INTRA AND INTER-PARTY RELATIONS AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN BENUE STATE

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Abstract

One of the defining attributes of party parties in Nigeria since the return of democracy in 1999 is intra and inter-parties conflicts. Some of these conflicts have resulted to the decamping of aggrieved members from one party to another. It is in the light of this that this paper examines intra and inter-party relations and democratic governance in Benue state.The paper employed essentially a qualitative approach which relied secondary sources of data collection.This paper adopts Realistic Group Conflict Theory (RGCT) as its framework of analysis. Findings from the paper have revealed that political parties in the state have undergone intra and inter party conflicts. These conflicts are used by lack of internal democracy, party executive arrogance, monetization of politics, sit-tight-syndrome and turning election contests as a matter of life and death. The consequences of both intra and inter-party conflict are fierce political struggle and violence which have continued to pose serious challenges to the survival of democracy in the state. The paper therefore recommends that political parties must entrench internal democracywithin their internal structure and workings,especially in the selection of candidates within theparty and for the general elections. Also, political parties must evolve political ideologies andtheir activities must be guided by the ideologiesthey so represent.

Introduction

Political partiesare key actors in any representative democracy. Political parties articulate group aims, nurture political leadership, develop and promote policy alternatives, and present voters with coherent electoral alternatives.Thus, these functions are indispensable for democratic system whether inadvanced or developing democracies largely depends tosome extent on the nature, composition, organization,ideals and institutionalization of political parties which inturn begets democratic consolidation (Ogundiya, 2011).

However, in most developing countries, political parties face number of distinctive challenges towards achieving their specific roles and functions (Maiyo, 2008). In most fledgling democracies, NDI (2014) have particularly identified lack of clear ideologies, failure to initiate coherent policy objectives, weak party structures that remains dormant apart from electioneering period, shallow and narrow support base usually defined by personal, ethnic or regional inclinations. As a result, party developmental process, through which political parties seek to formulate and implement its activities, is considered key to the healthy nature of representative democracy. Though, sustainable party system is built over generations, which is a byproduct of different political processes, Omotola (2009) show that democratic experiments in Nigeria over the first decade of its re-democratization is unfortunately regressing towards authoritarian regime or what some scholars termed democratic reversal.

In Nigeria, since the inception of party politics in 1920s, political partieshave been vulnerable to crises of different nature which had in turn undermined and still undermining their democratic functions. The defining characteristics of party politics in Nigeria, since the colonial period through independence and previous republics (first, second & aborted-third), have been intrigues, internal strife, backbiting, factionalism, schisms, and internal struggles, resulting in series of crisis, defections and counter-defection, as well as partly responsible for the collapse of these republics (Moliki, 2020). This current dispensation, (Fourth Republic) was ushered in with high hopes and expectations that Nigerian politicians have learnt from their past mistakes, but the reality has proved otherwise. Party politics, since 1999, has been bedevilled with crises in varying proportions and has exhibited more crises than cohesion, such that virtually all political parties in the country are perpetually enmeshed in internal crisis.

Scholars have, however, advanced various factors responsible for strained relationship among members of same political part and other parties to include:prebendal politics, dearth of viable party ideology, lack of internal democracy, imposition of candidates, money politics, party indiscipline, and ethnicisation of party politics, among others, which have heightened intense struggle over the control of party power and access to resources by political actors (Omotola, 2009; Ojukwu&Olaifa, 2011; Momodu&Matudi, 2013).Inter-parties conflict creates insecurity of life and properties on democracy. Many people have died, while some have lost valuable properties in the course of political violence arising from various inter-parties and other crises across the country.

The above hostile inter and intra party relations have also profoundly find expression in Benue State.Since the inception of democracy in 1999, party politics been characterized by acrimonies relationships. This paper therefore seeks to examine intra and inter-party relations and democratic governance in Benue state.

Conceptual Elucidation

Political Party

In its simplest form, political party is defined as a group of people with similar interest of winning, controlling and consolidating political power. Ikelegbe (2013) offers a more critical definition of political party. To him, political party is an organization for expressing and harmonizing interests, and that intermediates between the citizens and political society, government and state. Nnoli (2003) defines a political party as a group of people who share a common conception of how and why state power should be organized and used.

Political parties have also been conceived as an instrument for contesting elections for the purpose of selecting candidates and parties to exercise political power (Yaqub 2002). A political party is simply a body of organised individuals whose ultimate aim and goal is to contest for governmental power through the instrumentalities of elections. While it should not be mistaken that the mere existence of political parties presupposes that a society is democratic or otherwise, however, competitive and periodic elections have come to at least define the character of liberal democracy (Momoh, 2013).

Whatever the view one holds about political parties, two issues are essential for any definition: political party is congregation of people who must share similar interest of gaining, consolidating and exercising political power.

Democratic Governance

Democracy denotes that form of government in which the ruling power of the state is legally vested not only in any particular class or classes but in members of the community as a whole. To Dudley (1982) democracy entails meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and organized groups (especially political parties) either directly or indirectly, for the major positions of governmental power; in addition to popular participation in the electoral process and respect for the civil and political rights of the people.Democracy is the selection by the generality of the people to execute the will of the people. Suffice it to say that democracy connotes the existence of majority wishes and rules where those in leadership are beneficiaries of social contract decision of the people, acting only to fulfill the yearnings and aspirations of the people. It suggests that power belongs to the people and thus rules out the one man government, and that those who rule are answerable and responsible to the generality of the people.

Governance on the other hand is traced to a Latin word “Gubernare” which means steering a ship, and it is from this that, today we can talk about governs, government and governance. World Bank’s report (1986), defines it as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development. This definition is similar to that expressed by the World Bank to which governance is the exercise of political power to manage a nation’s affairs (Adamolekun 2002, p.3). These notions limit the concept of governance to the state and government activities or political decision making and public policies.

There is a broad or holistic definition of governance by the United Nations Development (UNDP) (1993) which states governance as the totality of the exercise of authority in the management of a country’s affairs comprising the complex mechanism, processes, and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interest, exercise their legal

rights, and mediate their differences. This view portrays governance as encompassing the political, economic, legal, judicial, social and administrative authority and thus includes government, the private sector and the civil society.

Thus, the two concepts married together to be refer to as democratic governance is believed to first appeared in a 1989 World Bank Report on Africa, which defines it as exercise of political power to manage a nation's affairs. Democratic governance includes some or all of the following features: an efficient public service; an independent judicial system and legal frameworks to enforce contract; the accountable administration of public funds; an independent public auditor, responsible to a representative legislature, respect for the rule of law and human rights at all levels of government; a pluralistic institutional structure and a free press (Jega, 2007). Democratic governance drawn from the above analysis can be linked as policy framework; imposes demands on policy makers in their exercise of power. According to Omotola(2008, p.56) it encompasses: an effective state that possesses an enabling political and legal environment for economic growth and equitable distribution. Civil societies and communities, are present in the policy making process, with the state facilitating political and social interaction and fostering societal cohesion and stability.

All the above elements, when put together with purposeful leadership in place monitors policies that are implemented and that are essential for sustainable development and good governance in any credible democracy.Democratic governance is the respect for the basic rights of individuals as enshrined in the constitution of the land, adherence to the rule of law, transparency and accountability in handling government affairs in terms of managing the countries resources.

From the above conception, democratic governance embraces all the things that will make life more meaningful to the people by the government, from choosing their leaders down to participating in the affairs of governance. Democratic governance requires a clear process of decision- making and public policy formulation. Government structures are one means through which decisions are arrived at and implemented, but also both formal and informal organizations may sometimes influence the decision making process. It assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. With democratic governance, it is believed that certain things that are wrong in society will begin to straighten out, societal morality will improve, good education will become easily accessible to all, tolerance will improve among the citizenry as they have less burdens to carry, justice will no longer be easily sought via violence; and a lasting democratic and individual peace will be closer to mankind.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts Realistic Group Conflict Theory (RGCT). The RGCT was officially named by Donald Campbell (1965). RGCT is a well-established theory with robust research support from both laboratory and field studies. It is used to understand many of the local and global intergroup conflicts that besiege the world. That a solution to end conflict is incorporated within this theory makes it one of the most applicable and compelling social psychological theories existing today.

This theory emerged in the 1960s to describe how perceived competition for limited resources

can lead to hostility between groups. Unlike theories that use psychological factors such as personality or value differences to explain conflict and prejudice, RGCT focuses on situational forces outside the self. When valuable resources are perceived to be abundant, then groups cooperate and exist in harmony. However, if valuable resources are perceived as scarce (regardless of whether they truly are), then these groups enter into competition and antagonism ensues between them. The resources in question can be physical (such as land, food, or water) or psychological (such as status, prestige, or power). One group need only believe that competition exists for hostile feelings and discriminatory behaviourto follow.

The realistic conflict theory is used to explain conflict, negative prejudices, and discrimination that occur between groups of people who are in competition for same goals and resources (Sidanius&Pratto, 1999). The theory further argues that the competition is aggravated when feelings of resentment set in as a result of "zero-sums game" syndrome (Jackson, 1993; Baumeister&Vohs, 2007).

The relevance of this theory to this paper lies on the premise that in every political organisation, such as political party, there is bound to be clash of interests due to competition for same goal. As a group within political party acquire the desired political power, party structure and resources, other groups equally strives to obtain same or related benefits, and since the winning group often seeks to assume winner-takes-all pattern, the struggle and competition towards achieving the same goals and objectives then becomes tensed, acrimonious and bitter, hence crisis is inevitable. It is therefore necessary that the stakeholders put in place punitive measures to curtail unnecessary internal crises within political parties in order to prevent democratic retrogression or collapse.

In Benue State, politics has overtaking farming which the state was known for. As a result, the contestations for political power has become an issue of do or die affair. To actualize their political ambition most Benue politicians have resorted to the manipulation of intra and inter party mechanism thereby promoting conflict in the political parties.

The Nature and Character of Intra and Inter Party Conflict in Benue State

Several factors are responsible for inter parties conflicts in Nigeria most especially Benue State. Some of these factors are discussed below.

a) **Monetization of Politics:** Generally, in Nigeria, politics is conceived as an investment. The case of Benue State is not different from this position. Benue politicians like their counterpart across the states of federation, having invested colossally on campaigns and others political activities, coupled with the existing system of winner takes all, would want to win at all cost. The need to employ the use of thugs and touts to destabilize and rig elections becomes inevitable especially when such politicians are not popular candidates.

b) **Sit-tight syndrome:** this is very common in Nigerian politics. This is a situation in which a political party tries to hold on to power. In an attempt to hang on to power, parties often create a regime of violence, conflict, political thugs, hooligans and scavengers to sing their praise, intimidate and kill opposing political parties member if they become intransigent.

c) **Poverty of Party Ideology:**Ideologies are comprehensive visions of societies and social developments, which contain explanations, values, and goals for past,

present and future developments (Wilhelm and Grabow, 2011). These ideologies inspire and justify political and social action. They are an essential element for political orientation.Ideology has been regarded as the most important vehicle of any political party. Fundamental in party ideology is the entrenchment of internal party democracy to guarantee equal opportunity for participation and protest. In advance democracies such as U.S.A., Britain, Germany, etc. parties have been known to exist on sustained ideological base, not just platform for ascending to political power.

However, in Nigeria, since Nigeria's independence in 1960, Nigerian parties have been established on baseless foundations. The absence of ideology in Nigerian parties is of great concern (Dode, 2010). Political parties are no longer after the doctrine, myths or beliefs; they refuse to offer anything special to differentiate them from other parties (Orji, 2015). This is because the more political parties we have in the country the more it is difficult to differentiate one from another. In fact is safe to argue that political parties in Nigeria have many similarities than difference, the only differences being their names and logos. This situated is more pronounced since the inception of democracy in 1999. The 2019 elections in the country were contested among ninety-three (93) political parties but it was difficult to identify the dividing lines between these political parties.

d) **Conducting primary elections:** There is no doubt is oneof the means of testing the tenacity and authenticity ofany party's internal democracy. It is the first litmus testfor political parties. Primaries areonly effective in contributing to internal party democracyand maintaining party's stability if some conditions areupheld. Some of these conditions include, having abasic party structure, some cohesiveness within theparty, and the ability of rank and file members toparticipate in elections. It has been proven from manystudies that some primaries conducted in some politicalparties are sheer promotional agenda as they do notcontribute positively to empowerment of the rank andfile in those parties. The point is, if primaries arereduced to mere 'de-jure' or 'de-facto' process openonly to the same old rich and powerful elite that mainlytake care of their own or if members are not wellinformed about the choices they face, then, such intrapartydemocracy can be questioned.

e) **Party Executive Arrogance:** There is no gain saying that the fact theproblems of internal democracy are peculiar to all political parties in the state and the country at large. This affirms the commonsaying that when the head of the fish is bad, the entirebody becomes bad as well. The assumption is thatsome party executives, especially at the National level,feel that they have the latitude to turn things around asthey wish in the party. This create problem within the party as disenfranchised members defects to other political parties and approach the courts for redress of the injustice. The endless courts' litigations among members of the same of the same breed conflicts and distract political parties from winning elections.

Implications for Democratic Governance in Benue State

The impact of intra and inter party conflict on democratic governance in Benue state are quiet huge and disturbing. For instance, decamping of aggrieved membersto other political parties creates distrust among members ofpolitical parties, animosity and factionalisation of

partymembers, indiscipline among party members, credibilityproblem and bad image for political parties, opportunityfor opposition political party to criticize and factionalizethe party in conflict, waste of time and resources,divided loyalty among party members, discontentamong party members, breakdown of party activities,instability in the party and over-heating the polity. This has negative implications for democratic governance. AsMbah (2011) rightly argued that party defection has negative impact on consolidation of democracy, especially where legislators, governors, deputy governors, and other party members, defect to the ruling party. It is argued that this trend breeds weak new parties, as well as makes caricature of the practice of democracy as it undermines the validity of contrary views, and the principle of alternative democratic choice.Political parties cannot achieve their democratic goals and objectives if politicians continually choose to pursue their own individual agenda which often lead to wrangling and poor party politics. The situation which undermines the ability of party leaders to maintain coherent policy platforms has resultant effect on party's reputation with voters who may withdraw their support from a fractious and divided party which invariably affect the finance of the party. Intra-party crisis limits the capability of political party in discharging its primary roles of interest articulation and aggregation, leadership recruitment, mobilisation, socialisation and to provide necessary input for political process, stability and democratic consolidation (Moliki, 2020).

Incessant conflicts in and among political parties are likely to be unstable and this can threaten democratisation process. As Kellman (2004)Momodu&Matudi (2013) observe that political parties in the promotion of democracy, they can equallybe a hindrance to its attainment as well. With conflict prone political parties, democracy has little chance of surviving. Consequently,intra-party conflicts undermine the capacity of politicalparties to perform their key role of fostering democraticgovernance and ensuring that they are responsive tosocietal needs. Inability of political parties to perform this role would mean that the whole democratic experiment can disintegrate (Kellman 2004). Political parties in Benue and the country as large are conflict prone due to the nature and character of primary elections and the hijack of party structures by the executive has undermine their performance hence the chances of entrenching democratic culture is seriously in doubts.

Inter-parties conflict creates insecurity of life and properties on democracy. Benue state has experienced a lot electoral violence courtesy of the inter-party conflicts. As a result, many people have died, while some have lost valuable properties in the course of political violence arising from various inter-parties and other crises across the country. In any democracy that is full of inter-parties conflict as witnessed in the state, fundamental human right will always be denied, right to vote and to be voted for will definitely be eroded, it will be difficult for citizens to elect the right candidate of their choice, and unqualified people will occupy political power within the political system and mismanage the available resources in the political system.Akindele and Olaopa (1998, p.12) encapsulate the effects of inter-party conflict on democracy as follow; a) breakdown of law and order; kidnapping and secret killings; marital collapse; pathological geocentricism; anarchy and civil disobedience and voter apathy. Following from the aforementioned, it is observed that inter-parties conflict will always give a setback to democracy.

In Benue state, inter-party conflicts have resulted to the formation political thug groups by various political parties. These groups are already out of the way in terms of any tangible mental reasoning for pro-social behaviours, but quick in adapting to anti-social activities. The Kwande political killing in 2002; Jato-Aka political mayhem of 2003; Asukunya political killing of 2011; and other sporadic political killings of people and groups, property destruction worth billions of naira, were carried out by poverty stricken youth in Benue state sponsored by high-flying politicians (Akuhwa, 2015). The present state of youth unemployment and poverty rate is on the increase, and the state seems not to have come up with any effective public plan for youth development (engagement and social inclusiveness). These groups have entered a different phase from its inception (Akuhwa, 2015). A common feature of these anti-social groups is that there is a link between the leaders of youth anti-social groups and top politicians, or even the government agents. The anti-social youth groups, some of political extractions abound and are present in every local government headquarters and prominent villages/hamlets in Benue state. During elections, almost all leading politicians in Benue state have at least one anti-social youth group. For example, there were the "Bai boys," and every prominent politician has this type of youth groups in their respective camps. Some are engaged in these actions because of poverty, unemployment, social exclusion and frustration. There are still other anti-social youth groups such as the "Ghana group" in Sankera, the "Aondonengen and Saasaa groups" in Gboko, the "Sparko G group" in Makurdi among other groups spread sporadically in the state (Akuhwa, 2015). They are very ruthless, tactical and dogged, some are even educated but unemployed, and painfully, most of them engage into these illicit acts for nothing more than pastry sums, red wine and spirits. All these have characterized party primaries in Benue State since the inception of democracy. Inter-parties conflict most especially in Benue state has gotten to the stage that assassination, rigging of election, arson, vandalism, and riot have turned to a frequent exercise and this has made democratic sustenance a tall dream.

The Way Foreword for Political Parties and Democratic Governance in Benue State

There is no gainsaying the fact that party politics in the context of intra and inter party relations in Nigeria needs a total overhaul through coherent and relevant re-organization and, institutional restructuring/reawakening. The need for this finds a consolation in the dislocation and/or disruptive development of her political process. Through this fundamental restructuring the nation can bequeath an enduring legacy to the citizenry. From the rhythmic characteristic of her political process from inception, theNigerian party system is still in dire need of appropriate institutional mechanisms. Hence these measures are recommended are suggested:

i. Political parties must entrench internal democracywithin their internal structure and workings,especially in the selection of candidates within theparty and for the general elections.

ii. Members of political parties should subordinatethemselves to their party constitution.

iii. Political parties must evolve political ideologies andtheir activities must be guided by the ideologiesthey so represent.

iv. Politicians in the state should learn the habit of accepting defeat. They must not see

politics as do or die affair. Political parties should not see the political system as the property of any political party that occupies the system.

v. There must be equality, tolerance and fairness in the system and the whole process of election must be democratized and transparent according to the principle of democracy.

If the above recommendations are embraced, they will go a long way in controlling intra and inter-parties conflict thereby promote democratic substance in Benue and Nigeria at large.

Conclusion

This paper examined the impact of intra and inter-party relations on democratic governance in Benue state. The paper has demonstrated that since the inception of democracy in 1999, the political parties in the state have undergone intra and inter party conflicts. Democratization process and party relations have over the years retrogressed to autocracy partly due to the elimination of all potential competitors through state sponsored assassinations, the incumbency factor, lack of internal democracy, party executive arrogance, monetization of politics, sit-tight-syndrome and turning election contests as a matter of life and death. The consequences have produced fierce political struggle and violence which have continued to pose serious challenges to the survival of democracy in the state.

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