Intraparty Conflict and Sustainable Democracy in Rivers State Nigeria

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Abstract

More often than not, intraparty conflicts are commonly found within the ranks of a ruling political party. The common causes of these conflicts are the pursuit of both political and economic interests and in other cases ideological incompatibility. Intraparty conflict entails the totality of all the power tussles and political mussel flexing that occurs within a political party. This study on intraparty conflict and sustainable democracy in Nigeria, is an undertaking to study how the conflict within the People's Democratic Party in Rivers State 2023-2024 can affect the sustainability of democracy in Nigeria. In the attempt to elicit the character of intraparty conflict in the People's Democratic Party in Rivers State, the study noted that the uncompromising stands of the two major political gladiators in the state as to who emerges as the leader of the party in the state and control the machineries of government has been the bone of contention.

Hinging this analysis on the conflict theory, the study concluded that until the issues of godfatherism in politics is burned, conflicts within a political party will continue to fester. It therefore recommends that though intraparty conflicts has both negative and positive effects, the judiciary which is a major institution of democracy must not lend itself to be used against the sustenance and consolidation of democratic rule in Nigeria.

Key Words: Party, Intraparty, Conflict, Intraparty Conflict, Democracy and Sustainable Democracy

Introduction

Every human organization, political parties inclusive are prone to conflict(s) more often than not, intra party conflict are commonly found within the ranks of a ruling political party. Intra-party conflict come in varying degrees leading to factionalization and fractionalization within a political party giving rise to the cross capeting syndrome, also known as decamping.

Intra party conflicts entails the totality of all the power tussles, political wrangling's and disagreements that occurs within a political party as opposed to that between two or more political parties. Intra political conflict is a form of opposition obtained within a political party which signals the rise of dissidents groups within the party. The dissidents constitutes splinter group(s), a movement which stands in opposition to the leadership, policies and activities of the party (Okoli, 2001). The common courses of intra party conflicts as stated by Okoli (2001) is as a result of clash of socio-political and economic interest, personality differences and in some cases ideological incompatibility. The high point of intra political party conflict is epitomized by the formation of parallel party structure, having its own leadership and followers within the party such effort seeks to usurp the party's platform. At the center of most intra party conflicts in Nigeria is the vexing issue of personality cult and godfatherism amongst the highly placed and privileged influential members of the party. Other issues are the lack of party discipline and the influence of money (Okonkwo & Unaji, 2016). Contributing also to the concept of intra-party conflicts, in Nigeria, Shale and Matlose (2008) isolated four main causes of intra party conflicts, including ethnicity and ethnic favoritism amongst highly placed politicians who promotes their ethnic groups above others. They also identified the

over centralization of party authority and the lack of regular party meetings to intimate members of the happening within the party as another source of intra-party conflict. The chief amongst the causes of intraparty wrangling's identified by Shale and Matloa (2008) is the issues of unequal resource allocation. A situation where the immediate constituencies of the party leader and that of his aids and cronies are more favoured in the politics of resource allocation, has been the real harbinger of intra-party conflicts. This is members of these political parties cutting across every strata of human endevours makes demands on the party.

Though it is unthinkable to have a democracy without the institutions of political party (Schattschnieder, 1944), most influential political actors in the Nigerian political scene prefers to play politics in line with Platoniam definition as the gently art of gathering votes from the poor and campaign funds from the rich by promising to protect them from each other.

Intra-party conflict has been at the forefront of most governance failure in Nigeria. the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in the build up to the 2023 elections in Rivers State become embodied in a mesh of intra-party wrangling which had its roots in the selection of party candidates, especially the gubernatorial flag bearer. The fall out of the 2023 governorship election in Rivers State has pitched the former governor who want to play the role of a political godfather and power broker against the present Governor who though acknowledges the former as his godfather, but yet want to firmly stand on both of his legs as he pilots the affairs of the state.

The uncompromising stands of the two gladiators on who emerges as the leader of the party in the state is fast eroding the fabrics of democratic consolidations in the state as party members align themselves behind both leaders thereby balkanizing the party from the state levels through the local government to the ward levels.

However, the critical role political parties plays in the development and sustenance of democracy cannot be over emphasized as both scholars and policy makers are in agreement that a successful democracy hinges on the ability of a political party to organize itself as a viable vehicle for the expression of political pluralism (Dode,

2010; Biezen 2004). Consequently, Scarrow, (2000) undermined the need for a strong and sustainable political party institution with the added capacity to represent citizen and provides a political choice that showcases their ability to govern for public good when he opined that "with the increased disconnect between citizens and elected leaders, democratic political parties will face growing challenges with sophistication of antidemocratic tendencies within the political party". Some as the rise of political "strong men" as against the rise of political institutions continued unabated, the denial of basic needs for identity and freedom of expression within the party will continue to generate such political cyclone and thunder bolt which are capable of destabilizing the party from reaching its democratic goals.

Following from the above, we pose the following research questions; what are the character of intra-party conflict in the People's Democratic Party and how has these conflicts affected democratic sustenance in Rivers State? The aim here is to examine the relationship between intra party conflict and democratic sustenance and proffer workable solution to this saga as it apply to the situation in Rivers State Nigeria.

The study drew from original primary data from field work and from a participant observer position. The primary data were obtained using a semi structure questionnaires with which information was elicited from stakeholders.

The theoretical foundation of this study is hinged on the conflict theory as put forward by Karl Marx (1818-1883) which presupposes a situation of competition between groups over limited resources, while viewing social and economic institutions as tools of the struggle between groups and classes to maintain inequality. The implication therefore is that those in position of power and authority will aim to protect and hoard available resources, while those without will do whatever it takes to have a share of the resources. These dynamics only portrays a state of constant struggles within the society.

Dudley (1973) opined that one common characteristics among all human societies and organizations is the interaction and interdependence of its members. Conflict therefore is a clash over interest between two or more persons as individuals or

within a group or between two groups. With differences in thoughts, opinions and needs, conflicts is an inevitable occurrence in the human society. Conflict occurs when the individual or groups involved are locked in the pursuit of incompatible goals. In what is described as the pursuit of incompatible but justifiable goal by two more actors.

Depending on how the parties to a conflict perceives and responds, conflict has the potentials to assume a functional or dysfunctional outcome as every one of the actors in a conflict employs moves to counter and displace the other with the aim of attaining or achieving the valued resource. Intra-party conflict is a concept coined to embrace and accommodate all the tussles and wrangles within a political party that is outside the norms of party leadership and followership that is now inimical to the normal nomination process (Okoli, 2001).

Internal democracy describes a wide range of method through which members of a political party are included in the intra-party deliberation and decision making process. The major cause of intra party conflict has been the lack of internal democracy and man-god leadership style (Diri, 2019, Scarow, 2004). The ugly trend of internally generated opposition within a political party masquerading as a dissident group and splinter movements, which stock in trade is the merchandise of opposition to all the activities of the parent party. The high point of intra party conflict is the emergence of parallel party structure and leadership which commands followership amongst party members. While intra-party conflict all over the world may emanate for different reasons, forms and sizes. The most debilitating effect of intra-party conflict is the destruction of the fabrics and pillars of democracy altogether in most extreme cases. Being an organization of individuals with divergent interest and opinions having the alternate aim of occupying public office or supporting others to do so, political party cannot but be an arena of conflict arising from mutually exclusive views, thoughts and interest.

While it appears that matured democracies have forged ways to institutionalize internal democracy within their various political parties to forestall the catastrophic consequences of intra party conflict, this cannot be said of Nigerian nascent democracy. According to Basiru (2015) since the re-democratization of Nigeria in

1999, political parties had very low record in the area of effective management of intraparty conflict to a very disappointing dimension.

Daka and Abuh (2018) clarified that, intra party conflict is not new to Nigerian body polity. It is a phenomenon that has always characterized the Nigerian political landscape from the pre independence era, however, the magnitude and dimension of this problem in this fourth democratic dispensation has been worrisome and alarming, with the plethora of crisis that always grace the after math of every primary election of a major political party in Nigeria. Intra party conflict has remained a reoccurring decimal in partisan politics in Nigeria to such an alarming dimension that it effects look inconsequential in the estimation of members.

The multiplicity of intra party conflict in Nigeria since the dawn of the forth democratic republic had prompted Olorungbemi (2014) to aver that, since the inception of the present democratic dispensation, political party organization has been toxic, transformed into a battle field characterized by hatred, enmity victimization and mutual suspicious resulting from the bitter struggles amongst party members in the quest to achieving personal interest.

Democracy is a Greek word which refers to the rule by the people through a representative. The primary concern of democracy is who should rule and how those who rule are decided and or selected (Ogundiya, 2011). Any form of government where the supreme power of government is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or through a representative under a free electoral system is termed as democratic. Three precondition presidents are necessary for an efficient functional democracy including a high level of civil liberties, political pluralism which allows and encourages competition amongst contestants and allow for free choice through free fair and credible election. The fourth democratic dispensation Diri, (2019) noted has failed the Robert Dahl test, therefore posited that democracy in Nigeria has negated the principle of choice by the people when he defined democracy in Nigeria as the rule of the majority by a privileged minority with the consent of the majority obtained either fraudulently or forcefully. The forth democratic republic in Nigeria aptly fits into the definition of democracy as enunciated by Plato, the 5th century BC Athenian philosopher and political thinker.

Plato presented democracy as the gentle art of gathering votes from the poor and campaign funds from the rich by promising to protect them from each other.

Every democracy is aimed at the recognition of equality of rights of citizen, political privileges, social and legal equity from a democratic ruler, who rule by freely and fairly selected in an election. Within this thematic view of democratic sustenance and the irreplaceability of the electoral process in a democratic setup, Akinsanya (2000) asserts that a sustained democracy is measured by the extent to which a country has regular free, fair and credible election. Akinsanya is of the view that the sustenance of democracy hinges on the stability which is the store house of accountability, transparency, responsiveness and competitiveness. Democratic consolidation therefore involves the wide spread acceptance of rules to which guarantees political participation and political competition. To this ends, election becomes the fundamental and only means of installing a democratic government and also a necessary requisite for the broader democratic sustenance.

Cyessis (1994) noted that, the Nigerian democracy seem to be a perfect example of the only democracy that thrives in crisis and instability. Nigeria holds the record of the only country which is embroidered in crisis and insecurity, yet conducted a "free and fair's election. Another very vexing obstacle to the sustenance of democracy and democratic principles in Nigeria is the issue of godfatherism. The activities of godfather and their overt influence and strangled hold on political parties have demeaned the development and consolidation of democracy within the political party structure. Political godfathers have elevated themselves to the position of demi gods which the party hierarchy must consult and worship before taking any major decision. Godfatherism has grown to become an unwritten political ideology in Nigeria, which if left unchecked has the capacity to derail Nigeria's democratic journey (Gambo, 2006).

For democracy to be sustained, Osaghae (1994) posited that, the state and its operators must be seen to be credible in the eyes of the people. He further stated that, a good government is a major indices for the measurement of stability, what he described as the "moral imperative of state". where a government lack credibility or seemingly so as a result of the activities of political godfathers, it

becomes an open invitation to instability, if and when the government through the auspices of godfathers tries to perpetuate itself in office, thereby eroding the fabrics of democratic sustenance.

Linz (1999) on the other hand is of the opinion, that democracy can only be seen to have be sustaining when none of the major political actors, political parties, organization, interest groups and political institutions sees or believes that there is no alternative outside to the democratic tenets through which one can gain ascendancy to political powers. Secondly, no political group can lay claims to any power to veto the action(s) of a democratically elected decision maker once sworn into office. Simply put, democracy is the only alternative to democracy. To justify this position, many scholars would rather claim to the minimalist conception of democracy by adopting the "outcome oriented approach" of democratic consolidation, with the caveat that both the political and socio-economic democracies are needed for democracy of a given country to be sustained. These conception include not only the procedural and formal democracy but also extended to some substantive democratic elements, such as the guarantee of basic civil rights, democratic accountability and responsive civilian control over the military and a constitution check on the dispensation of authority by the executive. Therefore the true meaning of democracy should not be devoid of equity, knowing that democracy can only be seen to be sustainable when quality depth and authenticity of democracy in the various dimensions (Diamond, 2013).

Effects of Intraparty Conflicts on Democratic Sustenance in Rivers State

Intra party conflicts in the Rivers State People's Democratic Party has both negative and positive impacts on democratic sustenance. On the positive side, the intraparty of conflict has been instrumental to the emergence of new sets of young and vibrant leadership within the state. This can be seen in the recent departure from the recycling of political office holders that have characterized the last sixteen years of democratic rule in the state.

Most of the appointments made by the state governor in the heat of the party crisis, consist of very vibrant and young individual e.g. commission for employment generation is in luslate 30s, the elected chairman of Obio/Akpor, Port Harcourt City

and Andoni were all young persons of less than 40yrs. The new faces on the political scene was a radical depature from the "norm" since 1999.

Secondly, the organic mobilization of people in the defense of democracy is another positive step in the sustenance of democracy, the sensitization programmes across all the Local Government Areas of the State have proving to be a key political education tool. E.g the massive turnout of citizen on the 30th of October 2023 in solidarity with the governor and in defense of democracy was both spontenous and organic.

Also the plethora of legal actions and pronouncements on the political issues considered are to be healthy for democracy, especially in the enrichment of democratic legal lexicon. Apart from enriching the literature on democracy and democratic sustenance, the judicial decision of the various courts also add to the development of law especially as it relates to party affairs and democratic governance.

Finally, the intra-party conflict in Rivers State is positively checkmating the activities of godfatherism in the Rivers State body polity.

The division within the party hast effectively checkmated the political overreach of the supposed "Godfather" of Rivers State politics, especially when it come to dictating the tone of political activities within the state thereby given the state Governor the much needed latitude to take independent decisions.

Though intraparty conflict is not new to Nigerian democracy since independence, coming in varied shapes, sizes and complexions, the pervasive and crisis dimension assumed by the crises rocking the People's Democratic Party Rivers State, have a very serious negative implication for Nigeria's democracy.

The sustainability of democracy in Nigeria is predicated on the ability of the key players to abide by the rules of the game, while showing respect for the institutions that are necessary for the consolidation of democracy in the country. However, with the multiplicity of litigations which is some case has led to the abuse of court

processes, it is a clear expression of the desperation of some of the actors in the complicit aimed at outsmarting others in other to control the machineries of state. Most recently, the opposition in the state is beginning to sing discontent tunes especially with the former Governor now minister serving in the opposition led Federal Government. The unofficial and unholy merger of the major political parties (APC and PDP) in the state into what is popularly referred as to APDC under the firm control of the minister cast a doubt on the ability of the opposition to continue flagging its role.

Furthermore, the sustenance of liberal democracy is dependent on the astuteness of a viable, vibrant and vocal opposition party. However, with the towering and glaring influence of godfatherism in the acquisition of the main opposition party in the state, it is doubtful if the opposition can continue to play its role by constructively criticizing the ruling party. The grandstanding position of the political godfathers in the crisis within the People's Democratic Party will nonetheless hamper the smooth runing of governmental administration and general development of the state.

Findings

The intraparty conflict that is currently rocking the People's Democratic Party in Rivers State is traceable to the over bearing influence of political godfather(s). The study revealed that the former governor of the state who is now at daggers drawn with the incumbent governor is at the center of the intraparty conflict. The refusal of the incumbent governor to allow his predecessor continue to perform his godfather's duties has been the main issue which has not only polarize the party in the entire state. While the former governor wanted an unfettered powers in the running of the affairs of the state, the refusal by the incumbent governor had led to the resort of using the State House of Assembly whose members where majorly of the same party with the governor to threaten impeachment.

The failure of the impeachment process which now pitched the party leaders, one against the other, also polarized the party structure in the state. Party faithful's now have divided loyally to the party, while premium is placed on the leaders rather than the party.

As the impasse in the People's Democratic Party Rivers State continue to move from the party secretariat to the court room, the issues of godfathering will continue to play a major role in the politics of Rivers State, while the court will continue to lose its credibility as more and more ordinary people loses confidence in the hitherto "last hope of the common man" given the rate at which court orders are procured without regard to hierarchy and jurisdiction.

Crisis generally are inimical to development, therefore the present party crisis in the state will undoubtedly hamper the rate of development in the state negatively. Democratic development therefore will continue to suffer, though sustained but never consolidated as long as godfatherism continue to play pivotal role in the political land scape of the state. Therefore the haba careful elimination of godfatherism will help to mitigate the recurrent issues of intra party conflict. Finally, the courts should make themselves unavailable to politician especially in given unambiguous orders while respect for judicial precedence, hierarchy and jurisdictions must be maintained.

Conclusion

Having noted the major reasons for the intraparty crisis that have continued to rock the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in Rivers State. The study wish to concluded that up until the rise of political godfatherism is tamed and nipped in the bud, crisis that are capable of crippling the party may continue to fester unabated. Secondly, the judiciary which has been the rallying point of all the parties to find legitimacy for their political maneuvering must be seen to be impartial in all cases and at all times.

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