

Intra-Party Non-Democratic Practices: Trends and Consequences at the Nigeria's Third –Tier Government.

Chibuike, E. Madubuegwu¹, Vincent Onyia O2, Ejjeji Ezeibe Peace Ijeoma³, Obiageli Otigi, PhD⁴

^{1,2,3}Doctoral Candidate, Department of Political Science, Nnamdi Azikwe University, Awka, Nigeria.

⁴Department of Political Science, Enugu State College of Education (Technical) Enugu

Email: totlechi@gmail.com¹

Abstract: Nigeria local government system under the present democratic dispensation is bedeviled with myriad of challenges which have eroded its relevance towards the plights and expectations of rural populace. One of such distractions is incessant intra-party undemocratic practices. Acknowledging this factuality, this paper takes a critical look on the effects of intra-party undemocratic practices on governance and administration at the level of third-tier of Nigeria government. The methodology of this paper is a descriptive design where the authors used documentary and non-participant methods of data collection, and content-analyze data and events. The paper further revealed that most local government areas across the federation are embroiled with incidences of intra-party frictions caused by undemocratic practices with adverse effects on governance, stability and development at the rural areas. The paper therefore opined that advocacy, institutional reforms amid other measures are fundamental for democratic party politics and accountable governance at the level of rural administration in Nigeria.

Keywords: Political Party, Democracy and Local government.

1. Introduction

Party politics and decentralization of governance are the reflective attributes of representative democracy. Political parties emerged from the euphoria of freedom and equality to provide alternative platform for the expression of peculiar preferences on governance and development of the state. Thus, the emergence and relevance of party politics is underscored by the democratic principles of liberty, equality and popular will as observed in Western democracies. Hence, party process is one of the imperatives of modern democracies.

Similarly, local government is an administrative strategy designed to decentralize power and duplicate responsibilities for purpose of governance, development of the rural economy and improved social welfare of the rural populace. In this vein, Asaju (2003) argued that globally, various strategies and approaches have been adopted or used by the government for promoting good governance and in their effort at distributing the state resources to reach the people at the grassroots.

Hence, local government emerged to respond to the plights and expectations of the rural populace through governance and administration. This responsiveness accentuates the essence of accountability which is one of the hallmarks of democratic governance. Invariably, Okoh and Ohwoyibo (2009) opined that accountability reflects the need for government and its agencies to serve the public effectively in accordance with the laws of the land.

Furthermore, local government not only works to satisfy the needs and aspirations but enhances partisan orientation of the rural electorate through representation and participation. Accordingly, Awofeso (2004) noted that major theoretical exposition on which the existence of local government has been justified was its ability to enhance grassroots democracy through popular participation, effective accountability and political representation. These three elements (participation, accountability and representation) incidentally are the tripod on which an enduring democracy is ensured in any civilized society.

Invariably, political parties therefore provide platform for functional participation at the local government level of political decentralization and administration. Thus, the political parties mobilize electoral support for their candidates to win elective positions in the rural legislative and administrative councils of the local government. Hence, the elected chairman and councilors in Nigerian local government system emerged through partisan platforms to represent interests and expectations of the rural populace.

It is therefore instructive to note that the nexus between democracy, party politics and local government is illuminating with regards to the process and dynamics of local government system in Nigeria. Thus, the paper is divided into five sections which reflect on the introduction, conceptual clarification, theoretical framework, dynamics, trends and implications of intra-party undemocratic practices, conclusion and recommendation.

2. Conceptual Clarification

Political Party

The political process of every democratizing or democratic political system is driven-by an interest-aggregative structure in habitual quest for the control of political power. Hence, this peculiar interest-oriented group within the context of the political process is alternatively known as “political party”. Expectedly, the term “political party” like other concepts in political science is

polemical and elusive in credence to the disparity of definitions between the Liberals and Marxists. On this premise, Johari (2005) aptly embellished the thrust of the liberal's view on the meaning of a political party which emphasized on the existence and role of the political parties as the agencies of organized public opinion with help of which a political system operates.

This view further revealed that political party performs the role of articulating and organizing interests beside the conventional quest for political power in the state. Hence, political party is a group that seeks for political power through a democratic process of election. Conversely, Nnoli O. (2003, p.206) explicated the Marxist's view of political party as an important mechanism used by some ruling class to consolidate and advance their hold on power. For the Marxists, political party represents the mechanism that advances class distinction and antagonism.

In reference to Marxian analogy, we analyze the trends and dynamics of intra-party undemocratic practices from the perspective of polarization and tussle within the ruling or dominant political party in Nigeria. Furthermore, the distinctiveness of political party from other groups within the political process reflects substantially on ideological orientation, acquisition of political power, party manifesto, organizational structure and openness. (Madubuegwu, 2010, p.7). However, the highlight of certain reflective attributes of political party in the conception of Johari is relevant to the thrust of this analysis as expressed below:

- i. A political party is not a loosely-knit organization of some persons. It is required that the members of a political party must be organized on some specific principles or interests in a tight manner so that the party may be distinguished from oligarchies.
- ii. There must be a clear line of distinction between principle and personalities despite the weighty influence of personalities of a few leaders, the life of the party must not depend upon the life of its members.
- iii. In the end, a party must adopt constitutional means for the seizure of power as to implement its policies and programmes or to protect and promote some specific interests Johari (2005, p.306).

In the analysis of this discourse, efforts are made to examine the extent these conventional attributes were violated by the incessant intra-party dissension at the community level of governance in Nigerian federal-heterogeneous polity.

Democracy

Etymologically, democracy is derived from two Greek words "demos" and "kratos" underscoring the organic unity of "rule and people". Thus, democracy is the government of the people. Democracy may also be described as a system of government under which the people exercise the governing power either directly or through representatives or periodically elected by themselves. (Appodoari, 1974, p.137). In explicit sense, Appodoari classified two forms of democracy – the classical democracy which flourished in the days of Pericles (500 – 429 BC) as exemplified in Athenian Ecclesia and Sparta's Appella where men directly influence the decisions of the City-States and, modern democracy which is expressed by the representative government.

Furthermore, Orji (1997, p.100) succinctly highlighted the fundamental principles of democracy as seen below:

- (i) Equality
- (ii) Alternative choices
- (iii) Regular consultations
- (iv) Regular Elections
- (v) Majoritarian rule

In this discourse, the researchers examined the extent of violation of these democratic norms in the internal dynamics of political parties particularly at the local government areas.

Local Government

Local government is a peculiar administrative mechanism at the community level of every developing or developed polity. In a generic sense, local government is defined as the established political authority at the local level entrusted with the responsibilities of governance, administration and development of the rural population. In this trend, the United Nations Division of Public Administration cited in Ola (2000) defined local government as: a political sub-division of a nation (or in a federal system, a state) which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs including the powers to impose taxes or to exact labour for prescribed purpose. The governing body of such an entity is elected or otherwise locally selected.

Similarly, the 1976 Local Government Reform Handbook defined local government as:

Government at the local level exercised through the representative councils established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas. These powers should give the council substantial control over local affairs as well as the staff and institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of services and to determine and implement projects to as to complement the activities of the state and federal government in their areas, and to ensure and through devolution of functions to these councils and through active

participations that local initiatives and response to local needs and conditions are maximized.

In other words, local government is a decentralized structure of governance at the grassroots level entrusted with powers and authority to respond to the plights and expectations of the rural population and, at the same time, enhance their partisan consciousness through mobilization and participation in the governmental activities.

Invariably, local government is a democratic institution in cognizance of its representative structure and composition. It consists of democratic structures (as exemplified in the Legislative and Executive arms) made up of elected representatives and appointed personnel articulating interests and responding to the needs and aspirations of the rural populace. Hence, the presence of the elected representatives in these structures of the local government is an indication of the expedience of party democracy at the level of communal governance in Nigeria. This is evident in the 774 local government councils spread across 36 states and FCT of Nigeria federation.

Similarly, local governance is driven-by party politics. In this regard, Ogunna (1996) noted that political parties are essential requirements for a democratic system of government as they serve as viable instruments for democratic elections. Political parties organize voters, choose and sponsor candidates, articulate and aggregate interests, and present them in a manner that provides choice for the voters. They ultimately seek to win and control political power.

In this discourse, we examine the absurdities of party-politicking on the functional process of rural governance and political stability of the community areas in Nigeria polity.

3. Theoretical Framework of Analysis

This discourse, adopted a Marxian theoretical framework to explicate the causes, dynamics, trends and implications of intra-party undemocratic activities and its effects on governance, development and stability of local government councils in Nigeria. Marxian paradigm alternatively known as Marxism is a scientific theory propounded by Karl Marx (1818 – 1883) and Frederick Engels to provide rationale for contradictions and uncertainties inherent in human society from the perspective of materialism. Hence, the scientific idea of Karl Marx is otherwise known as Marxism. Aja (1997) writes:

The premise of Marxism is this: “It is not men’s ideals, philosophies or religion that determines their social consciousness, but on the contrary, their economic or material existence that determines their social existence”. In Marxism, history was, for the first time, to reveal the concealed truth that men (labourers) must work before they can fight for dominion, pursue politics, religion, philosophy and so on. According to Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, economic factor is the primary determinant or the form of politics, culture and ideology of a society. The other dialectical interplay is that the ruling ideas of each age are the ideas of the rich, material class. Tension or conflict in society should be found in the relationship and reward of people in social relations of production. For Marx, everything is in a dialectical totality. Like Hegel, Marx expressed that without contradiction, nothing would change.

In other words, Marxism explicates on the essence of materialism (i.e. the primacy of material condition), class distinction and struggle and the need for social change.

Notably, Marxian dialectical materialism provides an empirical insight on the ceaseless and habitual struggle between contradicting tendencies as exemplified in the “thesis and “anti-thesis”. In a specific sense, Mukherjee and Ramaswamy (2007, p.355) embellished further on the substance of dialectics,

In Hegelian philosophy, dialectics applied to the process, evolution and development of history. Hegel viewed history as progressive manifestation of human reason, and the development of historical spirit. History recorded increasing awareness and greater rationality as exhibited in human affairs. Human consciousness and freedom expanded as a result of conflicting intellectual forces, which were constantly under tension. Hegel believed in a movement from a rudimentary state of affairs to a perfect form.

The process of history, for Hegel, was marked by two kinds of causation:

- a) the individual spirit which desired happiness and provided energy, and
- b) *the world spirit* which strived for higher freedom, that came with the knowledge of the self. He emphatically believed that without each individual pursuing his own goal(s), whatever they might be, nothing was achieved in history. But to know whether these actions were in conformity with the dialectics of the universe, “the cunning of reason” played its role by allowing

Marx agreed with Hegel that there was a constant movement in dialectical process, but emphasized the real than ideal, the social rather than the intellectual matter than the mind. For Marx, the key idea was not history of philosophy, but the history of economic production and the social relations.

The concern of Marx was primarily to reverse Hegelian dialectics to recognize the economic or material existence as the root cause of class conflict in human history and not a matter of ideas and philosophies of men. In a corrective sense, Marx employed the approach known as dialectical materialism. This is also referred to as economic determinism or historical determinism (Aja, 1997, p.13).

Thus, dialectical materialism therefore indicates that every stage of human development (from the slave, feudal to the capitalist socio-economic formation) is inherently fraught with suspicion, hatred, antagonism and conflict between the two unequal classes over material conditions and survival. Hence, the struggle over “materialism” accentuates the conflicts between “the have and have not” alternatively know as thesis and anti-thesis.

In relation to this discourse, we examine the tussle of politicians within a political party that controls the power structures of a local government from a dialectical materialistic perspective. Hence, the undemocratic practices that fraught the internal process of a ruling political party stems from a dialectical power conflicts between the various elites (the thesis and anti-thesis) of the local government areas in Nigeria. Thus, the utilitarian values of “who gets what position and extent of power” underscored the expedience of material survival from the context and dynamics of power relations.

In this vein, we argued that the material quest for power and influence among the political elites over “who becomes what or control what extent of power” has ceaseless precipitated certain irregularities which marred the general performance and viability of local government at the expense of the plights and aspirations of the rural indigenes. Thus, the dialectical materialistic perception lends credence to the relevance of this discourse with regards to the intra-party trends of unconventional practices at the level of Nigeria’s third-tier of governance and administration.

4. Dynamics, Trends and Implications of Intra-party Undemocratic Practices in Nigeria Local Government Areas.

As earlier indicated, local governments in Nigeria is bedeviled with myriad of problems which include failed governance, improvised rural area, lack of institutional and fiscal autonomy, power interference from other levels or tiers of government, murky party politics etc. These limiting variables had indeed elicited serious doubt on the essence of grassroots political governance in Nigeria. However, challenges of politics had continued to distract local government from its constitutional and statutory responsibilities as aptly illustrated by Okotie (2010, p.112):

One of the major problems of local government is political problem, which bother on the fact that local government is regarded as a training field for political participation. Therefore, local government is regarded as a guinea pig for politicians. There is also the problem of sharing of key political posts such as chairman, councilors and supervisory councilors. Politics at the local government is highly tempestuous which involves a lot of victimization and discrimination. Rather than pull resources together for the advantage of the community, energy is dissipated on minor irrelevancies such as interpersonal rivalries, party differences, god fatherism, and location of ward and local government headquarters. There is also the problem of rivalries between the Executive and Legislative arm of the local government. In such situations, the chairman of the local government feels a sense of supremacy over the councilors and therefore undermines the powers of the councilors. This normally creates a lot of rift.

Similarly, Ugwu, (2000) also remarked that political interference in the local government is one other major obstacle to the effective realization of the local government objectives. Most often, councilors in the council see themselves as representing their party interest or other primordial motives. This results into wrangling among the councilors and between them and chairman of local governments. The crisis in Udi local government council in Enugu State is a classic example of such wrangling. Such crises slow down development projects as efforts and energies are diverted to making positive efforts towards bettering the conditions of the rural people. Ohaozara local government crisis in Ebonyi State is also another good example of political interference which slow down the rate of development in the rural areas.

Basically, the intra-party conflict at the level of Nigeria local government is a function of clash of conflicting interests between political stakeholders with a subtle influence within a particular area. Therefore, the interest-driven tussle and failure of

bargaining between the following political gladiators can elicit intra-party conflicts and polarization at the level of rural governance:

- (i) The State Chief Executive (Governor)
- (ii) The Chairman of the Local Government
- (iii) The Councilors
- (iv) The Members of the State Assembly.

Other non-governing political elite whose influence directly and indirectly affects the trends of rural party politics and governance include:

- (i) Influential political personalities alternatively known as political godfathers (who may have served in strategic political positions at the state and federal levels of governance).
- (ii) A well-known Philanthropist (Business mogul and party financier) within the local government.
- (iii) An Influential Traditional ruler (preferably chairman of state council of traditional rulers, chairman of regional council of traditional rulers or highly acknowledged traditional ruler at the national level of council of traditional rulers).

Interestingly, from the orientation, attitude and disposition of these political elites, we examine the dynamics and trends of undemocratic practices within the process of rural party politics and, its effects on the local government.

(a) The authoritarian interest of State Chief Executive in the Local Government.

It is not uncommon in Nigeria local government councils to witness intra-party conflicts emanating from the authoritarian interest of the State Chief Executive (i.e. the Governor) with regards to the elective positions of chairmanship and councillorship. Hence, this interest which reflects in authoritarian action distorts or violates democratic values of intra-party democracy as it involves primary election between the prospective candidates for elective positions. Consequently, the authoritarian and undemocratic actions of the State Chief Executive often polarized the political party especially when conciliation of myriad of competing interests has failed which adversely create dissensions and antagonistic alliances in the political party that consequently stifle the process of rural governance. And, if this crisis situation is not effectively managed, it snowballed into widespread anti-party activities and political tension in the state.

(b) Strained relation between the State Chief Executive and Local Government Chairman.

The disaffection between the two Chief Executives of power disparity often stemmed from the clash of interests over appointments, revenue resources and site of development projects in the local government areas which are often attributed to the insubordination and disloyalty of the local government chairman, loyalty and alliance of the local government chairman with perceived political foe or foes of the State Chief Executive (Governor) within the council area and anti-party activities etc. Consequently, the State Chief Executive will immediately activate authoritarian structures and process to forcefully remove the disloyal chairman from his position. A process where the governor will persuade the State Assembly to illegitimately suspend the Chairman or situation where the local government councilors united in solidarity with State Chief Executive raises baseless indictments to impeach the embattled chairman. And, the ugly development is consequently followed by undemocratic appointment of a caretaker Chairman or caretaker Local Executive Council to manage the affairs of the local government in flagrant violation of the law and democratic principles.

(c) The Power tussles between the Chairman and Councilors of the same Party.

The party politics of Nigeria local government system is often fraught with frictions and tussle between the local government Chairman and Councilors over revenue resources, appointments, awarding of contracts, privileges, distribution of social infrastructures and services, responsibilities and powers. To this extent, allegations and counter-allegations often trail this power tussle. Consequently, this unpleasant situation often climaxed with the impeachment of the Chairman which often exacerbate tension within the community area and undermined the process of governance and socio-economic development. Again, if the impasse is not effectively managed by the State Chief Executive (Governor) and state party leadership then the chances of securing electoral victory in the next of election is undermined. For instance, this undemocratic practice pervades all local governments across the states of the federation irrespective of party affiliations.

(d) The power tussles between the State Assembly and Leadership of Local Government Area.

An incidence of power tussle between the State Assembly members and State Chief Executive (Governor) of the same political party may degenerate into chaos that affects adversely the stability of the local government. A situation may arise when the House members (in bid to get back on the embattled State Chief Executive) may generate series of indictments against leadership of the local governments in deliberate process to plummet the political relevance and influence of the State Chief Executive. And, this ugly situation is often met with serious resistance by the local government Chairmen and, may take unconventional dimension of arson and killings. Consequently, the processes of governance and development at the state and local government levels become embroiled with crises of power conflicts.

(e) Strife to Assert Political Relevance

As observed, the State governor determines “who becomes what and exert what influence” at the rural level of politics and governance. Often times in the process of advancing and protecting these authoritarian interests then other powerful interests are undermined resulting to suspicion and frictions. These other interests are expressed by the influential political personalities (the perceived god fathers), successful business tycoons (who were engrossed with rural politics and, serve as financiers of the political party) and influential traditional rulers (who wish tenaciously to overstretch the limit of their power and influence). Thus, these non-governing political elites in the conception of Pareto (1923) may strive to influence and determine certain elective posts (such as the councillorship positions) and appointive posts (such as the positions of deputy chairman, supervising councillorship, special assistants and advisers, project contracts etc).

Then, an ambitious State Chief Executive or local government Chief Executive may ignore or fail to neither accommodate nor bargain with these myriad of intervening interests which consequently create suspicion and antagonism. Adversely, this unpleasant situation leads to the proliferation of opponent affiliations and re-realignment of interests within the political party which invariably erode the values of governance and democratic processes.

Apparently, there are certain defective tendencies that exacerbate these undemocratic practices at the level of Nigeria’s grassroots governance. They are:

- i. The militarized orientation and attitude of our political class which has over the years precipitated uncivil disposition and practices contrary to democratic norms and legality.
- ii. The murky nature of Nigeria’s multi-party politics which breeds suspicion, injustice, frictions and chaos.
- iii. The absence of credibility and fairness of local government’s elections because of the vulnerability and non-neutrality of the State Independent Electoral Commission.
- iv. Apathy and indifference of the rural electorate and masses towards partisan process and activities of the local government.
- v. Flaws inherent in the Federal Republic Constitution of 1999 as exemplified in Section 7 (subsection 1) and Section 8 which subject the third-tier structure of governance to the whims and caprices of the State House Assembly. In addition, section 162 (subsection 6 and 8) which subject the financial autonomy of the local government to the institutionalized control and encroachment of the State government. Hence, these constitutional privileges are flagrantly abused in despotic-drive to protect and advance ordinate interests.
- vi. The absence of effective networks and institutionalized processes of accountability and transparency at the rural governance which had led to these absurdities at the level of local government areas by the disgruntled political elites.
- vii. Weak democratic structures at local government level which accelerate practices in violation of democratic values and principles of rule of law.
- viii. Poverty and ignorance of the rural populace perhaps impel these elites to manipulate public conscience to advance their self-motives.

5. The Conclusion and Recommendations.

These irregularities and absurdities that stem from the intra-party uncivil attitude and dispositions affect adversely the democratization, administrative process and socio-economic development of the local government area. In other words, most of the challenges bedeviling Nigeria rural areas are the function of these undemocratic practices. Thus, these irregularities elicit serious concerns for plausible measures to strengthen democratic structures and ensure a civic political culture among our political elites at the levels of state and local governance. Therefore, the following are imperative:

- (i) Alteration of certain flaws in our Federal Republic Constitution which subject local government to the institutional control and encroachments of the state government.

- (ii) Entrusting constitutional responsibilities of administration and conduct of local government elections on the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC. This measure is expedient to eliminate the fidelity of state election management body from the whims and caprices of state Chief Executive.
- (iii) Encouraging the practice of free and credible primary election within the political party. Hence, Nigerian political parties should de-emphasis on the issue of “consensus candidate” and encourage intending or prospective candidates to test their popularity and relevance among the members of the political party.
- (iv) Enactment of laws and strict procedures to check against money-politics or material inducement during the primary and general elections. This measure shall indeed facilitate emergence of credible individuals who occupy elective positions at National, State and Local levels of governance.
- (v) Constructive political education and advocacy on the essence of civility and democratic values against undemocratic practices. Therefore, the National Orientation Agency and Advocacy Enlightenment groups should step-up on this task especially at the community level.
- (vi) The political education unit of Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC and Community Based Organization (CBOs) should also work in synergy to reverse the apathetic attitude of the rural populace and, reinforces their interests in the political process.
- (vii) Advocacy on the culture and process of effective checks and balances among the Legislative and Executive councils of the local government. This is germane for accountability and transparency at the level of local governance.
- (viii) Enactment of relevant laws to restrict the state Chief Executive and his loyalists from interfering or encroaching into the leadership, structures and process of local government.
- (ix) The readiness and neutrality of the Court to ensure effective administration of justice in situation of tussle between political stakeholders of the local government area.

In final analysis, entrenched democratic practices in the internal process and dynamics of political party is imperative for improved governance and administration at the local level. Thus, the practice of democratic values at the rural politics is instrumental to the socio-political and economic development of Nigeria third-tier jurisdiction.

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