, that Okorocha abandoned governance in Imo State and channelled state resources to actualize his selfish desires.

Arguably, the experience of the use of undemocratic process in the party primary depicts that when candidates emerged through undemocratic process of party primary election, their major focus is not to actualize their party’s manifesto, neither is it to improve the lots of the masses. Rather they concentrate on ways to make returns on their investment and satisfaction of the interest of those that brought them to power. Therefore, rather than focusing more on how to move the state and country forward by championing or investing energies around issues/policies that will bring about improved and sustainable development, their priorities center more on policies that benefit and satisfy the interest of their godfathers, and most

often, on how to perpetuate themselves in power. With this mind-set, they embark on looting and misappropriation of the needed funds to build critical infrastructure that will turn around the country for the better.

It can be argued that the imposition of candidates by the political elite in a party is a total disregard to democratic electoral process and it impacts negatively on internal party cohesion. It causes intra party crisis and political violence. It denies the majority of party members the opportunity to participate in the process and contributed meaningfully for democratic development.

In his effort to reverse the trend of flagrant abuse of democratic process by politicians in Nigeria, Professor Attahiru Jega, the then INEC Chairman, argued that there are some provisions in the 2010 Act that must be amended because of two conflicting issues that are causing a lot of confusion in Sections 31 and 87 of the Electoral Act. Section 31 says, “when a party does a primary and submits the name of candidate to INEC, INEC should not reject that name submitted by the party”, while Section 87 of the same Electoral Act states “candidates of the political parties should emerge through democratic process”. These two sections are very contradictory, because from reports submitted to INEC by its officials that monitored some party primaries in the past, they were able to ascertain, that most often, party members that emerged victorious at the primary elections had their names substituted by those who did not win the elections, and thus canvassed for the amendments of the 2010 Electoral Act. However, efforts made to amend the Act ahead of 2015 elections failed following President Goodluck Jonathan’s inability to sign the bill into law, and this made political parties and INEC to rely on the same Act to conduct 2015 general elections.

Although, it was expected that the amended 2018 Electoral Act, according to Igin (2018) which contains profound changes that would re-define the process of party primaries for nomination of candidates for 2019 elections would have been ready and signed into law by President Buhari, but this wasn’t the case, INEC and political parties had again have to relied on the 2010 Electoral Act to conduct primaries and just as predicted, parties’ primaries especially that of PDP and APC were manipulated with impunity. There was no level playing grounds was all war of words among party chieftains. Lives were lost in some cases, and the will of the electorate were subverted.

For instance, Omeiza (2018) posits that the then National Chairman of the ruling All Progressives Congress, APC, Comrade Adams Oshiomhole, condemning the attitude of the three former APC governors who opposed his conduct of a free and fair party primaries in their states, said that “they were behaving like drug addicts suffering from withdrawal syndrome”. Going further, Oshiomhole, who for days during the run-down to the conduct of their party’s primaries, was having a running battle with then governors, Ibikunle Amosun of Ogun State, Rochas Okorocha of Imo state and Abdulaziz Yari of Zamfara State, over the position of the national chairman on the outcome of the APC primaries in their respective states. Speaking with journalists in Abuja, Oshiomhole said the action of the governors was akin to drug addicts suddenly jolted by the new reality of lack of access to drugs and who now suffer from withdrawal syndrome, and that, Nigerians are now worried that we can have a democracy in which only a few kingpins dominate the polity and that party membership does not carry any weight, it is the so-called godfathers that anoint and impose the anointed. He concluded that it is his task, as National Chairman, to strenuously work to steer everything away from this heinous past which the PDP created, so that the party can be

membership driven. It can be inferred from the above that Oshiomole's concern was to restore internal party democracy through the prevention of the culture of impunity, imposition of candidate in party primary election and godfatherism to ensure people-driven and people-based democracy in the APC primaries.

Conclusion

It is clear from all indications that political parties in Nigeria, such as PDP and APC, which constitute the focus of this study, have failed to uphold democratic principles in the selection of party candidates. The notorious and infamous practice of imposition of candidates always adopted by the party elite is very unhealthy for democratic development in Nigeria; and if not nipped in the bud will lead to institutionalization of anti-democratic practices within the political parties.

It is pertinent to note that undemocratic selection process of candidate in the PDP and APC primary elections was mainly responsible for incessant intra-party crisis, political violence, defection of aggrieved party members, litigations and sometimes disqualification or removal of party candidates by INEC or Court who are unlawfully selected. The domination and control of the party primary elections in PDP and APC has not only undermined the credibility and integrity of political parties but has also reduced the quality of leadership, representation and governance leading to lack of democratic development in Nigeria. This is very worrisome and calls for a change of status quo.

Recommendations

From the forgoing, there is urgent need for the abolition of imposition of candidates and institutionalization of democratic process in the conduct of primary elections in Nigeria. To achieve this,

1. The new Electoral Act signed in 2021 should be sustained by all the stakeholders (INEC, political parties, electorate, civil society, etc) in the Nigerian political system to ensure that internal party democratic principles are not only promoted by defaulters of Electoral Act are prosecuted and punished accordingly to deter others from committing electoral fraud and malpractices.
2. There is an overriding need for the adoption of direct primary election to give room for popular participation in the press. This will help to limit the domination and control of the political parties by the elite in the primary election.
3. Strengthening the Judiciary to be more proactive, more independent and more responsive in dealing with the electoral related cases as well as the effective prosecution of offenders of Electoral Act in relation to party election.

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