

The Contradictions of “Party Supremacy”: Lessons from Nigeria’s Eighth National Assembly

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Abstract

As one of the critical elements of democracy, a functional political party plays major roles in the political process of a state. One such role is the provision of a platform by which its members emerge as elected officials in government. A critical dimension of Nigeria’s democratic experience in the Fourth Republic is the issue of conflict of interests among party oligarchies and party members elected to political office. This article attempts to interrogate the causal factors of this development by analysing the triggers of divergences within political parties whose members supposedly share similar ideological leanings. Specifically, the article considers the causes and effects of the issues thrown up in the aftermath of the emergence processes of the principal officers in the two chambers of parliament of the eighth National Assembly. This it does in the context of the normative interpretation of “party supremacy”. As samples, we isolate three cases, after which the qualitative method is employed to elaborate on the data gathered from secondary sources.

Keywords: National Assembly; democracy; Fourth Republic; House of Representatives; interests; political party; Nigeria; Senate

Introduction

Prior to the commencement of the Fourth Republic, Nigeria’s political terrain was characterised by military dictatorships. For most of the period, the military presented the illusion of democracy without any concrete commitment to realising it. The political environment was typified by military coups and truncated democratic transition programmes such as the Babangida and the Abacha military regimes’ transition programmes. The consequences of the wanton disregard of the people’s will, which is sometimes in response to the people’s wish (George, Amujo and Cornelius 2012, 47), are the absence of democratic structures and institutions, and the undemocratic nature

of the political culture, socialisation and behaviour that has pervaded the polity. In a significant sense, the Nigerian political elite was prevented from imbibing and becoming accustomed to the principles and practices of democracy partly because of the lack of opportunity to learn from the mistakes of the previous civilian administrations. In retrospect, the appointment of civilians to the government by military dictators and, indeed, the election of civilians to government under Babangida's contrived diarchy did not provide the enabling environment necessary to inculcating and developing a democratic ethos. As a result, the exclusionist practices of the Nigerian military fed into the system created by the pseudo-democratic arrangements of the post-1999 era. The fundamental problems with the major institutions of democracy were evident from the beginning of the Fourth Republic. A critical pointer to the problem of a disconnection between the theory and the practice of democracy is the manner in which the political parties jostled for power. Historically, the process of party formation in Nigeria is embedded in the ethno-regional power-bloc dynamics (Sklar 1963, 87–140). Nigeria's political parties therefore emerge as the creations of cults of powerful and rich personalities (Amoda 2010) who quite often invoke ethno-regional sentiments to assert their dominance and control over the parties. The Nigerian scenario can be captured in this way:

From the point of view of their formation the classes of leaders and inner circles can be divided into several kinds. No doubt the simplest is to be seen in the *camarilla*, a small group which makes use of close personal solidarity as a means of establishing and retaining its influence. Sometimes it takes the form of a clique grouped around an influential leader: this leader's retinue has a monopoly of the positions of leadership and takes on the characteristics of an oligarchy. (Duverger 1965, 152)

In the Fourth Republic, this is exemplified by the formation of the initial three political parties, namely: the Alliance for Democracy (AD), the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) and the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP). It is worth reiterating that Sklar's (1963) position on ethno-regional power-bloc dynamics played out in AD's participation in the 1999 transition to democracy programme. As the dominant party in the south-west, the departing military government of Abdulsalami Abubakar was committed to AD's participation in the electoral process. Even though the AD did not meet the statutory requirements of party registration as stipulated in the 1999 Constitution, the government had to concede some ground in order to avoid the consequences of a presumed alienation or marginalisation of the south-west in the political process. Despite the various alignments, mergers, realignments and reformations of political parties witnessed since the commencement of the Fourth Republic, the overarching influences and dominance of powerful individuals rather than that of the card-carrying members loom large in the determination of policy directions for political parties, so much so that political parties are crafted into tools through which the oligarchs promote and protect their interests.

This article focuses on the consequences of conflicting interests between the party oligarchy and members elected on the platform of the party. It is a discourse on how the oligarchy in the new ruling party—the All Progressives Congress (APC)—was unable to exercise its authority over its elected members in respect of the party’s position regarding the choice of principal officers of the eighth National Assembly. The analysis is based on the normative narrative of party supremacy and its linkages to parliamentary autonomy under the presidential system of government. This provides the basis for engaging with some of the scenarios of clashes of interests between political parties and their supposed beneficiaries in government, with the conditions in the eighth National Assembly serving as the point of departure. At the level of theory, Robert Dahl’s (1961) theory of community power is applied to give bite to the existence of power contestations in any political community. The article then describes the character of political partisanship in Nigeria. It arrives at the conclusion that, while the normative philosophy of party supremacy is an ideal, the basis of party formation must be revolutionised in order for the system to be able to subsume the personal interests of individuals or groups (members of the party) within the overall interests of the party.

Framework of Analysis: Philosophy of Party Supremacy

The practice of democracy has undergone various evolutionary processes since ancient times. Etymologically, direct democracy as practised in ancient Greece is regarded as the first attempt to devise a fair, free and just means of creating political offices (Qvortrup 2013). Subsequently, there was a radical transformation from direct democracy to representative democracy, partly because of the impact of logistical challenges on the effective practice of democratic governance. By the eighteenth century, the introduction of platforms for political aspirants had become one of the defining characteristics of democracy (Hoadley 1986). The invention of political parties as the platform for contesting political offices was significant to the extent that political aspirants could be systematically grouped on the basis of ideological persuasions. Accordingly,

the term “party” presupposes that among the individual components of the party there should exist a harmonious direction of wills towards identical objectives and practical aims. (Michels 1968, 341)

In effect, the parties provide the opportunities for aspirants to benefit from the constellation of ideas that congregate for the purposes of seeking and gaining political power. As Elischer (2013, 11) rightly submits, political parties

aggregate the interest of their respective populations and, in doing so, structure the popular vote; they integrate and mobilize the citizenry; and they are in charge of recruiting the national political leadership.

In Suttner’s (2003, 14–15) view, however, the party’s relevance ends with the recruitment responsibility, since “once there have been elections, the elected leaders are

on centre-stage and the membership and the masses in general are expected to step back”.

Upon gaining political power, the aspirant political representative is confronted with the various deliverables expected of the office. Often, the attempts to achieve the deliverables produce conflicting outcomes because of the contending interests they are made to serve. First, the elected officials are the parties’ representatives in government and therefore they are meant to serve the interests of the nation, ostensibly by actualising the action plans codified in the party manifesto. Secondly, the elected officials would have become the representatives of certain constituencies (depending on the system of government in practice, which also determines the arms of government they are made to serve). However, a political party may not have majority support from some of the constituencies its elected officials are made to serve, which could mean a lack of faith on the part of the affected constituencies in the letter of the party’s manifesto; as a result, the impossibility of serving the constituencies’ interests arises. Finally, an elected official would probably have personal political interests (especially political ambitions) that may sometimes conflict with the interests of the party through which the official was elected to office.

All three sources of interest aggregation have means by which they can exert their power and influence. While a constituency can exercise its power of recall when an elected representative is presumed ineffective in protecting its interests, the political party has the power to suspend the representative’s membership or expel them, depending on the severity of the offence. Lastly, the elected party member can resign their membership of the party through which the election was won and “cross the carpet” to a suitable political party, yet retain their position in government (which means the loss of a political position for the party). However, it is possible to prevent “party-hopping” by restricting “the capacity of members to change parties once elected, using ‘anti-hopping’ provisions in countries such as India, Brazil and Thailand” (Reilly, Nordlund and Newman 2008, 6).

The nature of the relationship between the elected representative and the political party upon which platform political power was achieved is therefore relatively salient. The stark reality, as pointed out by Suttner (2003, 15), is that after elections, “the input and importance of the party and its membership is downgraded”. The reason for the reduced influence of the parties in the post-election period is that ‘parties exhibit deficiencies that undermine their ability to deliver the foundation upon which representative politics depends’ (Reilly, Nordlund and Newman 2008, 2).

Indeed, the nature of this relationship has generated one of the most contentious reactions in the practice of substantive democracy in Nigeria. It has at various times also tested the resilience and veracity of Nigeria’s justice system. The relationship raises the issue of where power lies when it concerns the conduct of elected representatives vis-à-vis the political parties upon whose platform they were elected. Does the representative

dictate expectations and demands to the party? Or does the party determine the fate of the representative according to the representative's conduct in government, despite their having won an election? In effect, which of the interests supersedes the other in the case of a clash of interests?

In the practice of party politics, there has been a growing emphasis on the ideal of 'party supremacy' in the relationship between the political party and several other actors regarding governance processes and, more particularly, the conduct of party members holding political office. Party supremacy implies the idea of an overbearing influence on the conduct of regular card-carrying members of the party, and also on representatives elected on the platform of the political party as a consequence of the party's role as the conduit between the aspirant politician and the public office. In this respect:

The electoral system of the State seems to exercise a certain influence upon the oligarchic nature of party leadership and the formation of "inner circles". In so far as no candidate has a chance of being elected without the approbation of the committees of the party, its leaders play an essential part in the selection of future parliamentary representatives: they are nominated by the inner circle. (Duverger 1965, 151)

The logic is that the political party represents the aggregate interests of all its members, among which the elected representative is included and, therefore, will-enforcement must be the basis of the party's collective decisions. A counter-argument resonates on the responsibilities required of the party representative in government, who after assumption of office must represent the interests of all—and "all" would include a section of the electorate that may not have voted for the candidate or the party, as the case may be. While the representative may be compelled to support and initiate policies on the basis of the party's manifestoes (in theory, an election is won partly on the basis of the acceptance of the party manifesto by the majority of the electorates), the representative may nevertheless decide to further their personal interests, which may contrast or be in conflict with the party's.

In theory, the concept of party supremacy is the ideal for democratic political systems, while the possibility of its actualisation is remote because of the dimension of power struggle attached to it. The terrain of partisan politics is particularly created for power contestations where survival is reserved for the most powerful actors. In reference to Max Weber's works, Sadan's (1997, 35) definition of power as "the probability that an actor within a social relationship would be in a position to carry out his will despite resistance to it" adequately describes the dynamics of the relationships between contending actors in a political party. Essentially, the prize for winning is reasonably high (power acquisition and retention), which encourages all manner of relationships, such as coalitions and defections that characterise most political environments.

The structure and processes of the presidential system of government seemingly lack the capacity to ensure “party supremacy” in the relationship between the leaders of the party (who ostensibly represent the party position) and the party’s representatives in parliament. The notion of parliamentary autonomy as a standard in the presidential system of government gives expression to the attitude of parliamentarians towards other political actors. On the basis of the notion of parliamentary autonomy, parliamentarians are quick to extend the liberty and relative independence they enjoy in the relationship with the other arms of government to the relationships with their political parties. Understandably, political parties are averse to relationships that shield them from controlling and manipulating their members in government, especially in the parliament where bloc support or opposition may be critical to the acquisition and retention of political power, and also to the policy direction of government.

The theory of community power as articulated by Robert Dahl (1961) provides an apt understanding of the relationship between the political party and its card-carrying members in parliament. According to the theory, “power is exercised in order to cause those who are subject to it to follow the private preferences of those who possess the power” (Sadan 1997, 36). The focus on the pluralistic dimension of the understanding of power as against emphasis on the elite (in this case, members of the oligarchy) as the only source of exercising power presents the members of parliament as a virile power bloc. With the existence of numerous power centres in a political party, the protection of the party’s interests becomes jeopardised.

The interests of political parties in actual governance issues never wane with triumphs in elections; on the contrary, the interests become stronger and most visible. In their efforts to consolidate their hold on power and determine policy directions, political parties strategise to play central roles in the activities of their representatives in government. This is so because political parties are classic examples of organisations and, as Michels (1968, 15) notes, “he who says ‘organisation’, says oligarchy.” Accordingly,

the leadership of parties tends naturally to assume oligarchic form. A veritable “ruling class” comes into being that is more or less closed; it is an ‘inner circle’ into which it is difficult to penetrate. (Duverger 1965, 151)

In reference to Nigeria:

The Constitution allows both for monopoly of decision making and democratic structure of decision making in the internal matters for what is the case in the internal operations of political parties depends on how formation of parties are funded; the constitution does not prohibit sole proprietorship of parties or mandate collective proprietorship of the same. (Amoda 2010, np)

Therefore, it may be impossible not to acquiesce in the dictates of the powerful elites in oligarchic settings, which a political party represents. This is essentially because, while the representatives may attempt to pursue agendas under the guise of constituency interests, the top hierarchy of political parties are equally well positioned to protect vested interests that are presented as the interests of the political party as a whole. In general, Duverger asserts:

The distinction between parliamentary representatives and party leaders corresponds to that between electors and members of the party: the members of parliament (and, to generalize, the 'elected representatives', national and local) represent the electorate, the leaders are the heads of the party community. The problem of their reciprocal relations is of great importance: democracy requires that parliamentary representatives should take precedence over party leaders and the members of the electorate over the members of the party, since the electors constitute a larger group than party members, who are moreover included in it. In practice the opposite often takes place: in many parties there can be seen a tendency of party leaders to give orders to the parliamentary representatives in the name of the militant members. This domination of the party over its elected representatives constitutes a form of oligarchy that might be termed "external" by comparison with the oligarchic nature of leaders within the community of party members. (Duverger 1965, 182)

What is therefore essential as a moderating tool in the relationship between a political party and its elected members in government is the constitution of the country as interpreted by the courts. Although the constitution may have its flaws, it is nevertheless the only operating element through which limitations can be imposed on the party and through which the party members' fundamental human rights can be protected. This is even more so because the party machinery for guaranteeing civil relationships may be compromised by the party oligarchy. Indeed, there are no 'quick fixes' to the relationship between the party representatives in government and the party. The issue of supremacy between the party and its elected members depends largely on the internal workings of the party as outlined by the party oligarchy. In this respect, "[d]omination over the parliamentary representatives by the party is the result of the general structure of the party and of its general orientation much more than of particular technical devices" (Duverger 1965, 182). To this extent, the constitution is the only neutral instrument for moderating relationships.

By implication, therefore, domination and supremacy lie in the realm of power configuration in the party. In practice,

a party is neither a social unity nor an economic unity. It is based upon its program. In theory this program may be the expression of the interests of a particular class. (Michels 1968, 351)

However, the overall interests of the party (as an inclusive organisation), as assented to and acquiesced in by the majority of the members, should dominate the core of the representatives' exertions while the party is in government.

Nigeria's Political Arena as the Terrain of Dissonances

The Fourth Republic is noted for its flurry of dramatic twists and turns involving the party leadership and individual members over clashes of interests, which sometimes warrant legal interpretations by the highest court in the land, the Supreme Court. In most cases, the major challenge stems from the interpretation of the role of the party, on the one hand, and the rights and duties of various categories of membership, on the other. A critical assessment of a political party indicates that:

The party, regarded as an entity, as a piece of mechanism, is not necessarily identifiable with the totality of its members, and still less so with the class to which these belong. The party is created as a means to secure an end. Having, however, become an end in itself, endowed with aims and interests of its own, it undergoes detachment, from the teleological point of view, from the class which it represents. (Michels 1968, 353)

The illogic of similar ideological leanings being a strength of a political party is brutally exposed when there are clashes of interests between the party oligarchy and the representatives in government; the three cases presented below adequately capture this scenario.

Aso-Rock Saga: The Atiku Abubakar Case

This particular case involved a clash of interests between the party and its second-highest representative in government, the Vice-President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999–2007). President Olusegun Obasanjo and Vice-President Atiku Abubakar were elected to office in the first general elections of the Fourth Republic. The duo were re-elected into office for another four-year term in 2003. Towards the end of the reign of their administration, there emerged discontent between the president and the vice-president. A visible element of the discontent was the vice-president's ambition of seeking election to the office of the president after the expiration of the joint ticket with Obasanjo in 2007. President Obasanjo distanced himself from the presidential ambition of his vice-president and, indeed, set out to frustrate that ambition (Oyimadu 2015).

By all indications, President Obasanjo not only superintended over the country, he was arguably the most powerful member of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) oligarchy. It was evident that 'in the PDP, the fear of Obasanjo is the beginning of wisdom' (Ganago 2003). President Obasanjo, with the PDP leadership in tow, did not support Vice-President Abubakar from the time he made public his ambition of seeking election to the presidency; accordingly, multiple obstacles were thrown in his path (Ibrahim 2007, 5). Initially undeterred by this negative development, Abubakar fought back

determinedly as a member of the PDP until the battle was lost to the unyielding albatross. Vice-President Abubakar then took the unprecedented step of dumping the party, upon which he won the joint ticket and pitched tent with an opposition party, the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) (Balogun 2009, 206). For this daring political move, the PDP insisted that Abubakar had to vacate his seat as the vice-president of Nigeria, since he had assumed the position on the platform provided by the PDP. Vice-President Abubakar, on the other hand, hung the legality of his action on the relevant provisions of the 1999 Constitution. In particular, he sought protection against the declaration of his office as vacant under section 142(2) of the Constitution, which states:

The provisions of this Part of this Chapter relating to qualification for election, tenure of office, disqualification, declaration of assets and liabilities and oaths of President shall apply in relation to the office of Vice-President if the candidate for an election to the office of who nominated him as such associate is duly elected as President in accordance with the provisions of aforesaid.

Both parties—the vice-president and the PDP—sought clarification of the legal position from the various courts in the land. In a landmark judgment, the Supreme Court affirmed Vice-President Abubakar’s rights to be a member of the opposition party, ACN, while retaining his official position as the vice-president in a PDP-led government. On the basis of the judgment, he contested the presidential election on the platform of the ACN, while serving as the vice-president under the PDP government.

In the main, this was a classic case of clash of interests between the party oligarchy and an elected representative of the party, the vice-president. Indeed, the judgment of the Supreme Court on the matter calls into question the philosophy of party supremacy in the relationship between a political party and the actions of an elected party member in government. The judgment is suggestive of the notion that the philosophy of party supremacy is merely a moral norm that may not apply in the face of real political brinkmanship.

Rivers of Discontent: The Rotimi Amaechi Case

The PDP had been in government in Rivers State, South-South Region of Nigeria, since 1999. The 2007 gubernatorial election in Rivers State presented a classic case of dissonance among the top hierarchy of the PDP at the state level. Preparatory to the governorship election of April 2007, the Rivers State chapter of the PDP held its primary election in December 2006 (Ajayi 2006). The outgoing Speaker of the State House of Assembly, Hon Rotimi Amaechi, won the election. As required by the law governing elections as enshrined in the Electoral Act, 2010, section 87(1), his name was forwarded to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as the governorship candidate of the PDP in the forthcoming governorship election of 13 April 2007, on 14 December 2006. However, on 2 February 2007, the PDP withdrew his name from INEC and substituted it with the name of Chris Omehia (who had not participated in the primary election). With that act, Omehia was granted leave by the party to contest the

governorship election of Rivers State on the platform of the PDP. The PDP won the election and Omehia was declared the governor and sworn into office on 29 May 2007 (Ogunye 2013).

Rather than submit to a party decision, Amaechi focused on exercising his fundamental human rights, which he believed had been severely trampled upon by the party oligarchy through the act of withdrawing his name. That summary act prevented him from being the front-runner in the state gubernatorial election, despite having won the party primary. He took the matter to court, and on the strength of the merits of his case, the Supreme Court described Omehia as the usurper and Amaechi as the rightful owner of the mandate. Subsequently, the Supreme Court directed the appropriate institutions to remove Omehia from office and to swear in Amaechi as the governor (Sagay 2008).

In effect, Amaechi defied the party oligarchy and pursued his cause to a logical conclusion. In the thinking of the Supreme Court, it is the party that won the state election, and that same party had freely and fairly given the mandate of representation to Amaechi during the primary election; therefore, Amaechi was the duly elected person in the State governorship election.

As surmised by Justice Oguntade:

Having held as I did that the name of Amaechi was not substituted as provided by law, the consequence is that he was the candidate of the PDP for whom the party campaigned in the April 2007 elections and not Omehia and since PDP was declared to have won the elections, Amaechi must be deemed the candidate that won the election for the PDP. In the eyes of the law, Omehia was never a candidate in the election, much less winner. I accordingly declared Amaechi the person entitled to be the Governor of Rivers State.

The Confluence Impasse: The John Faleke Case

Kogi State is located in the North-Central zone of Nigeria. It is referred to as the confluence state because the two major rivers in Nigeria, the Niger and the Benue, meet at Lokoja, Kogi's capital city. Like some other states in Nigeria, Kogi state's gubernatorial election no longer falls on the date earmarked by the INEC for holding elections throughout the Federation as a result of judicial decisions concerning the outcome of previous elections.

The 2015 gubernatorial election in the state was billed for 21 November 2015. Prior to the election date, the political parties had submitted the names of their candidates (the governorship candidate and the running mate) to the electoral body —INEC— as required by the law governing the conduct of elections, as enshrined in the Electoral Act, 2010, section 87(1). For this purpose, the APC had submitted the names of Abubakar Audu and John Faleke as both the governorship and the deputy governorship candidates respectively. In the course of the elections, Abubakar Audu died, prompting INEC to suspend the voting exercise and declare the election process inconclusive

(Adebayo 2015). INEC eventually declared the result of the election on the basis of the vote cast prior to Audu's death and also fixed a date for the conclusion of the voting exercise. As anticipated, INEC requested the APC to present the name of a new gubernatorial candidate for the supplementary election that would complete the exercise on 5 December 2015 (Vanguard 2015). The need to present a new candidate pitched the APC oligarchy against the former deputy gubernatorial candidate, John Faleke (Tukur 2015b).

Even while it appeared glaring that the party could no longer lose the election based on the votes already counted, the APC oligarchy was determined to avoid any form of legal tussle that might challenge the status of the choice of the new candidate to complete the electoral process. Based on the need to protect its own interests, the APC chose to present the first runner-up to late Abubakar Audu during the primary elections of the party, Yahaya Bello, as the gubernatorial candidate to complete the election process (Andrew and Tijani 2015). Faleke rejected the party's decision and claimed to be the rightful candidate who should conclude the electoral process, having been the deputy gubernatorial candidate till INEC halted the voting process. In order to claim the candidacy, Faleke sought support in the courts, where his case was dismissed and the party position was upheld (Soniya and Jimoh 2016).

In this instance, the philosophy of party supremacy was by implication invoked by the courts in reaching a judgment. But, in reality, the Court had based its judgment on a legality rather than on the basis of the relationship between the party and one of its members. In a leading judgment, Justice Kekere-Ekun averred:

This is a simple law. Since the election had not been completed and the final results issued by the electoral body, Faleke, as a running mate, cannot claim victory in the election. (*Punch* 2016)

It is apparent, however, that party member Faleke was equally focused on advancing his own interests, which on this occasion were consumed by the interests of the oligarchy of the APC.

Party Supremacy and Nigeria's Eighth National Assembly

Nigeria's Fourth Republic, which commenced on 29 May 1999 with the inauguration of the Olusegun Obasanjo government, is a presidential system of government, with two legislative houses, the House of Representatives and the Senate, together called the National Assembly. The House of Representatives is made up of 360 elected members representing every state of the Federation, on the basis of proportional representation for each state, and two members representing Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory. The Senate is composed of 109 members, made up of an elected member from each of the equally delineated three senatorial zones of each of the 36 states of the Federation and

one member from Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory (Federal Republic of Nigeria, National Assembly).

The members are each elected on the platforms of the registered political parties. The process was such that the representatives had won the parties' primary elections prior to the general elections and had their names submitted to INEC for screening, among other legal requirements, for the purposes of standing for election on their parties' platforms.

In effect, therefore, the Nigerian party system does not accommodate a system of independent candidacy. In each of the legislative houses, however, there are series of statutory leadership positions that are occupied by the principal officers for the smooth running of legislative responsibilities. For the Senate, the positions are President, Deputy, Majority Leader, Minority Leader, Chief Whip, Minority Whip, Deputy Majority Whip, Deputy Minority Whip, Deputy Minority Leader, Deputy Chief Whip and Deputy Minority Whip. The same applies in the House of Representatives, except for the nomenclature of the presiding officer and the deputy, in this case called Speaker and Deputy Speaker respectively.

For the first time since the commencement of the Fourth Republic, the PDP lost the presidential elections, as well as the majority of seats in both houses of the National Assembly. The APC emerged on the Nigerian political terrain in 2014 as a 'mega-party' that acted as an umbrella party for all hitherto major opposition parties. The party is a creation of multiple shades of opinions, interests, philosophies and ideologies that litter Nigeria's political terrain. In the 2015 general elections, the APC swept the boards. Besides winning the presidential elections, the party won the majority of seats in both houses of parliament, in addition to winning the gubernatorial elections in most states of the Federation, and also winning majority seats in most houses of the state assemblies. It was only a matter of time, however, before the "bottom fell out" of the "unholy" alliance of the "mega-party". This came at the time of sharing the "spoils" of political office, especially at the level of the legislature (Haastrup 2015).

In accordance with the provisions of section 50(1) of the 1999 Constitution, the offices of the leadership positions in the legislature are filled through democratic processes that involve elections among members of the parties represented in the legislature. Arising from the experiences of the Fourth Republic, which commenced on 29 May 1999, there has been an informal arrangement within the legislature which provides that top leadership positions are reserved for contests in the party which holds the majority of seats, while the minority party or parties equally contest for positions earmarked for minority leadership. Customarily, the political party adopts its candidates, which in most cases receive the support of the majority members of parliament and therefore become elected. According to the APC:

The party duly met and conducted a straw poll and clear candidates emerged for the posts of Senate President, Deputy Senate President and Speaker of the House of Representatives supported by a majority of all Senators-elect and members-elect of the House of Representatives. (*Premium Times* 2015)

The APC had expected that ‘All National Assembly members-elect who emerged on the platform of the party are bound by that decision’ (*Premium Times* 2015). In the thinking of the party leadership, “[t]he party is supreme and its interest is superior to that of its individual members” (*Premium Times* June 2015). But in defiance of the party’s position and in preference to individual and group interests, a section of the APC members-elect in the National Assembly ostensibly collaborated with members of the main opposition party, the PDP, to elect their preferred candidates into the principal positions in the two houses of the legislature. Indeed, the ideal of party supremacy was completely disregarded in the election of the leaders of the eighth National Assembly. According to the APC, “[t]here can be no higher level of treachery, disloyalty, insincerity within any party” (*Premium Times* June 2015).

House of Representatives

The elections for the principal offices of the House of Representatives took place on 9 June 2015 amid discontent and disagreements among members. In total disregard of the instructions of the party leadership, and in their presumed determination to assert their independence and be the true representatives of the people who had elected them to office, the majority of the members decided to defy the party directives and vote on the basis of prearranged agreements which served political interests that excluded the party leadership.

The national executive of the party had organised a ‘primary’ election, prior to the election slated for the floor of the House of Representatives to select the party’s choice for the position of Speaker of the House of Representatives. For the Speaker position, Hon Femi Gbajabiamila, representing Surulere Federal Constituency, was declared the winner, having won the election (Tukur 2015a). It was, however, clear that the party was not united about the process, hence the disagreement from a faction of the party, which maintained that the election of principal officers of the House of Representatives should take place on the floor of the House of Representatives (Abuh 2015). In effect, the stage became set for clashes of interests on the floor of the House of Representatives, because it had become apparent that the election process for the position of Speaker would not be a mere validation of the “candidate” of the party oligarchy.

As anticipated, the election process was a demonstration of the contrasting political differences at play. Indeed, in clear defiance of the dictates of the party, Hon Yakubu Dogara won a majority of the votes and was duly sworn in as the Speaker of the House of Representatives. In furtherance of the defiance of a faction of the honourable members of the House of Representatives, the Speaker refused to respect the wishes of

the party on elections for the following positions: House Leader, Deputy Leader, Chief Whip and Deputy Chief Whip (Aziken and Agbakwuru 2015). In the end, the officers for the position emerged from the elections undertaken on the floor of the House of Representatives. By this act, the members of the House of Representatives exposed the limited control that the party had on elected members. By implication, therefore, once elected, the interests of the political party become relegated, while individual and group interests (religion, ethnicity, etc.) take central position in the calculations of Nigeria's political representatives.

The Senate

The Senate chamber was the first to play host to the incidence of total disregard for party dictates on the day of the elections of the principal officers of the National Assembly. The Senate conducted its elections to fill the presidency position, with Senator Bukola Saraki as the only nominee. In the absence of a contender, Senator Saraki was elected unopposed and duly sworn in. This is a clear violation of the instruction of the APC leadership, which had earlier nominated Senator Ahmed Lawan through a straw poll for the top job. The party also nominated Senator George Akume as the Deputy Senate President, Akume having emerged as first runner-up in an election in which the Saraki faction refused to participate (Agbakwuru 2015).

The bigger twist in the Senate's political drama involved the choice of Deputy Senate President. Taking advantage of a close affinity with members of the main opposition, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the newly elected Senate President rode on the backing of members of the PDP in the Senate to win the Senate Presidency. For the support provided, the Saraki team ceded the position of the Deputy Senate President to the PDP members in the Senate to the detriment of their party, the APC. In an unprecedented political move, the position of Deputy Senate President was won by the candidate of a minority party, Senator Ike Ekweremadu (who had previously served a two-term, eight-year stint in the position). This action was tantamount to disrespect and disregard of the authority of the APC. It became apparent that the party had merely been used as a conduit to win the elections, after which each individual and group had become consumed by the desire to pursue self-interest without due regard to or respect for the interests of the party.

Outcome

The APC's immediate reaction to the developments in the two chambers of the National Assembly vis-à-vis the party's position on the emergence of new leaders was one of consternation. Regarding the event, the party submitted:

Consequently, the APC leadership is meeting in a bid to re-establish discipline in the party and to mete out the necessary sanctions to all those involved in what is nothing but a monumental act of indiscipline and betrayal to subject the party to ridicule and create obstacles for the new administration. (*Premium Times* 2015)

The development pitched two main factions within the party against each other. It is instructive that the pro-Saraki and pro-Dogara factions are emphatic that their groups had not violated any of the party rules. Indeed, the factions claimed that the process had been democratic and that due process had been followed to the letter.

The party was unable to invoke any of its rules to set up an ad hoc disciplinary committee to prosecute the *dramatis personae* in the saga. The reserved response of the party towards its humiliation is understandable because, from a reading of political currents at the time, any punitive measure from the party would have been counter-productive. By all indications, the affected members' reactions to a punitive measure from the party may negatively affect the party's position and the loyalty the party seems to command across the nation. For instance, if the affected members' reaction to a punitive measure by the party is to "cross the carpet" to another party, it may significantly affect the party's majority status in the National Assembly, and may equally have negative implications for the APC's status at the various levels of party representation across the country. Faced with such a grim reality, the ruling party swallowed its pride and allowed the members occupy the positions they had ostensibly won through democratic processes within the hallowed chambers of the National Assembly.

What has played out in the above instance is an inability to resolve amicably the conflict of interests within the party. Being a conglomeration of various political parties which merged into a mega-party with the sole aim of achieving political power by ousting the PDP from its position as ruling party, the APC became hampered by the many interests struggling for relevance. Some of these interests are even represented by former members of the PDP that defected to the APC camp. As soon as the APC gained political power, the major interests reared their heads in order to remain relevant on the political arena, thus denying the party its traditional characterisation of being a "hierarchical, patronage-based groups whose power lies in the control of nominations" (Masket 2009, 26). Masket (2009, 105) depicts the Nigerian scenario as one in which "career-minded legislators and candidates will build parties if they think they will be useful, and will avoid them if they find them unnecessary or bothersome".

From the interplay of forces that emerged in the course of the saga around political power acquisition, the interests of the electorate did not feature as a dominant consideration. The dominant interests were those of the party oligarchy and of the members in the National Assembly. While the interests of the former concern the consolidation of its political dominance, the latter (both as individuals and as groups) aspire to fulfil their ultimate political ambitions: political power acquisition and retention. By implication, therefore, Nigeria's political terrain affords the established interests of the various political "jobbers" (members of the party oligarchy; elected members of the party) perpetually to override the interests of the critical mass of the people.

Instructive Notes on Partisan Politics in Nigeria

Across the epochs, the Nigerian political terrain is usually enmeshed in conflicts of interests that are sometimes fierce and destructive. The ‘murky waters’ of Nigerian politics is known for tilting towards anomie rather than an arena where politics is defined by fair, free and just processes. The democratic process in the First Republic came to a sudden halt as a result of the wanton disregard for law and order, election rigging, political violence, etc. that characterised the political class at the time (Ojo 2012, 12). The Second Republic had its fair share of uncertainties in the political arena, occasioned by flagrant disregard of the rules of the game (Joseph 1987). The still-born Third Republic was no different. It was characterised by a disregard for law and order, executed through political manoeuvrings and shenanigans that led to the annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential elections purportedly won by late Chief MKO Abiola. The Fourth Republic was meant to usher in a rebirth that would lead to democratic consolidation in Nigeria; so far, the signals indicate a long and tortuous road to “Eldorado”. In summary, the causal factors are found to be deep-rooted in the psyche of the average Nigerian politician. Indeed,

parties have suddenly descended to the level of being used to promote personal and sectional interests at the expense of the collective good especially national integration and development. (Omotola 2009, 628)

In general, the value attached to political power in Nigeria has become sufficiently divorced from the essence of service. We argue that one of the main qualifications for seeking public office is the ability to make sacrifices for the public good; however, the Nigerian situation defies this logic. The focus of attention for public service in Nigeria is the view that “the end justifies the means”. On the basis of the immense wealth and patronage open to public office-holders, the Nigerian political terrain has become an arena for self-serving personalities who are unabashedly committed to self-enrichment and self-aggrandisement. In this regard, a reorientation of the tenets and philosophy of service is required to change attitudes, beliefs and mind sets about the ultimate reasons for seeking public office.

It is also a disturbing commentary on the political environment and ethos that Nigeria’s political class lacks the ideological foundations that could provide the basis for political engagements and galvanise the critical mass of the people to popular participation. Accordingly, “it will seem that Nigerian parties, despite their pretence through party manifestoes, do not have clear cut political ideologies” (Omotola 2009, 627). Faced with concrete ideological leanings (as against the broad concepts of conservatives and progressives), the people would be empowered to separate the wheat from the chaff in determining their political representation. Essentially, the expectations of the teeming electorates are concerned largely with the enthronement of a good-governance regime that would assure them of, inter alia, economic empowerment, security of lives and

properties, the protection of fundamental human rights, affordable and quality healthcare services and reliable infrastructural facilities.

Arguably, all ideological persuasions attempt to achieve these objectives. However, there are various ideological pathways through which the fundamentals of good governance may be achieved. Therefore, it is essential that political parties, and indeed their members, pitch tent with identifiable ideological beliefs. This standard may curtail the ever-shifting positions that lead to unregulated “cross-carpeting” and defections by political office-holders, which present the political class as a set of self-serving parasites that are determined to extract from the commonwealth, under any arrangement, much more than rightly belongs to them.

A related issue is the practice of adversarial politics endorsed by the Nigerian elite through the various constitutions. With the benefit of hindsight, a heterogeneous Nigerian state with cross-cutting segmental cleavages along cultural, ethnic and religious divides may have had the guarantee of political stability, economic development and socio-cultural harmony if the political class had adopted consensus rather than adversarial politics, with its “winner-takes-all” principle. While some parts of the 1999 Constitution provide for proportional representation through the Federal Character Principle, and the political parties adopt the zoning principle in the allocation of political offices, a large proportion of the electorate remains unrepresented after elections. In effect, while there are opportunities to increase representation at the ethnic and religious levels in the zoning system, electoral contests do not provide for such an increase. In order to reverse this trend, representation at the highest level must be made conditional upon critical factors that are germane to the continued corporate existence of Nigeria. Some of these are ethnicity, party affiliation, religious affiliation and gender. The acceptance of adversarial rather than consensus politics on the basis of proportional representation is partly at the core of the disaffection and disharmony among the political parties, and indeed, within the political parties. If parties were to gain positions on the basis of workable proportional representation instead, this may greatly reduce the rancour and bickering exhibited along party lines.

In the final analysis, the situation that arose in determining the principal officers of the eighth National Assembly is an indication of the contradictions underlying Nigeria’s political terrain in the Fourth Republic. Essentially, it points in the direction of clashes of interests between the APC oligarchy and the party’s representatives in government. However, while the party’s representatives continue to have the right to protect their own interests, it is equally important to give due regard to the norm of “party supremacy”. It is therefore the responsibility of stakeholders to seek an acceptable balance between personal or group interests and the interests of the party.

Conclusion

The main argument of this article rests on the necessity for seeking an acceptable balance in the Nigerian political milieu between the interests of the political party and that of the critical actors whose membership created the party. Such a balance would limit the propensity for clashes of interest that often lead to internal crises. In this regard, it is germane for Nigerian political parties to operate within the realms of ideology. It is argued that the broad categorisation of political ideologies into progressive and conservative camps would only continue to breed the intra-party clashes that arise from discordances. In effect, the institutionalisation of ideology is a *sine qua non* for the regulation of relationships within political parties. Thus, Nigerian political parties must at this point concern themselves with establishing viable institutions that would give birth to distinct and identifiable political ideologies. The existence of political ideology would promote the enabling environment required for intra-party harmony and cooperation to flourish, an environment in which rules and regulations would be strictly adhered to. By extension, such an environment would also make it possible to enforce sanctions on party members and office-bearers. Indeed, it is only under such conditions that norms such as “party supremacy” and “parliamentary autonomy” can take pride of place.

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