
INTERNAL PARTY DEMOCRACY AND PARTY ORGANIZATIONAL STABILITY
IN NIGERIA: PARTY PRIMARY AND CONGRESS IN PDP
CHAPTER OF NIGER STATE (2015)

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Abstract

This paper examines the internal party democratic processes in the conduct of the internal party activities of peoples' Democratic Party in Niger State (2015), with a view to unveiling the dynamics of internal party democracy and organizational stability of the party in Niger State. Qualitative research design was employed in gathering both primary and secondary data used to examine the extent to which internal party democracy influence party organizational stability. The study revealed that, decisions concerning the selection of party candidates and party officials emerge through undemocratic processes and do not represent the views of wider party membership, thus causing organizational instability. The role ordinary party members' play in party affairs is secondary to that of the political elites. The implications of these persistent internal problems faced by the party has been decamping of party members to other political parties, conflict of interest over choice of candidate and divided loyalty among party members and organizational instability. To minimize these conflicts, the party needs to decentralize party decision making processes by allowing ordinary party members view prevails above those of the party leadership during internal party affairs.

Introduction

The history of democracy is a history of political parties. Political parties are popular institutions of modern democratic governance that foster and strengthen democracy. In fact, political parties are considered to be the makers of democracy. Similarly, political parties are considered to be critical formal actors in the political process particularly in relation to power, democracy, governance, governments and economy (Ikelegbe, 2013). It is also worthy to note that, political scientists have continued to identify parties as key institutions for a healthy democracy, highlighting not only their roles in the recruitment of candidates but also in providing linkages between government and civil society. In sum, political parties are central to whatever type of modern representative democracy (Kura, 2007, cited in Kura, 2008:68). Political parties as explained above play a vital role in the democratic processes. However, for the political parties to play these roles effectively, they must be organizationally stable. Thus, party organizational stability is paramount in parties discharging their roles in democratic governance. Nonetheless, party organizational stability is a function of internal democracy in all their affairs. Internal party democracy means that a political party has impersonal rules and procedures to avoid the manipulations of internal elections and party functioning by individuals, party leaders or political elites. Such rules must also be put into practice; otherwise a party could be considered to be neither institutionalized nor truly democratic. Similarly, internal party democracy means that all party components and functionaries follow due process and are accountable to the ranks-and-files and to the lawful organs established in the statutes (NIMD 2004).

Further still, Momodu and Matudi, (2013:7) affirm that, the aim of internal democracy in political parties is basically to create a level playing- field for the active participation of every member in

the affairs and to build a cohesive and vibrant party that will provide a strong government. The attainment of internal party democracy depends on the extent to which processes of effective membership participation are formally stipulated and practically implemented in the party's organizational rules and procedures. When these rules and procedures are not strictly adhered to particularly during the conduct of primary elections, the party may be faced with significant operational challenges including organizational instability, centralized decision-making processes, non-inclusive and transparent candidate selection processes, diminishing popularity of political party, internal party conflict and weak organizational strength ((Meinhardt and Patel, 2003: 33 cited in John, 2008:7).

These challenges lead to undesired results such as lack of cohesion and organizational instability, creation of factions within the party, defection where aggrieved members move to other parties and this affect the membership strength of the party as well as electoral support. These factors undermine political parties' effectiveness as agents of democracy.

From the academic point of view, an examination of internal party democracy and its effects on the organizational stability of PDP chapter of Niger state will expand the existing knowledge on internal party democracy in Nigeria. While to the political parties, it may reduce party defection, factions and conflict among party members which will in turn enhance political stability in Nigeria. Other political parties may find this piece of work useful in the course of conducting their internal affairs particularly candidate and leadership selections.

This paper however, is limited to two internal party democratic processes key to organizational stability, namely party primary and party congress. The aim of this paper is to examine the dynamics of internal party democracy and the extent to which it influences and /or affects party organizational stability in PDP chapter of Niger state (2015).

This study is structured thus: following this introduction is section two where extant literature were reviewed, section three dwells on the methodology. Section four analyses the process of selecting candidates and party leadership. The last section concludes the paper with relevant recommendations.

Literature Review

Concept and Functions of Political Parties

Implicitly and explicitly, conceptual innovation in politics and indeed social science generally are not easy to do. This is because all concepts are viewed differently by different scholars. Therefore, it is important to review concepts and functions of political parties in this context. Generally speaking, political parties are well-known institutions of modern democratic governance. The popular thought particularly among comparative scholars is that political parties play a key role in strengthening and fostering democracy in both established as well as emerging democratic politics. This is concisely captured by the assertion that "political parties created democracy and modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the political parties" (Schattschneider, 1942:1 Cited in Cross and Karz, 2013:1). This assertion indicates that the relevance of political parties in the organization of modern politics and governance is not a recent phenomenon of contemporary societies. Political parties have been part and parcel of political organization since the creation of the nation state. They are vehicle through which the people are linked with government either directly through engaging in political contest or indirectly through participating in internal party decision making processes.

Conceptually, political parties are organizations whose members have values, ideals and aspirations in common and at least participate in the organized contest/struggles for political power (Kura, 2011:268). Alfa (2012) aptly describes political parties in Nigeria "as different groups that have at all times been engrossed in bitter rivalries both in government and in opposition 'Political party according to Nwankwo (1991) is an organized group of individuals seeking to seize power of government in order to enjoy the benefit derived from such control. He stresses further that political parties exist primarily as an electoral machine for gaining power with coherent philosophy and its deep ideological aim. This is a pointer to the fact that, nature and functions of political parties have continued to evolve in response to socio-economic and political changes in society. This connotes that earlier conceptions of political parties have obviously changed over time.

Furthermore, it is in recognition of the role played by political parties in any given democratic society that Scholars have identified the functions of political parties which includes: Almond's Input-Output functions which constitute seven functional variables as classified thus: political parties discharge their responsibilities at three levels in any political system. These are electorate-related functions, government-related function and linkage-related functions (Moore, 2002; cited in Okhaide, 2012:58). Kura (2011:270) captures it precisely as wherever a political party exists, it tends to perform common functions at different stages of economic, social, political and judicial development. The foregoing conceptualization of political parties is derived from a general consensus on the utilitarian and functional view of their perceived 'usefulness' in modern democracies. According to Diamond (1997) the importance of political parties lies in the functions they perform in modern democracies by linking citizens to government. These include the articulation and aggregating of diverse interests, recruitment and preparation of candidates for electoral office, making policy alternatives and formulating the policy agenda, organizing and participating in electoral competition and forming effective government and thus integrating groups and individuals into the democratic process. It is clear from the foregoing that there is no universally accepted definition of political party and so also the functions they perform in a given democratic society and these is aptly described by Janda (1993: 166) the greatest problem in defining political parties is whether it should be limited to explaining purely competitive parties, as found in stable advanced democracies, or provide a broader conception that embraces single party systems and anti-systems or subversive groups in autocratic democratic regimes.

Kura (2011) argued that, political parties as a formally recognized organizations whose members share certain common values, ideals and aspiration about how society should be politically, socio culturally and economically organized for the common and aspire to translate these ideals and values through the control of government by placing their representative in a competitive free, fair and honestly conducted elections without harassment, intimidation and threat of violence (Kura, 2005: cited in Kura, 2011:269). This definition captures the democratic tenets such as competitiveness, free and fairness especially during elections. Election could be internal elections conducted by the party or general elections. What matters here is that of playing the game according to the rules. Thus, this particular concept has contributed to the broad understanding of political parties and can be applied to the study of both developing countries and also new and old democracies and as such was considered most suitable and adopted in this paper.

Foundation and Development of PDP in Niger State

A review of the history of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) at the National level shows that the party arose from four sources. Firstly, were those politicians who were denied registration by Late Head of state General Sani Abacha during his self-succession' political designs' (Kura, 2011). Second, are those politicians, who were former followers of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) who do not oppose the self –succession move of the Military strongman but were not part of his machine, Nevertheless, This group called itself the All Nigeria Congress (ANC) and was led by Chief Sunday B. Awoniyi. Third, were those who were the followers of the Late General Shehu Musa Yar,adua as the People Democratic Movement (PDM). This group is comprised of Chief Tony Anenih and Alhaji Atiku.Abubakar (Former Vice President 1999-2007). Four, were those who called themselves social democrats with the name, social progressive party (SPP). This was a collection of politicians from different parts of the country that failed to make their positions felt in the party (Omoruyi, 2001, Cited in Oluwaseun, 2012:5).

Niger State chapter of PDP according to PDP chieftain from Chanchaga local government area of the State Baba Abubakar Haruna was formed by a group led by Prof. Jerry Gana who is one of the founding fathers of the party at the National Level. He hails from Niger South Senatorial District politically referred to in the State as Zone 'A'. Other prominent members of the group included: Late Prof. Shehu Bida, Late Col. John Yahya Madaki (Retired), Nuhu Aliyu (DIG Retired), Late Tanko Inga, Late Sen. DahiruAwaisu Kuta, Late Sen. Idris Kuta and Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (Former Military President) (Shehu, 2019). It could be noticed that these founding members of the party have been controlling the party at both national and state level. Most of the federal and state political appointments were made by this group of party caucus.

It could be discerned from the above that, the founding fathers at the national level is comprised of people from different works of life. This also applies to the Niger State chapter of the party. It could be deduced from the history of the formation of PDP that, the party was founded by retired top military officers and some civilians who were friends of the military. They came together to form the party so as to continue to be relevant in state affairs. Perhaps, these and other factors could be responsible for the numerous challenges the party is being faced with which include: internal party conflicts and organizational instability.

PDP structure in Niger State

The party is organized and administered at Wards and Local Government Area levels. There are a total of 25 Local Government Area and Two Hundred and Seventy Four (274) Electoral wards in the State. The State is divided into three Senatorial zones: Niger South, Niger North and Niger East. Niger South comprised of Agaie, Bida, Edati, Gbako, Katcha, Lapai, Lavun and Mokwa LGAs. Niger East comprised of Bosso, Chanchaga, Gurara, Munya, Paikoro, Rafi, Shiroro, Suleja, Tafa LGAs. Niger North comprised of Agwara, Borgu, Kontagora, Magama, Mariga, Mashegu, Rijau, Wushishi LGAs (INEC Official Website 2016).

State level Party Organs: Membership and Functions

Organs of the party at the state level is made up of the following: State party executives, Ward Executive Committee, Ward Congress, Local Government Executive Committee, Local Government Area Congress, Senatorial District Working Committee, Senatorial Caucus, State Working Committee, State Executive Committee, State Congress, Zonal Working Committee (PDP Constitution, 2012 Amended. pp 13-38).

The duties and functions of each of these organs are clearly stated in the PDP constitution (2012 as

Amended). What seem to be important here are not actually the organs of the party, but the process of recruitment or selection or electing officers who are expected to man these organs effectively. Already the 1999 constitution and INEC statutory rules mandated parties to conduct periodic democratic congresses and conventions to select these officers. Parties must inform INEC about such exercises for it to supervise the process.

Chapter VII of the PDP constitution (2012 as Amended) unambiguously states the mode of election of these officers. It states that for instance: during state congress, party members from local government area and wards shall meet to elect the officers of the party at the various levels of the party structure as specified in this constitution where officers of the party shall be elected based on geopolitical zones. Party guidelines concerning eligibility to contest has been explicitly stated in the guidelines. For example, every registered member of the party who has satisfied the requirement for nomination and election as stated in the constitution shall be eligible to contest for any of the party internal positions.

The guidelines for elections to any office of the party shall be approved by the state working committee of the party in accordance with the provision of this constitution; no member of the party shall be qualified for nomination or election or appointment into any of the offices of the party, unless he or she has been a registered member for at least 18 months and is of a good financial standing in the party except there is a waiver by the appropriate executive committee.

PDP leadership in Niger State

Scholars such as Scarrow (2005:10) and John, (2008:56) on political parties have concurred on the importance of leadership selection, where it is considered to be one of the key processes of expanding inclusiveness in party procedures and decision making. These processes allow parties opportunities to demonstrate their inclusiveness by providing opportunities to incorporate party members in these processes. According to PDP constitution (2012 as Amended) party leaders are to be elected through the delegates' conference which is a form of party caucus where for example at the state level delegates from the various wards and local governments converge at the state headquarters to elect party executives.

PDP in Niger State from 1999 to 2015 had four party chairmen namely: Nuhu Aliyu (DIG Retired), Farouk Mohammed Borgu, Abdurahman Muhammed Enagi and RT. Hon. Adamu Ma'ali. But interestingly, it was Abdurahman Enagi that was able to complete his tenure. However, Nuhu Aliyu who served as the pioneer state chairman lasted less than a year. While Farouk, was tipped for a national assignment. As a new party that came to power in 1999, the party members were not interested in who becomes the state party leader. This gave opportunity to the elected governor to select party leadership in the state. As a result, there was no any serious party congress that was conducted between 1999 and 2007. All party executives were practically imposed on the party by the then governor who is the leader of the party in the state. This practice is contrary to democratic principles and capable of causing disharmony among party members (John, 2008:6).

Zoning Formula in PDP Niger state

It was gathered that the founders of PDP in Niger State prior to the General Elections held in 1999 agreed on a zoning formula for the offices of the Governor, Speaker and Secretary to State Government. It was also agreed that each political zone would be allowed to occupy these positions accordingly for two tenures and would be rotated among the three political zones in the State. Although there was no record to show the Zoning arrangements, the arrangements have

been respected by the political elites in the state. For example, Zone 'A' was to produce the governor, while zone 'B' and 'C' were to produce deputy governor and speaker of the state house of assembly respectively. This was obtainable between 1999-2003 and 2003-2007 respectively. In the second instance, Zone 'B' was to produce governor, while 'C' and 'A' were to produce Deputy governor and speaker state house of assembly respectively. This was also what was obtainable between 2007-2011 and 2011-2015 respectively. These zoning arrangements even though it is the brain child of PDP in the state, it is still respected by APC party that has produced the governor and majority of the members of state house of assembly. This could be as a result of the influence of the political elites in the state who decide the political direction the state should follow.

It could be argued that zoning formula is against the principles of internal party democracy, majorly because it is against open competitiveness, free and fairness in the conduct of internal party affair. And this does not allow for the choice of credible candidates by the party in the State. Other related challenges included: internal wrangling and acrimony among protagonists and antagonists of the zoning formula. The likely result is the inability to produce a consensus candidate from wherever it has been zoned to. Consequently, it poses some negative effect on the party especially during elections.

While this is theoretically correct, the multi-cultural, plural or ethno- religious cleavages of a post-colonial society/state such as Niger state needs to be remembered in domesticating democratic values such as this. In some instances, unless you make provisions like this, the long term effect of some these values may actually be that some part of the state/society will never have the opportunity to gain political power in the state.

Understanding Internal Party Democracy

The role political parties' play in the democratic processes cannot be overemphasized. Sartori (2005) in a related view states that the primary democratic function of political parties is to link the citizenry with the government. In order to play this role effectively, political parties have to provide unrestricted opportunities for effective participation by ordinary party members in the party's decision-making processes particularly during the processes of candidate selection.

Internal party democracy which is also known as intra-party democracy – refers to the level and methods of including party members in the decision-making processes of a party, which includes the election of its party executives, public representatives and in the deliberations about party policies and programs. In other words, internal party democracy is a very broad term which describes the wide range of methods which allow party members to take part in the activities of the political party they belong to. It is defined as a "democratic process which involves accountability and transparency in all party affairs most especially in selecting party leaders, flag bearer, executive and other party officials in a political party" (Ukaeje, 2011). Similarly, Mohammed (2006:54) views internal party democracy as support for the general interest of the party membership, the public and the state. In a similar view, Scarrow (2005:3) describes internal party democracy as a wide range of methods for including party members in intra- party deliberation and decision –making. She went further to identify the levels in which ordinary members of political party are involve in making decision to include the nomination processes of candidates standing for election into various political positions, participation of the party members in policy formulation and/or in the election of the leadership of the party and even whether members are allowed to 'recall' public representatives of their respective parties if they

are unhappy with their performance.

This above assertion particularly those that dwells on party primaries and congress formed the framework and basis within which this paper was prepared.

Elements of Internal Party Democracy

Different Scholars have identified elements that constitute internal party democracy, for example Mimpem (2007:2) identifies two instrumental elements of internal party democracy. The first element involves organizing free, fair and regular elections of internal positions, as well as candidates for representative bodies. This entails credible and transparent candidate selection processes. The second entails equal and open participation of all members and member groups in such a way that interests are more or less equally represented. Direct, representative, Sefakor (2008 Pp 9-11) in his contribution identifies institutionalization, direct and indirect participation, inclusiveness and decentralization as constituents of internal party democracy. From the foregoing, and in more cogent analysis, internal party democracy includes the following elements:

Membership Participation: Membership participation is one of the key elements of internal party democracy which entails equal participation of all members and groups in the democratic processes of the party. This emphasizes the involvement of the ranks-and-files in the party's policies, as well as representation at party activities and in party bodies. Generally speaking, membership participation in party internal decision-making process is divided in to two viz, direct and indirect participation. Cross and Katz (2013) identify four modes of participation involved in a typical policy development process delegate, and consultative.

Direct participation in the policy process is perhaps the most difficult model to practically achieve, as members must 'have a voice in all key decisions' (Miller, 2005) and be actively involved at the point of decision-making. Both the representative and delegate models of participation create a link between members and policy without their direct involvement in decision-making. As the most common type of participation, members choose one or more of their number to represent their views and interests in policy decisions at a higher level of intra-party decision-making.

Consultative model of participation involves the participation of members in the policy process through submissions to, and consultations with, party policy working groups. This mode of participation can be distinguished from direct forms as members are not directly making policy decisions; rather they channel their views to intermediary bodies in the drafting process, such as working groups and staged policy forums. Regardless of the approach used to select candidate, membership participation increases the legitimacy of the process and minimize disputes.

Inclusiveness: according to Chris and Tope (2011:28) internal party democracy is all about inclusiveness. If there is no provision for people's inclusion in the party, there may be little participation since one begets the other. Inclusiveness stresses how wide the circle of party decision-makers is. Scarrow (2005:6) noted that in the most inclusive parties, all party members, or even all-party supporters, are given the opportunity to decide on important issues, such as the choice of party leader or the selection of party candidates. Because inclusiveness is a matter of process as well as of formal rules, more inclusive parties will offer more opportunities for open deliberation prior to the decision stage.

Decentralization of Party Powers: decentralization describes the extent to which power is

devolved to party branches. At one end, candidate selection can be completely controlled by local party organs without input from central party organs. At the other, the spectrum, a central party organ or perhaps even one individual controls candidate selection. Most political parties fall somewhere between these two extremes (Sefakor 2008:9). In general, increased decentralization allows for greater inclusiveness in candidate selection but does not guarantee full direct participation by members. For instance, a process could be decentralized but still only involve local party branch officials and not all members.

Institutionalization of the party values and norms: party institutionalization according to Mohammed (2006:55) is the process by which parties become established, acquire value and enduring stability. Institutionalization demonstrates the degree to which internal decisions and procedures are formalized, and the extent to which the party has coordinated structures throughout its target constituency. It is believed that parties with high degree of internal party democracy are generally highly institutionalized because they need rules that define who is eligible to participate and what constitutes victory in internal contests.

Concept of Political and Organizational Stability

Party organizational stability anywhere in the world and regardless of the nature of democratic system is a function of many factors, including the nature of parties, the system of democratic governance, citizens participation and mobilizations, internal party democracy, the nature and operation of constitution, electoral rules and behaviour etc. Nevertheless, internal party democracy seems to play a pivotal role in party organizational stability as it links and connects other factors. Internal party organization according to Anja (2012:8) is a way of leading internal discussions, debates and conflicts within and between different branches and groups of the party and of recruiting candidates and dealing with the involvement of their members. Furthermore, political party that could be regarded as internally democratic and by extension organizationally stable are those that practice transparent and participatory selection processes for both internal positions and candidate for public office. Similarly, Scarrow (2005) gave their credentials to include regularized and inclusive procedures for candidate and leadership contests and effective conflict resolving mechanism. Golan (n.d:7), in his contribution identifies several characteristics of parties which he consider as those who lack internal party democracy and could be organizationally unstable to include: Parties with very limited direct role of party members in the decision-making process, very limited (if any) role of non-members in party affairs, a weak influence of functional groups (youth, women, retired persons, etc.) within parties,

Party organization could be viewed as the way a political party is structured, its relationship with members and non-members; while stability according to English dictionary means a situation in which something is not likely to move or change. The term 'stability' is also associated with the degree of being able to stand or endure resistance to any form of change, especially sudden change or deteriorations. Thus, Party organizational stability here is referred to as the totality of party organizational activities and how these contributes either positively or negatively (especially when changes are experienced in the party) towards the continuous existence of the political party.

Internal party democracy and organizational stability

The popular view among scholars on the connection between internal party democracy and organizational stability has been that, party organizational stability is a function of internal party

democracy. This assertion presupposes that the extent at which political parties observes internal democratic principles in all its internal activities are what determine its organizational stability.

Internal party democracy which could be viewed as a very broad term which describes the wide range of methods which allow party members to take part in the activities of the political party they belong to. It is defined as a "democratic process which involves accountability and transparency in all party affairs most especially in selecting party leaders, flag bearer, executive and other party officials in a political party" (Ukaeje, 2011). In addition, scholars have agreed on some basic principles of internal party democracy to include: electivity, accountability, transparency, inclusivity, participation and representation.

On a pragmatic level advocates for intra-party democracy argue that parties using internally democratic procedures are likely to select more capable and appealing leaders, to have more responsive policies, and, as a result, to enjoy greater electoral success (Scarrow, 2005). Similarly, Abimbola and Adesote, (2012:46) argued that internal party organisational issues such as membership, recruitment, socialisation, training, discipline and resources of the party have profound influence on the electoral outcome. Internal organisational factors (recruitment strategies, centralisation, party discipline, norms of co-operation, and political skills) It could have argued that Political parties can be able to maximize these opportunities only when the parties are organizationally stable. In other words, In order words, to be successful in the political contest and to have an effect on the formation of political opinion a party needs to be a stable organization. Similarly, Sefakor (2008:11) argued that political parties that actively engage their members in taking decisions tend to be more naturally connected to voters in general and therefore more aware of the concerns of citizens. Inclusive models can encourage candidates, and eventually, elected representatives or party leaders to remain faithful to the broad interests of party members on whom their re-election and political future depends. This indicates that political parties who move along with their party members ordinarily will enjoy stability and also minimize conflict which could be the chief source of organizational instability in a given political party. In a nutshell, political parties where party members participate freely in particularly in decision making processes is likely to enjoy legitimacy of the internal party processes and minimize disputes.

He further states that, "regardless of where party rules emanate from, well-defined and publicized procedures make the rules of engagement clear". As such, the extent that such established procedures are followed can help encourage participation and minimize or manage conflict. The adherence to laid down principles and procedures of political party enhances organizational stability of the party. This is because when rules and procedures are not taken seriously chances are that conflicts will emanate which often cause party splits, defection and organizational instability. In addition, organizational stability may be fundamental for any party that tries to be successful on the long run. The development and stability of party organizations may represent the bases for effective communication with the electorate. The party organization, through its effective membership participation in decision-process would not only enhance party stability but also increase party credibility in the eyes of the electorates.

Scarrow (2005) further argued that decentralization of party powers can encourage aspiring candidates to be more sensitive to the views of party officials at the branch level, promoting broader accountability than if aspiring candidates were simply indebted to a small central unit within the party. This is because they know their locality and the individuals in their area the best.

Their significant involvement in candidate selection can help ensure that the person selected is well-known and well regarded in the area in which s/he is running. The most decentralized candidate selection systems allow branches to define their own procedures for selecting candidates' thereby increasing organizational stability not at the grassroots level only, but also at national level.

It is evident from the foregoing that party organizational stability regardless of the nature of democratic system is a function of many factors, including the nature of parties, the system of democratic governance, citizens participation and mobilizations, internal party democracy, the nature and operation of constitution, electoral rules and behavior etc. Nevertheless, internal party democracy seems to play a pivotal role in party organizational stability as it links and connects other factors.

It is on the basis of the above that, the paper looked into how Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) in Niger State conducts its internal activities with particular reference to 2015.

Research Methodology

The research methodology adopted in this paper is basically qualitative. Qualitative method of data collection is referred to as the 'use of non- statistical data and arrival at non- statistical conclusions' (Kura, 2012:9). Similarly, Creswell, (2009) asserted that qualitative methods 'employ philosophical assumptions, strategies of inquiry and methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation. In this sense, data is not considered to be ordinary information. *Qualitative data according to ACAPS, (2011) are "often textual observations that portray attitudes, perceptions or intentions"* (World #8 2009, Cited in ACAPS, 2018:8). "Conclusions made from collected qualitative data take the form of informed assertions about the meaning and experience of certain (sub) groups of affected populations under study".

On this, the experiences of the respondents concerning how Niger State PDP conducts its internal activities, the implication of such activities on internal party democracy within the party and also, the extent to which internal party democracy influence party organizational stability were explored. These internal party activities within the party were examined in Minna (Chanchaga local government of the State). The Qualitative research method used in this study was a combination of probability and Non-probability sampling methods (Multi-stage sampling method), personal interview and use of semi structured interview to elicit response from the respondents.

Case study approach was used in this paper where data were collected through in-depth interviews, and additionally reviewed secondary documents such as published or unpublished research works, articles, journals, newspaper, internet –based materials and official documents such as party constitution of the party under study. The selection criteria were based on simple random sampling technique. In this respect, two broad categories of respondents have been selected because they are key players in internal party affairs. The first category is the party executive which comprises of elected party officials and party ex-officio. The second category comprises of party delegates as well as party flag bearers or Aspirants.

At the end, a total of 33 respondents have been interviewed which comprised of, 5 party officials, 3 party ex-officio, 7 party delegates were selected from each of three selected LGA totaling 21 and 4 party flag bearers or Aspirants. The party delegates were identified through a Snowball process in which a respondent identified the next respondent to be interviewed.

Conduct of party primaries in Niger state PDP: Tale of conflict and divided loyalty among party members

Primary elections provide the platform for the political parties to select credible candidates to contest elections, while applying the cherished attribute of democracy which is to provide opportunity to the populace to make informed and free choices of those to rule them. Primary elections in a party system are therefore major tests of the entrenchment of democracy in any society. (Tenuche, 2012:3).

Taking a look into the primary election conducted by PDP 2015 in Niger state revealed that; candidacy in PDP Niger state was determined by seating governor and other party leaders in the state. And the ordinary members of the party who are represented by the delegates do not have any say in these processes. Party primary was influenced by the party leadership in conjunction with other influential people in the state to make sure it is their candidate/s that gets the party mandate. It was also observed that, the party during the conduct of its party primary in 2015 the party delegates were not given the free hand to make their choices. Instead party candidates were imposed on them by the party leadership in the state in order to achieve selfish personal interest. And at the end the party delegates were divided along different groups. The worst case scenario was recorded where some delegates walked out of the venue of the party primary for dissatisfaction over the way and manner the party primary was conducted. Consequently, the political party was faced with operational problems such as organizational instability coupled with structural problems and Defection a situation that led to the party losing its prominent members and supporters among which was Hon. Ahmed Musa Ibeta the then two- time deputy governor in the state.

Another unfortunate situation that occurred during the party primary was the act of indiscipline exhibited by some party hoodlums who caused rancor and disorderliness at the venue of the party primary. However, the perpetrators of these acts were not punished. These singular acts of indiscipline against the party led to a situation where ordinary members of the party felt unimportant and defected to other parties which in turn reduced the number of party members and supporters thereby paving way for party organizational instability.

Conduct of Party Congress: A negation of transparency, competitiveness, free and fair process.

Leadership selection is an internal party activity where party executives are elected at state level. These activities are often referred to at state level as party congress. These processes are some of the most crucial undertakings a party can make since the outcome not only determines the party's public profile and competitiveness during elections but it also has consequences on members' and supporters continued loyalty and support.

Leadership selection is one key process of expanding inclusiveness in party procedures and decision making is in the recruitment and selection of party leaders. These processes allow parties the opportunities to demonstrate their inclusiveness by providing opportunities to incorporate party members in these processes. Similarly, Scarrow, (2005) argued that, since there is little or no doubt that party leaders play a very important role in party organization, their recruitment deserves attention. In addition, Scholars have noted the importance of party leadership in terms of their influence both within the party and in determining public policy direction.

It was observed that, PDP party leadership in the state during the 2015 party congress held at all

party levels were manned with irregularities and conflict ridden. Related to this was the fact that, some party members who had expressed their interest to contest for party position were denied party nomination forms. This negates the principle of open competition, transparency and accountability. Majority of the party executives at all levels have been occupying their respective positions since 1999. Furthermore, the non-involvement of party ex officio in the decision-making processes further exacerbated the conflict in the party (Shehu, 2019).

Consequently, PDP leadership in Niger state have exercised significant influence over all party internal activities in the state. Consequently, response of ranks-and-files show a very serious dissatisfaction with the role party leaders played in party affairs particularly in terms of candidate and leadership selection processes and this dissatisfaction is a possible contributing factor to declining party membership numbers. Young (2000) corroborates this assertion by stating that; surveys of ranks-and-files in many countries shows dissatisfaction with the role party leaders play in parties and many have pointed to this dissatisfaction as a possible contributing factor to declining party membership numbers in many contemporary democracies.

The above assertion has pointed to the fact that, the interference of party leadership in internal party affairs does not allow for effective membership participation and makes the process non-participatory and non-inclusive which leads to party organizational instability.

Conclusion

PDP in Niger State like in many other State Chapters in the country is well structured, roles of each party organ is clearly stated. This suggests how wide the circle of decision makers within the party is and also meant to stabilise and entrench internal democracy in the party. However, the challenge has been that of, the gap between what is in the party's constitution and actual practice. More so, these structures are put in place to ensure absolute control and easy manipulation of party members at the grass root level. This is contrary to the principles of equal and effective membership participation of party members in internal party affairs.

This study has established that there is a connection between what happens at the national office of the party and what happens at the Niger State office of the party. It was among those who formed the party at the Center that brought the party to the state in 1998. In addition, party internal activities have been influenced by both party executives and founders of the party in the state and this has affected the party's internal cohesion and organizational stability.

As argued above, for political parties to achieve stability and make meaningful contribution towards the democratic processes in any given polity, the political parties need to continue to exist as corporate entity regardless of any change in the organization. The role of Party organizational stability in any given political party cannot be underestimated. In other words, for political parties to be able to effectively play their roles in the democratic processes, there is the need for them not be organizationally stable only, but also be able to maintain it over time.

It could also be discerned that, party members who are supposedly the life-line of any political party are not given the desired attention. Chances are that the political party will be faced with numerous problems such as weak structure, loss of contest and could become unpopular and this is exactly what PDP in Niger State was being faced with in 2015. Even where some few party members are involved in the decision-making processes, such participation was ineffective and opinions not considered. Also, the circle of decision makers in the party is narrow as it does not allow party members at the grassroots to participate in internal party affairs directly. These

processes, particularly candidate and leadership selections, tend not to be competitive, participatory, free and fair. Consequently, these undemocratic practices have been responsible for the decline in the party's organizational stability in the state, defection of the party members who were dissatisfied to other parties, conflict of interest and divided loyalty among party members.

Recommendations

From a participatory democracy perspective, the following broad recommendations are proposed for the attainment of internal party democracy and organizational stability in Niger State PDP.

- a) PDP in Niger state should practice direct membership participation during primary election, where card carrying members elect party candidate at the ward level through direct voting system. This should also be extended to party convention in which all party members seeking to serve as party officials are elected at ward levels.
- b) There is the need for party to decentralize decision making processes through the devolution of power from the state office to the local party branches and organs. This can be achieved through the empowerment and strengthening of the capacity of local party organs and structures.
- c) Party members should be allowed to effectively participate in the formulation of party policies and programs. Also, the party needs to demonstrate a commitment to institutionalization, inclusiveness and decentralization of party powers through the review and enactment of internal party laws.
- d) Disciplinary actions must be taken against individuals or groups who violate party rules and regulations regardless of his/her status in the party in line with party's constitution.
- e) Rules and regulations that entrenches internal party democracy in internal party activities should be promoted and protected and also ensure strict adherence to these laid down rules and regulations.

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