Party Primaries, Candidate Selection and Intra-Party Conflict in Nigeria: PDP in Perspective

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Abstract: This paper underscores the interplay among party primaries, candidate selection and intra-party conflicts in the People’s Democratic Party (PDP). It employs the theoretical explanations of the Group Conflict Theory which posits that conflicts within groups are borne out of incompatible interests catalyzed by selfish nature of individuals. Findings from the qualitative analysis signifies that while institutional structures have been enacted to avert conflicts within the party, non-adherence to the dictates of such structures have birthed a wide range of internal conflicts within the party, thus resulting to cases of defection, factionalization, proliferation of political parties, unconstitutional change of party leaders and most importantly, the defeat of the party in 2015 general elections. It was recommended that effective restructuring of internal laws and polices within PDP, establishment of punitive measure and the practice of transparency by the INEC would ensure good governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: Political Party, Party Primaries, Candidate Selection, People’s Democratic Party, Nigeria.

Introduction

It is incontestable that political parties have remained vital and indispensable tools in institutionalizing democracy in most democratic polities in the world today. Arising from the catalytic feature of political parties, they serve an intermediate role in democratic societies by acting as a connecting cord between the government and the people, thereby ensuring all tenets of democracy are upheld in the country. This justifies the reason why most literatures explain democracy in the context of political parties; Agudiegwu and Ezeani (2015 p.105) emphasized that “the strength and effectiveness of political parties is directly proportional to the degree of resilience democracy enjoy”, Omotola (2009) similarly opined that political parties are makers of democracy such that no democratic settings can exist without them. From these, it is therefore a truism that political parties pose as an instrumental paddle of democratic foundations, which employs diverse
processes in ensuring such democratic structures are guarded and protected. In line with this, they are thus institutions which sponsor a wide range of aspiring political office holders through a formal and constitutional process, setting them aside as the parties’ official candidates.

In relation, the selection of viable and competent candidates is most importantly and firstly done through the organization of primary elections which is a type of poll organized before the general elections for the purpose of nominating a party’s candidates for a political office (Keithly, 2012), thus making it a relevant activity in ensuring that internal democracy of the party is properly upheld. This is because, not only does it create room for political position average party members, but also weakens the influence of political elites within the party, which will consequently aid the institutionalization of the party. In turn, institutionalization will allow for a proper method of channeling social demands, and will also help in ensuring most of the party activities are in order. Thus, it suffices to posit that parties’ survival, effectiveness and buoyancy is largely anchored on its internal process of party primaries and candidate selection process.

However, while the institutionalization of party primaries and candidate selection has commanded a robust discussion at the theoretical level, it has enjoyed limited applicability in Nigeria with the implication that political parties in the country have been marred by various degrees of internal conflicts, squabbles and crisis with the implication that the internal structure of the parties are often mired in endless contestations. And as Odibachi (2010) rightly asserted that what exists within them can only be equated to battles such that party politics has exhibited more crisis than cohesion for national development and that virtually all the political parties have been perpetually enmeshed in conflicts owing to lack of internal democracy and imposition of party candidates and party leadership.

Amidst such, the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) maintained the front burner in the perpetration of internal crisis resulting from selection of candidates through party primaries. Aniche and Egboh (2015) maintained that no political party has been bedeviled by internal conflict like the People’s Democratic Party. Such crisis arose out of indiscriminate imposition of candidates by powerful members of the party, substitution of candidates who have won the primary election with others who did not and disrupting internal rules and regulations, which resulted to defection of members to other parties and factionalization within the party. Additionally, enduring crisis in the People’s Democratic Party also contributed to the defeat of its 16-year incumbency in the 2015 general elections.

This inescapable situation of the Nigerian political parties thus creates a need for the analysis of intra-party conflicts in the PDP vis-à-vis its candidate selection and party primaries in Nigeria’s fourth republic. To do that, the paper takes a long historical view of the emergence of the party, the legal and institutional framework that undergirds its candidate selection process as well as some empirical cases of crisis in the party arising from the candidate
selection process. The paper further explores the implications of such internal crises for the country at large, especially for the sustenance of our nascent democracy. It finally proffers some solutions for curbing the persistent occurrences of internal party crisis in Nigeria. The focus on the PDP is made germane by the fact that the party exercised predominant control over Nigeria’s political landscape in the first sixteen years of the Fourth Republic and also recorded unparalleled spate of internal crises within the period.

**Statement of the Problem**

Maintenance of internal democracy, through the process of selecting candidates among political parties in Nigeria, particularly in the People’s Democratic Party has remained a vexed issue (Akubo & Umoru, 2014). Consequently, enhancing the democratic process since the launch of the fourth democratic dispensation has also been a daunting task in the country. After decades long colonial rule, military rule and epileptic democratic surge, it was expected that the new democratic dispensation would create an avenue for the maximization of democracy in the country. The trend remains an overt reliance on structures of political parties to aid in the achievement of such democracy; since political parties are dividends and makers of democracies, it is expected of them to not only aid in achieving the needed democracy in the country, but also ensure that they maintain democratic principles within themselves. In essence, political parties were seen as the purveyors of the democracy, because they themselves exude democratic principles among members. Hence, the achievement of these roles is largely hinged on the capability of the party to foster internal unity, relations, democracy and cohesion.

However, although these political parties theoretically befit constitutional qualities and prospects ascribed to them, enhancing internal democracy remained a herculean task in practice; they have been bereft of proper adherence to their respective constitutional party structures, particularly in the process of selecting candidates and conducting its primaries. Such discrepancy has sparked odious cases of internal conflicts among them, resulting to the enmeshment of intra-party conflicts in the fabric of political parties. In the spate of this, intra-party conflicts in Nigeria have reduced political parties to a “liability than an asset to the common man and the system at large (Omotola, 2010 p.141)”. Amidst these, the People’s Democratic Party has unfortunately remained the carrier of such odious legacies of internal crisis. Since its establishment, it has demonstrated wide ranges of internal conflicts, thus necessitating the understanding of how its election and selection process has bred internal conflicts and also the implications of such conflicts in Nigeria.

**Brief Review of Literature**

**The People’s Democratic Party: History, Nature and Formation**

The People’s Democratic Party has a long history in Nigerian party politics. Its origin dates back to 1998, in preparation for the new democratic dispensation. Osumah and Ikelegbe (2009) asserted that the end of military dispensation in the country created the necessity to have political parties which were not only devoid of ethnic-based
typology of political parties that marked
the previous republics, but which would
also help in underlining the country’s
readiness for plural democracy. This led
to the establishment and registration of
several political parties, including the
PDP by the General Abdulsalam
Abubakar-led Federal Military
Government. Right from inception, the
PDP received wide range of support
from various individuals and groups in
the country. It was made up of different
individuals like traditional chiefs,
Academicians, Businessmen and also
high ranking retired military officers.
Originally, the party was formed by a
conglomeration of majorly four political
groupings necessitating its
colorization as a coat of many
colours. The groups included the
Institute of Civil Society (ICS), which
was also known as G-34, resulting from
the 34 individuals, led by Alex
Ekewume, who signed the petition
against Abacha’s self-succession during
his regime. The Second Group
comprised of the National Party of
Nigeria (NPN), also known as the All
Nigeria Congress, who were conversely
not opposed to Abacha’s self-
succession, but were also not part of his
regime. It was led by S.B Awoniyi. The
third group was made up of the former
followers of Late Shehu Musa Yaradua,
under the aegis of the People’s
Democratic Movement (PDM). Its most
prominent members included
AtikuAbubakar and Chief Tony Anenih.
The fourth group was the Social
Progressive Party (SDP). The mosaic
nature of the party signifies the extent to
which politicians were willing to unite
in the formation of a democratic rule
and also ensure that the military was
sent to the barracks. The objectives of
the party at inception, according to
Ojukwu and Olaifa (2013), included: to
seek political power for the purpose of
protecting the territorial integrity of
Nigeria and promoting the security,
safety, welfare of all Nigerians; to
promote and establish political stability
in Nigeria and foster national unity and
integration; to provide good governance
that ensures probity and participatory
democracy; to offer equal opportunities
to hold the highest political, military,
bureaucratic and judicial offices in the
country to all citizens; and provide the
political environment that is conducive
to economic growth and national
development through private initiative
and free enterprise.
These objectives reveal the extent to
which the party was targeted at
maintaining the country’s democratic
system. Before its defeat in 2015
however, the party had won every
election at the National level for 16
years but had at the same time failed to
actualize those values and objectives
represented in its constitution. It has
however been a different ball game in
practice, suggesting disconnect between
theory and practice or a dichotomy
between policy and politics. This would
be further explored in consequent
sections of this paper.

Party Primaries and Candidate
Selection: The Legal and Institutional
Framework
Institutional and legal designs are
important elements of ensuring the
effectiveness of political parties. This is
because they define the operational
structure of the party and also regulate
behaviors within the party (Kura, 2014).
Additionally, institutionalizing political
parties allows for the propagation of democracy due to the fact that political parties which are institutionalized are not subjected to the whims and caprices of few ambitious leaders within the party. Against this backdrop, Ikechukwu (2015) highlighted five categories of institutional and legal designs guiding the operation of political parties in Nigeria, and which embodies the legal frameworks guiding primaries and candidate selection in the People’s Democratic Party. These include;

1. The 1999 Constitution;
2. The Constitution of the People’s Democratic Party
3. The Electoral Acts
4. Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) statutory rules
5. Other informal rules.

The 1999 constitution of Nigeria provides rules guiding political parties in Nigeria. Thus, internal constitution of the People’s Democratic Party is constructed in relation to the stipulations of the 1999 constitution. Sections 221-229 provides that, every political party must guarantee the registration of names and addresses, open membership, registered constitution, ethno-religious free party nomenclature and location of headquarters in Abuja.

In relation to the conduction of primaries and selection of candidates, the political parties must provide; for the conduct of a periodic election on a democratic basis for the election of its principal officers, executive members and members of its governing body, at regular intervals not exceeding four years; members of its executive committee and other principal officers must reflect the federal character of Nigeria, and these officers must belong to different states not being less than 2/3 of the 36 states and FCT (Section 223, Sub-sections 1-2). Similarly, the constitution of the PDP also outlines legal guidelines for conducting primaries and selection of candidates for political offices from the office of the President to the local level. Therefore, registered members of the party who have been able to meet the requirements will be eligible to contest for such positions in relation to the party guidelines approved by the National Executive Committee.

Electoral Acts and the rules of the Independent National Electoral Commission are also important elements of legal frameworks binding candidate selection and conduct of primaries in the People’s Democratic Party. Ikechukwu (2015) asserted that the INEC is the second most important institutional design guiding party politics in Nigeria; it is constitutionally authorized to monitor all party operations in the country ranging from registration and mode of conducting primaries. These rules are thus provided through electoral acts, which are usually provided prior to the conduct of elections such as the 2002, 2006, 2010 and 2014 acts used for 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 elections respectively.

Informal rules also form another category of institutional framework of candidate selection in the PDP. These rules are not coded in any legal framework, but are guided by the socio-cultural norms of the society. Certain informal designs of candidate selection and primaries were outlined by Ballington (2004) to include assessment of the costs of time, energy, the likelihood of winning, and by an
estimation of the resources needed to run an effective campaign. In the People’s Democratic Party, certain unconstitutional considerations such as nepotism, ethnic cleavages, clientelism, and an aspirant’s war chest such as the ability to rig elections, influence party officials or delegates who vote at primaries have been institutionalized in the process of candidate selection. More importantly, the zoning formula ranks high in informal framework of candidate selection in the People’s Democratic Party. Alumona & Obianyo (2014 p.15) described the zoning formula as “a type of consociational arrangement devised by the Nigerian political class to address the divisive politics of ethnicity and primordialism that scuttled the democratic dispensation in the first republic”. This was designed due to the fact that over 250 ethnic groups are embedded in the country, and as such, there is a need to carve out a regulation which would favour the wide span of ethnic groups and ensure no zone is marginalized in the process of candidate selection in the country. In response, candidate selection is therefore organized and periodically rotated among the country’s geo-political zones which includes North-East(6 states), North-West(7 states), North Central(7 states), South East(5 states), South West(5 states) and South - South(6 states). In essence, the institutional and legal frameworks are normative guidelines for regulating the behaviors of party members and ensuring orderly organization in the party. The degrees at which these institutional and legal frameworks are able to guide the actions in the political party have a direct impact on the level of internal democracy and cohesion in the party. It can be said that they serve as a means to maintaining democracy within the party and in the national polity.

However, there is deficit in adherence to these institutional and legal frameworks in the People’s Democratic Party. This is not surprising as Adejumobi (2007 p.42) have argued that “political parties mostly do not conform to legal codes of internal democracy, whether at the level of electoral regulations or at that of their own internal party rules”. This thus represents the case in the People’s Democratic Party; while proper legal and institutional frameworks have been entrenched to guide the character and activities of political parties, lack of adherence to these have bred internal chaos leading to the emergence of conflicts and rifts within the party. This creates the need to underscore intra-party conflicts in the People’s Democratic Party in relation to party primaries and candidate selection.

**Internal Democracy and Party Politics in Nigeria**

Political parties, as democratic institutions are expected to be the carriers of democratic frameworks, through which democracy can be properly actualized in the whole country at large. Analysis of political parties have summated that they are indeed a vital aspect of promoting democracy. Scholars have asserted that they not only promote democratic principles, but are themselves “makers” of democracy (Omotola, 2009:612), of which their absence also translates to an absence of democratic principles or structures. In essence, political parties are sine qua non for the entrenchment of democracy.
To Aleyomi (2013 p.286), they are also expected to perform “institutional guarantees” through which effective discharge of their democratic duties can be properly carried out. As such, political parties are expected to possess an internal democracy, which will in turn to ensure democratic governance. One of the foremost proponents of internal democracy; Scarrow (2004), believed that Intra-party democracy is “a very broad term describing a wide range of methods for including party members in intra-party deliberation and decision making. Part of the reasoning behind it is that parties using internally democratic procedures are likely to select more capable, appealing leaders and candidates and to have more responsive policies, and, as a result, to enjoy greater electoral success. Other considerations relate to parties “practicing what they preach”. This clearly reveals that party primaries and models of candidate selection are one of the most important elements of entrenching internal democracy among political parties.

Party politics and process of ensuring democracy have always recognized intra-party democracy as one of the elements and pillars necessary to achieve good governance within political parties, which is also expected to radiate outwardly in creating a healthy democratic development and stability in the country (Matlosa, 2008). In Nigerian politics, the legal foundations for ensuring internal democracy within political parties are deeply prescribed in various institutional frameworks like the constitution and the electoral act. In essence, it could be gleaned that the architects of Nigerian democracy were not oblivious of the centrality of internal party democracy to the thriving of the democratic enterprise. However, despite such strong legal support for intra-party democracy, in Nigeria, there is as sense in which it could be argued that internal party democracy, particularly in the Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP) which held sway for the first sixteen years of the Fourth Republic, has largely been observed in the breach. Nor is this non-adherence to the principle of internal party democracy limited to the current democratic experiment. On the contrary, it would appear that this singular fact contributed in large measure to the demise of earlier democratic experiments in Nigeria. Taking a long historical view of the phenomenon, Sklar (2004) stated that political parties in the colonial period grew out of the struggles against colonial domination and striving for political independence. Such struggles led to the establishment of the Nigerian National Democratic Party in 1922, spearheaded by the then nationalist; Herbert Macaulay. He observed that the party which was focused on championing the interests of the local people and protecting their rights which the colonial masters willfully violated had the objective of attaining municipal status and local self-government for Lagos, encouragement of non-discriminatory private economic enterprise, Africanization of the civil service among others. Upon its establishment, the party recorded huge success in the pursuance of its goals; it served as a platform through which local people expressed their grievances and displeasure against the rulings of the colonial elites. However, it was not
without its shortcomings, it was personalized and controlled by educated elites within the party. Additionally, it was not nationalistic, as most of its activities were confined to the environs of Lagos.

The groups of political parties; the Action Group (AG), the Northern People’s Congress (NPC) and the NCNC also culminated another set of political parties which succeeded the NYM and NNDP. However, although they were largely ethnicized and elitist in nature, Omodia (2010) opined that their major objectives revolved around acquiring power and achievement of independence for the country. While highlighting the major importance of the political parties, he asserted that “even when parties were elitist formed, they were deeply rooted in the people in terms of interest articulation, aggregation, political socialization and elite recruitment coupled with political communication” (Omodia, 2010 p. 66).

However, the political parties were bedeviled by internal conflicts; major internal crisis resulting from leadership conflicts and ethnic sectionalism were recorded in the NCNC; the leader of the National Council for Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC), Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, was to be the Premier of the Western Region following the victory of his party in the Western regional election. The emergence of Azikiwe as the Premier of the Western region was however resisted by certain members, particularly the Yorubas. Mbah (2011) asserted that members of the NCNC, majorly Yorubas felt uncomfortable with the success of Azikiwe resulting in their eventual defection to the Action Group, which was majorly a Yoruba party. Therefore, despite his success, he was denied the premiership position owing to lack of internal party cohesion. Just as ethnic segregation and factionalization culminated to the denial of the Premiership of the Western Region to Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe and his eventual migration to the Eastern region, similar intra-party crisis which bedeviled the Northern People’s Congress (NPC) leading to factionalization of the party and breaking away of Mallam Aminu Kano from the party, to form the Northern Elements Progressives Union (NEPU). The factionalization was borne out of his perceived marginalization of minority interests in the Arewa Cultural Group and his desire to protect the interests of those minorities. Consequent marginalization of minorities by the Hausa-Fulani majority also culminated into the formation of United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) by Joseph Tarka. The party was riddled with conflict of interests among its members, ranging from a discrepancy between its elected representatives and top native authority officials, to the domineering role played by the Native Authority officials in controlling the party affairs.

Internal Crisis which loomed in the Action Group was also marked by political rivalry which was majorly between Awolowo and Akintola’s ideological differences and party leadership. The rift was so grave that the political scandals were publicly disclosed and birthed myriad of conflicts leading to massive violence and state of emergency in the Western region. Akintola was later dismissed from the party, which led to the
formation of another party-Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP).

The inception of the Second republic in 1979 following some years of military rule marked the formation the National Party of Nigeria (NPN); Nigerian People’s Party (NPP); Great Nigerian People’s Party (GNPP); Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN); and People’s Redemption Party (PRP). Toyden (2002) opined that political parties in the second republic were a metamorphosis of the First Republic in that they mirrored the activities of those of the First Republic. In this period, intra-party relation was a mixture of cooperation and conflicts; while the Northern People’s Congress (NPC) enjoyed some level of internal cohesion, certain elements of conflicts were still evident within the party. An example was when Alhaji Aminu Kano left the party due to the sabotage of his presidential ambition, to form People’s Redemption Party (PRP).

Additionally, authoritarian activities loomed in the UPN and GNPP. Within the parties, presidential and gubernatorial candidates also doubled as their Party chairmen, thus suffocating the possibility of internal democracy. The resultant effects were defections, factionalizations and splits. Sunday Afolabi and Akin Omoboriowo of Oyo and Ondo states defected from UPN to NPN. Other cases were Arthur Nzeribe’s defection from NPP to UPN, Chief Abiola’s defection from NPN, the split of PRP into Aminu Kano and Micheal Imodu factions, among others. In essence, the Second Republic recorded internal strife, with the UPN having the largest number of intra-party crisis.

The Third Republic started with the transition programme, General Ibrahim Babangida emphasized on his desire to rid Nigerian party politics of the ethnicization, politics of ownership and party crisis which bedeviled it in previous republics. This saw to the establishment of two political parties along ideological lines; the Social Democratic Party (SDP) which was a leftist or welfarist party and the National Republican Convention (NRC) which was a capitalist party. Although the parties were later dissolved sequel to the highly controversial cancellation of the 1993 election, which marked the beginning of another military dispensation ended in 1999, it is no doubt that the parties witnessed their own share of intra-party conflicts within the short time. Intra-party relations during the period were marked by factional feud and in-fighting. The National Republican Convention (NRC) was divided among various factions like the Republican Action Committee by Tom Ikimi, the Republican Solidarity led by Umaru Shinkafi, Bamanga Tukur and Adamu Ciroma and the NRC consultative forum led by Alhaji Ibrahim Mantu. The Social Democratic Party (SDP) was also marked by internal feud and factionalization leading to the emergence of the Yaradua and Kingibe factions.

The death of General Sani Abacha, and consequent end of the military junta, ushered in the Fourth Republic. Momoh (2013) captured the feature of party politics in the Fourth Republic by stating that political parties experienced reoccurring internal crises leading to factionalization and also the proliferation of political parties.
At the inception of the fourth republic, the main parties: Alliance for Democracy (AD), Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), All Nigerian People’s Party (ANPP) and the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), have always been said to be largely affected by “deep internal crises, disorder, recurring tensions and turmoil manifested in factional fighting, expulsions and counter-expulsions, multiple executives and dual offices (Akubo, 2014 p.85)”

The literature reveals the extent to which previous Nigerian republics have been marred by incessant internal strife. Indeed, intra-party crisis is historically deep-seated in the fabric of the country’s party politics, borne out of single-leader control, Godfatherism, Sit-tightism and most importantly, utmost disregard for constitutional structures. While extant literature have provided ample summation of lack of internal party democracy and the resultant intra-party crises, this paper focuses on the manifestation of this syndrome in Nigeria’s longest ruling political party, the PDP, and the implication for its eventual defeat in the 2015 general election.

Theoretical Perspective
The Realistic group conflict theory best explains the central argument of this paper. It is an economic theory which explains that intergroup conflicts stems out of incompatible goals as a result of completion over scarce resources. The theory can be summarized into few assumptions; humans are naturally selfish and would always want their interests to rise above the interests of others; conflicts within and among members of the group are borne out of incompatible interests among group members; psychological and behavioural elements among members are determined by the compatibility and incompatibility of their interests; and the result of the consequent conflict is zero sum, that is, the success of one member or members to achieve desired purpose, translates to the defeat of another member or members.

Alexander, Chizhik and Chizhik (2009 p.367) unravel how in-group discrepancy occurs and the effects it has on the group at large. Respective group members strive to maintain and possess control over the limited valuable resources, which thus breeds competition among the advantaged as disadvantaged members of the group. While the disadvantaged groups compete and strive to gain such resources and status, the advantaged group repels such attempts by acting against any form of threat to the resources they control. As such, the competitions among the two groups for scarce resources breed hostility among them. Markus, Fein and Kassin (2013) added that in some cases, competitions resulting to hostilities and conflicts may not necessarily be as a result of the feeling of threat to the resources they seek to control, or control, but may also be as a result of relative feelings of deprivation by those groups; the feelings of being marginalized or poor in relation to others. In essence, therefore competition is at the heart of the realistic conflict theory.

The realistic group conflict theory has been used by scholars to explain power relations in party politics and thus the theory provides accurate explanations of how competitions, and conflict unravels in the People’s Democratic Party (PDP);
despite the fact that the party represents one group where the sole interests of the party and the country is supposed to be of major concern, the party is still marred by the desire its members to further their selfish interests above the interest of other members, which results to spanning competition and conflict among them. In this Omoruyi (in Omotola, 2009 p.626) stated that “the so-called parties are not in competition with one another. They are in factions; these factions are more in competition with themselves than with another party”. For instance, the Peoples’ Democratic Party has been characterized with several conflicts since its formation as a political party (Aleyomi, 2013 p.296). The Peoples’ Democratic Party is made up of several personalities with divergent interest; this interest has led to several crises that have threatened the existence and survival of the party as a whole. For example, on August 31st 2013, there was a major crisis in the Peoples’ Democratic Party during their national convention. The crisis led to the creation of Kawu Baraje faction and the Tukur faction in the PDP. The crisis led to the creation of New Peoples Democratic Party (NPDP) by the Kawu Baraje led faction. The Kawu Baraje led faction includes Aliyu Wamakko (Sokoto); Babangida Aliyu (Niger); Rabiu Kwankwanso (Kano); Muritala Nyako (Adamawa); Abdulfatah Ahmed (Kwara); Sule Lamido (Jigawa) and Rotimi Amaechi (Rivers). Also in the faction are an acting National Chairman, Kawu Baraje; a suspended National Secretary, Prince Olagunsoye Oyinlola and a former National Deputy National Chairman, Dr. Sam Jaja (Punch Newspaper, September 1, 2013). The Party’s internal squabble was also responsible for its defeat in the 2015 general elections, particularly at the presidential level. The realistic group conflict theory adopted in this research is therefore germane for explaining the power relations and the divergent interests usually pursued by party members within the Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP).

**Party Primaries and Candidate Selection as the Purveyor of Intra-Party Conflicts in PDP**

Above outline of the legal and institutional frameworks has demonstrated the extent to which political parties in Nigeria, particularly the PDP appreciate the nexus between internal party democracy and achievement of smooth turnover of election. In this regard, Norris (2004) had stated that one of the key issues in intra-party democracy is the nomination process in that it serves as a prism through which power distribution among organs and factions in the political party is understood. In essence there is no gainsaying party primary and candidate selection is pivotal to the process of ensuring democracy both within and outside the political party.

However, despite such laudable legalistic constructs and acknowledged importance of selecting candidates through primaries, the party is not devoid of internal crisis; it has in fact been riddled with an avalanche and tales of conflicts and litigations accruing from the gap between theory and practice. In 2003, internal conflict in the PDP revolved majorly around Obasanjo’s second term bid and his hegemonic control over the party structures. The summary of candidate
imposition was given by Elischer (2008) thus:

In order to get the PDP aligned state governors to support his renewed candidacy in 2003, Obasanjo and his then-ally Atiku promised all PDP governors to free them of intra-party opposition to their renewed bid for power irrespective of the various legal suits leveled against them. Eventually Obasanjo secured his second nomination and all governors were returned as PDP candidates.

Kura (2011) further asserted that the 2006 primaries which preceded the 2007 elections were also marred by resultant chaos and internal crisis. Events in the 2007 elections revolved around Obasanjo’s third term presidential ambition, Atiku’s presidential ambition, Yar’Adua’s consequent selection and other cases of intra-party rifts. Within these unfolding events, candidate imposition and political sabotage were clearly evident. Obasanjo, who was at the time president and towards the end of his presidential tenure declared the election a do-or-die affair, which was in relation to his third term ambition. Alumona and Obianyo (2014) stated that Atiku Abubakar used the People’s Democratic Movement (PDM) as his formidable political machine to ensure the victory and defeat of certain candidates within the party and also to plot the nullification of Obasanjo’s third term presidential ambition. In retaliation, Obasanjo sabotaged Atiku and his supporter’s registration, forcing Atiku’s defection to the Action Congress (AC), later Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), to pursue his presidential candidate. Following his defection, other members of the party witnessed harassments and forceful withdrawal from the presidential race, which led to the emergence of Umara Musa Yar’Adua as the presidential candidate, which also blossomed into crisis; According to Irem (2006), the process leading to the emergence of Yar’ Adua was not truly democratic because there seemed to be an undemocratic consensus by leaders of the party prior to the convention in his favour.

Other notable series of unconstitutional candidature were also evident in 2011 leading to impositions and substitution of candidates. In Imo gubernatorial race, Mr. Ifeanyi Ararume was replaced with Engineer Ugwu. In Lagos, Hilda Williams who emerged as the winner in the primaries was also replaced with Senator Musiliu Obanikoro. Similarly, in River State, Mr. Rotimi Ameachi was replaced with Mr. Celestine Omehia. The end result was underscored by Kura (2011); disregard for constitutionalism culminated into the absence of party candidates in Rivers and Imo States. Between 2011 and 2015, other cases of escalating intra-party crisis were also recorded; spiraling conflict between the then party chairman; Alhaji Bamanga Tukur and the state governors led to the factionization and later defection of five state governors. Surrounding controversies led to the resignation of Tukur, who was replaced with Adamu Muazu. Within the same period, the then President Goodluck Jonathan’s presidential ambition triggered another form of conflict between him and the Northern members of the party. He subsequently emerged as the party’s sole presidential candidate which irked
other interested members like Sule Lamido. Therefore, upholding institutionalized processes of candidate selection and party primaries in the PDP have been subjected to mere abstraction. The pitiable state of internal democracy consequently resulting to conflicts have been captured by Obi (in Adejumobi, 2011 p.81) when he argued on how the elitist members of the party have seized the instruments of power.

From the foregoing, it could be seen that the PDP had witnessed a large spate of intra party crisis in its sixteen years in power. We now turn to an examination of the resultant implications of such protracted crises not only for the party but also for the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria.

**Implications of Intra-Party Conflicts in Nigeria**

There is no gainsaying intra-party conflicts in the PDP are primarily fuelled by the desire of its political elites to quench an insatiable thirst for political power thus having damaging implications on the political party and country at large. The trend of cross-carpeting, party hopping and member defection borne out of intra-party conflict is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria’s party politics. Mbah (2011) posits that party defection has positioned itself as a permanent feature in the Nigerian democratic experience. This fact is undeniable in Nigeria, having witnessed the spate since the inception of the fourth democratic dispensation in 1999. The rationale for such defections has always revolved around members’ inability to attain their political ambitions in their present party. Against this, members defect to other parties to secure such ambitions and in some cases accommodate the possible thought of returning to their former parties as the case of Mallam Isa Yuguda of Bauchi state. However, pursuance of political ambitions only represents a part of the rationale for member defections from the Peoples’ Democratic Party; the absence of internal democracy contributes to gale of defections in political parties, which is borne out of unhealthy party feuds in selection of candidates, clash between and among the party executives, which consequently results to intra party tussles which has continued to contribute to the growth of an odious act of party defection. Onyishi (2015) asserted that the internal crisis that riddled the PDP was one of the contributing factors which led to the defection of Mallam Isa Yuguda to the All Nigeria People’s Party, prior to the 2007 elections. Additionally, defection arose out of the rift between Adamu Muazu and Mallam Isa Yuguda; the then governor of Bauchi state; AdamuMuazu frustrated Mallam Isa Yuguda from getting the PDP ticket, which consequently led to his defection to the All Nigeria People’s Party (ANPP). Additionally, between 1999 and 2013, over 13 Senators and 35 members of the House of Representatives were said to have switched to the opposition. The most remarkable case of defection was witnessed prior to the 2015 elections when five PDP governors (Rotimi Amaechi of Rivers; Rabiu Kwankwaso of Kano; Aliyu Magatakada Wammako of Sokoto; Abdulfatah Ahmed of Kwara and ex- Governor Murtala Nyako of
Adamawa) defected to the All Progressives Congress (APC).

Frequent leadership changes within the party also represent another crucial implication of conflicts within the People’s Democratic Party. The point worthy of note is that such change of leadership is not only frequent, but also unconstitutional and goes against the institutional dictates of the party. Since its establishment in 1999 to 2014, the party has had up to fifteen national chairmen (Aziken, 2014), of which only a few had the privilege of completing their tenures. Most PDP chairmen were ousted as a result of internal conflict or rifts with the party hierarchy. Additionally, some of the party chairmen were not even elected, but rather imposed on the party members. Solomon Lar, Barnabas Geremade, Adu Ogbe, Ahmadu Ali, Vincent Ogbulafor, Okwesilieze Nwodo, Haliru Muhammed Bello, Bamanga Tukur, have all led the party and have been removed as a result to conflictual occurrences. The main crux is that none of the changes was orderly, open, free, independent or in tandem with the wishes of the party majority, but rather in line with the whims and caprices of the party elites, particularly the presidency.

Cumulatively, it is incontrovertible from the foregoing submissions that internal crises within the PDP have yielded nothing but odious cases of defection to other “peaceful” and prospective parties, by members of the PDP, too many leadership changes not borne out of democratic elements and also resultant factionalization, all of which resulted to the defeat of the party in the 2015 elections. Aside the presidential election, gubernatorial and other primaries across various states were mishandled by the party leaders, who favoured their anointed candidates. Party elders such as Ibrahim Shekarau and Aminu Wali were alleged to have contributed to the defeat of the PDP by imposing candidates for elective offices in Kano state. In essence, conflict within the party produced two end results which finally led to the defeat of the party; due to internal wrangling, proper coordination of the party in relation to campaign and other factors could not be achieved; also certain members of the party became disillusioned and expressed their discontent through defecting to the All Progressives Congress.

Proliferation of political parties is also seen as the end product of intra-party crisis in the People’s Democratic Party. Whereas it may be a positive dimension for members who cannot actualize their political ambitions within a political party to defect to or form another political party, Akindele (2011) underscored the negative implications by stating that party members, realizing their constitutional right to form other political parties culminates into their unwillingness to come to grips with the problems inherent in their present party or find amicable grounds of solving those problems.

**Conclusion**

This work essentially underscores how the processes of candidate selection and party primaries in the People’s Democratic Party have culminated to internal crisis within the party, and the subsequent implications of such crisis on the country’s democracy. In an effort to achieve this, the study outlined the legal and constitutional framework of
the People’s Democratic Party with regard to internal party democracy. It was discovered that lack of synergy between the parties’ laid down rules, legal framework and institutional designs, with actually practices, borne out of the pursuance of personal interests are one of the major factors that resulted to protracted intra-party conflicts within the People’s Democratic Party. Rather than ensure proper adherence to the legal frameworks guiding the party, such as the 1999 constitution, the Constitution of the PDP and the laid rules in the Electoral Act, candidates were largely selected by imposing them on party members and substitution of certain names with others.

To discover the reasons behind intra-party conflicts in the PDP, and also to understand the theoretical constructs guiding such occurrences, the paper adopted the realistic group conflict theory. The use of the theory enable the exposition of how internal conflicts within the party arose out of the tussle to control limited resources, influence and power within the political party, which set party members in fierce competition with one another and bred hostilities and conflicts. Cumulatively, these resulted to massive defections to other political parties, factionalization within the party, distrust among party members, proliferation of political parties in the country, and the consequent defeat of the party in the 2015 elections.

In line with the above, this paper established that those legal and institutional frameworks carved to guide the party activities are nothing but mere abstractions. In reality, selection of candidates is not done through outcomes from party primaries but through the principle of nepotism, master-servant relationship, continuum of loyalty of the candidates among other factors. This in essence translates to the fact that the People’s Democratic Party, which was expected to promote the tenets of democracy, had fallen short of ensuring that such goal is achieved. In a sense therefore, portraying the political party as a bridging gap between the government and the people, through the promotion of accountability, democracy, good governance, among other factors, is not an accurate depiction.

Intra-party crisis has been seen as a grave impediment to democratic sustainability in Nigeria. It is therefore necessary to pay critical attention to the institutionalization political parties in Nigeria; political parties should be restructured not only as an avenue through which power is attained but also as that which is capable of mediating, reconciling and structuring opposing forces of societal interests within and outside it to attain democratic goal. This translates to the need to have effective leadership devoid of elitist control, internal democracy, strong ideology and development.

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