



Intra-Party Conflicts and Democratic Consolidation in Rivers State: A Study of All Progressives Congress, 2014-2021

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ABSTRACT

This research titled “intraparty conflicts and democratic consolidation in Rivers State: a study of the All Progressives Congress, 2014-2021” examined the challenges that intraparty conflicts posed in the All Progressives Congress and its effect on democratic consolidation in Rivers State. Four objectives which aligned with hypotheses and research questions were adopted to carry out the study. The study adopted secondary data as methods of data collection and content analysis. The Systems Theory by Ludwig von Bertalanffy was adopted as the theoretical framework. Findings revealed among others that the circumvention of party rules, struggle for leadership supremacy leading to political tension and instability were indications of interconnection between intraparty conflicts and democratic consolidation in Rivers State. In line with the findings, the study among others recommended that political party constitutions should be restructured by experts to reflect incontrovertible democratic tenets that would engender democratic consolidation.

Received 10 Nov., 2022; Revised 22 Nov., 2022; Accepted 24 Nov., 2022 © The author(s) 2022.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Intra-party democracy is germane for the guarantee of active participation of the politically involved citizen in the affairs of their parties. This will increase their influence and contribution to the development and survival of such parties (Wilhelm and Karsten, 2011). Political parties as a creation of the constitution provide a simplified means for the operation of modern democracy. The very essence of political parties to the effective practice and survival of representative democracy is emphasized by Rossiter (1960) in his description of parties as the life-wire of democracy. He opined that there cannot be democracy without politics just as there can never be politics without parties. Modern democracy is unthinkable without political parties. Schattschneider in Norris (2005) in his own view concluded that modern democracy in mass society is unworkable without parties. This is because political parties serve as intermediary (agent) between the electorate and the state; they offer voters the opportunity of choice in the leadership recruitment process and also provide order, stability and coherence in the formation of government. Bassey, (2015) opined that political parties are constitutionally formed to facilitate the establishment and consolidation of democratic rule (p.35).

They are the instruments through which democratic process evolves. Their primary responsibilities are to, among other things, recruit and prepare candidates for elections and check the excesses of government policies and programmes by serving as opposition to a ruling party (Bassey, 2015, p.35). Importantly, they are involved in political education of the citizenry, especially in developing countries. In the words of Egobueze (2020), participation in political activities is very phenomenal in democratic consolidation. He stressed that the strength of democratic process lies on the political participation that takes the form of lawful protests, public consultation, town hall meetings with critical stakeholders on political issues, voting for members of the legislature or executive, serving on a jury, to name but a few. The scholar further stressed that the gains of democratic governance are consolidated on periodic elections, amongst other values. Furthermore, Egobueze (2021) opined that political parties are part of the features of democracy and very germane in institutional development. The scholar emphasized that African colonialism led to the birth of political parties that became the vanguards that stimulated the de-colonization process. This indicates that political parties are the bedrock of democracy. Hence, their objectives revolve around seeking political power through collective efforts. Democratic consolidation is therefore built around a strong and effective political activism that employs constitutional and peaceful methods in seeking control over the government through elections. Parties serve as

yardstick for measuring the extent of fragility or otherwise of a democratic system while still offering the opportunity of comparison of good governance among states. Omodia (2010) noted that parties serves variety of purposes which include aggregation of various interests, structuring electoral choices, selection of candidates for elections, coordination of formation and activities of government and organization of legislature.

Tsaro, Egobueze&Nwaoburu (2021) claimed that the application of the concept of internal democracy in the conduct of the business of political parties, particularly with regards to primary elections is inviolable and therefore sacrosanct. They opined that internal democracy operates on the premise of due process, fair play, equity and good conscience in the discharge of duties and obligations to organizations, groups or the society at large. They stressed that within the folds of most political parties in Nigeria, however, internal democracy as a concept seems to be honoured more in the breach as primordial considerations such as avarice, greed, nepotism and outright inordinate ambition have continued to be elevated over and above the wishes of the people. Cases abound today of questionable substitution, disqualification and reversal of nomination of previously screened and cleared candidates by an interplay of party intrigues, naked power display, cultures of impunity and disregard for fair play and internal democracy. Again, Tsaro, Egobueze&Nwaoburu (2021) held:

Democracy like charity, should begin at home and political parties ought to imbibe the concept of democracy internally and not through the back door. Back door democracy will only produce back door exponents, the direct and natural consequence of which is to keep the society perpetually at the back door. Absence of internal democracy in the affairs of political parties robs the society of competent, diligent and transparent leadership as products of unjust and undemocratic leaders can only give what they have. Parties provide the institutional transmission of preferences, engagement and leaving between the government and the citizenry. They co-ordinate at the legislative level and offer a measure of policy coherence in the face of the fractionating temptations of preference cycling. Political parties create democracy and modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties (pp.157-158).

Legal framework exists in most countries which require parties to shape their internal procedures according to democratic procedures and norms that are consistent with the constitution and laws (Wilhelm and Karsten, 2011). The capacity and ability of parties to effectively discharge their responsibilities is dependent on the regulatory environments which is the external laws that governs the operations of parties in the country (constitution) and also by internal party rules and regulations (bye laws of parties) (Norris, 2005). Parties' operations are guided by their rules and regulations which are imbedded in their constitutions. The constitutions spell out the *modus operandi*, the selection process(es) for party flag bearers, party regime change as well as the tenure of office of party officials among others.

Intra-party politics in Nigeria under the period under review was chaotic, problematic, crises-ridden and often bloody. It is politics of war, acrimony, hatred, mudslinging, anarchy, discord, division, disunity, rascality and gangsterism as against that of peace, brotherhood, cooperation, consensus, orderliness and integrity (Oyediran, 1999). Ojukwu and Olaifa (2011) agree that intra-party conflicts are traceable to the failure of parties to adopt openness in their dealings which denies members to participate in the decision making and other processes within the party. The trend is further aggravated by the undue influence of party leaders who would stop at nothing to glorify their wishes above those of others. This they do through the abuse of the laid down procedures and rules of the party as contained in their various constitutions. Political intrigues, manipulation and over bearing influences of money bags in imposing their wishes on the party and lack of internal democracy in conducting intra-party affairs are few cases that provide fertile grounds for growth and nurturing of conflicts within the party. The nature of Nigerian politics which encourages weak institutions and strong individuals has in no small measures promoted abuse of process, disregard for rules of law in very high scale, giving room for the imposition of the 'the rule of self' as against the 'rule of law'. The Nigerian party system however shares the character traits of the Nigerian states.

Intra-party conflicts have become a component part of Nigerian politics, which has resulted in acrimony, war of attrition, problems in coordinating party affairs and internal wrangling within the party (Ojukwu&Olaifa, 2011). It is a considered view of scholars that the collapse of the second republic is linked to internal strife occasioned by the deadly party conflicts as contained in the coup speech of Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu (especially the Action Group crises) which later snowballed into a full-blown political violence that engulfed the Western Region between 1964 and 1965. Tsaro, Egobueze&Nwaoburu (2021) asserted that party democracy is regulated in Sections 221-229 of the 1999 Constitution (As Amended), which provides for making leadership elections compulsory for all parties. The procedures are however often disregarded as political actors like godfathers and other gladiators remain a central figure in internal politics.

Also, when the rules are adhered to, the godfathers and gladiators have means of circumscribing them, influencing the process in order to determine the outcomes in their favour.

They stressed that party politics has been subjected to all forms of democratic strangulation and travesty. Democracy and its towering tenets are being abysmally raped and pejoratively desecrated on the altar of party politics. Party politics is barren of the necessary ingredients of democratic ethos. Consequently, these intra-party hijackers and bandits pride themselves in wielding their political imprimatur of godfatherism and goddess-motherism to deaden the collective voice of their stooges, *inter-alia* party members. Political representation is selfishly handpicked by party warlords against party guidelines and the whims and caprices of the generality of party members. The consequence has retarded developmental growth and crises attraction. There is dire need to urgently jettison the awful narrative to put the State on the right track of true modern democracy. In fact, the gamut of protracted political quagmire in Rivers State has remained a serious cause for sober reflection. It is within the purview of this study to emphasize the need for a collective pragmatic giant stride to ameliorating the imbroglio of intra-party politics in Rivers State. A paradigm shift from the hitherto undemocratic narrative of intra-party businesses is a desideratum (Okonkwo&Unaji, 2016). The scholars averred that since the inception of the present democratic rule in 1999, political party organizations were transformed into a battle field characterized by hatred, enmity, victimization and suspicion resulting from bitter struggles among party members in their quest to achieve public and/or personal interests. The inordinate ambition of some of the party stalwarts has created political conflicts in the polity.

According to the APC official site, the All Progressives Congress was formed in February 2013 as a result of a merger of Nigeria's three biggest opposition parties – the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) – and a faction of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA).

The three political parties organized their conventions and passed resolutions giving the go ahead to forgo their individual identities and merge into one big party, the All Progressives Congress (APC). The parties received approval from the nation's electoral umpire Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) on the 31st of July 2013 to become a political party and subsequently withdrew the operating licenses of the three legacy parties (the ACN, CPC and ANPP).

In November 2013, five serving Governors which include Rotimi Amaechi of Rivers State, Abdulfatah Ahmed of Kwara State, Rabiu Kwankwaso of Kano State, Murtala Nyako of Adamawa State and Aliyu Wamako of Sokoto State along with Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, former Vice President of Nigeria, from the governing PDP defected to the APC. The defection of the then Governor Rotimi Amaechi of Rivers State with some of his supporters was the beginning of a new birth for the All Progressives Congress in Rivers State. The party has been known for its intra-party conflicts since 2014 between Hon. Rotimi Amaechi and Senator Magnus Abe over supremacy of leadership and adoption of candidates. Adakai & Olorunsuwa (2020) claimed that the All Progressive Congress is a true replica of Nigeria's heterogeneous and cantankerous nature, a relatively very new party that emerged as a conjecture of four opposition parties with different political ideologies, programmes and manifestoes. The merger that birthed APC was hurriedly packaged in the year 2013 to provide a formidable challenge to the then ruling PDP. APC has *ab initio*, exhibited characteristics of a crises-infected party that was only buying time to explode.

In view of the above therefore, this study aimed at interrogating the relationship between intra-party conflicts and democratic consolidation with a focal periscope on the All Progressives Congress (APC), 2014-2021.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study also adopted the Systems Theory. Ugben & Egobueze (2021) noted that the theory was propounded by Ludwig von Bertalanffy to analyse biological systems. The theory was later adopted by David Easton in his "*Analysis of Political Life*" in 1965 to study social behaviour and phenomena. He stated that living entities are complex and highly integrated. The heart, lungs, blood digestive track and brain perform their functions in such a way as to keep the animal active. Take away one organ and the animal dies. Damage one organ and the other components of the system alter their functions to compensate and keep the animal active (Mbah, 2011). More so, political system model views political arrangements through inputs and outputs analysis. The inputs into the system include money, support and demands. The outputs therefore, involve the public policies produced by the system. Also, there is a feedback loop response to policies which initiated new demands and so on. The environment involves the people and their diverse needs which may be ecological, biological, personality, social etc. while the political system includes the executive, legislature and judiciary. They are the elected ones to represent the people in the government. However, to ensure stability in the system, the people send in their needs to the political system after some analysis, the system brings out the reply as an output. Then, if the feedback is favourable, the people will uphold their support but when the reverse is the case, the people will withdraw their support hence, the system will collapse.

By a way of application, political party is a part of the political system that is made up of many sub-systems or units which has a decisive socialisation role in the society to participate in electioneering conducts with the purpose to gain control of the seat of government. Any attempt either by a way of misconduct or disarrangement for the sub-systems to function at variance, the entire system is negatively affected or the purpose of its existence becomes a mirage. Intra-party conflicts is therefore one of the ingredients that could hamper the smooth running of the political system in democratic consolidation. This made it to be a fertile training ground for impending politicians. Essentially, the democratic rudiments and ethos are supposedly inculcated in the minds of the politicians in those political parties. Therefore, the proper working of democracy should without reservation stem from and/or be observed in the party activities which the politicians or better still the leaders will undoubtedly exhibit in their party operations. Axiomatically, if the party arrangement is undemocratic in nature, obviously the party politics will correspondingly be characterised by the democratic deficiencies. In Nigeria, the intra-party actions and inputs are so pronounced that election results are decided before the conclusion of a recruitment process or election and if there is a contrary outcome on the proposed outcomes, the participants seek to use economic and political means to manipulate the outcomes. This was quite widespread both at the state and national levels during the elections of 1999, 2003, 2007, 2015 and 2019. The political dispute between the former Minister of Transport, Rt. Hon. Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi and Senator Magnus Abe of Rivers State also cost the political system in disarray. This manifested in intra-party conflicts, cross-carpeting and factional executives that snowballed into dual or multiple executives within the same political party. Therefore, the inference is that political elites are so powerful either as a way to reach out to the masses or by electoral manipulation to gain political power. Political parties focus on the bourgeoisie in terms of articulation and accumulation of interest to the detriment of the system. This unhealthy practice has negatively affected the system in such a manner that a part of the system is affected; automatically the remaining parts are inadvertently involved. This reason is responsible for the constant intra-party conflicts and poor performance that the system faces since its inception in Rivers State. Nonetheless, the issue of democratic consolidation in the state has been grossly hampered starting from intra-party conflicts. The political activity within a particular political party should be checked for democratic contrivance. By extension, the more the parties realise their socialisation role, the more they inculcate the democratic credos to their members. The more they mobilise democratic principles during party primaries, the more the challenges to democratic consolidation in Nigerian political system are resolved. Obah-Akpowoghaha (2013) disclosed that the adoption of the relevant principles, norms and values of democracy in intra-party affairs is necessary to stabilizing the democratic system and preventing it from malfunctioning.

1. SYNOPTIC HISTORICITY OF INTRA-PARTY CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

Adakai&Olorunsuwa (2020) opined that the colonial political legacies that were bequeathed to Nigeria were inundated with confusion, series of conflicts, brute force, violence, subjugation of political subjects as well as trick, threat and tension. Hence, party politics is fashioned after the nature and character of the Nigerian state. Intra-party conflicts in Nigeria dates back to pre-colonial era. Early parties had a fair share of intra-party wrangling. As typified above, the scholars noted that political parties in Nigeria's first republic were modelled after the dominant leader model while the fourth republic are largely reflective of the party of notables model (which Robert Michels 1911 dubbed the iron law of oligarchy) of political parties organisation (Scarrow, 2005). This explains the level of participation of members in the decision making process. This trend no doubt brews intra-party displeasure and conflicts in no small measure as larger percentage of members are left out in the decision making processes.

In the pre-colonial era, the New Nigeria Democratic Party was torn apart by what Ibrahim and Abubakar (2016) called petty jealousy and inability to manage spoil of office. Lack of openness, and autocratic posture of the party leaders coupled with inability to resolve issues led to the formation of Lagos Youth Movement in 1933 (later Nigeria Youth Movement 1936) by displeased members of NNDP. It is to be noted that, the NYM was short-lived principally because of incessant intra party feud in the fold of the party. The ethnic colouration of the party which was promoted to the highest level greatly undermined internal democratic value of the party as it was disintegrated in 1941 by the Ike Akinsanya crisis (Ibrahim & Abubakar (2016). Innocent (2012) quoted in Ibrahim & Abubakar (2016) succinctly captured:

In 1941, the NYM, to its intents and purposes, shed its national character. Nnamdi Azikwe and the Ibo members of the movement together with Samuel Akinsanya and the Ijebu Yoruba left the movement. The reason being that the non-Ijebu Yoruba had supported the victorious candidacy of the Ijaw Ernest Ikoli, to the legislative council over that of Samuel Akinsanya (pp.2-3).

Intra-party conflicts in Nigeria are as old as the Nigerian party politics itself, as it has been traced to NNDP and NYM; the trend continued to thrive in subsequent regional parties. National Council of Nigerian and Cameroun (NCNC) later metamorphosed into National Council of Nigerian Citizens a predominantly Igbo party and the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC), a party that was northern in its formation, ideology and operations. Action Group was a party that grew from EgbeOmoOdua, a pan Yoruba cultural group (Olaniyan 2016).

In the NPC, there were continuous irreconcilable differences between its leader Sir Ahmadu Bello and Mallam Aminu Kano. The latter later moved out of the party to form the Northern Peoples Element (Onyishi in Abubakar&Ibrahim 2016). Action Group was engulfed by bloody and destructive intra-party conflicts that later led to a full blown violence that resulted into declaration of state of emergency in the region (Dedley 1973 cited in Abubakar& Ibrahim 2016). The crisis was a case of lack of trust and confidence between the leader of the party Chief Obafemi Awolowo and his deputy Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola. The latter was expelled from the party on the 20th May, 1962 for anti-party activities and insubordination after he and five regional ministers walked out of the party conference in Jos. He was removed as the Premier of Western Region through a vote of no confidence. Akintola went ahead to form another party, the New Nigeria Democratic Party (NNDP) which was backed by NPC. The new party won almost all elections in the region (Puke, 2010).

The NCNC crisis was kick started on the floor of the Western Region parliament in 1951 when some of its Yoruba members cross-carpeted to AG. They had been brainwashed to dump their party to foreclose the chances of a non-Yoruba man, Nnamdi Azikiwe whose party had won majority seats in the parliament from becoming the Premier of the region. Azikiwe was by this incident forced to relocate to his home (Eastern) region. His home coming created further crises in the Eastern Region's wing of the party (and later nationally) as he forcefully high-jacked the party from Chief Eyo Ita who was the leader of the party in the region. He was aided by other party stalwarts of Igbo extraction as Chief Ita was a non-Igbo of Efik origin (Onyishi, 1998). Apart from this incidence, there were other cases of crises that rocked the NCNC. The failure of the party leaders and NCNC parliamentarians to hold a common view on whether or not the party should continue to support Macpherson constitution further tore the party apart. The crises led to the expulsion of three federal ministers from the party in 1952 while some regional ministers were also expelled from the party in 1953. The crises also led to the dissolution of the Eastern House of Assembly. The expelled ministers floated another party called National Independent Party (NIP) with Eyo Ita as the chairman (Nwosuet 'al 1998). Dr. Kingsley Mbadiwe, one of the national figures of the party broke ranks with Chief Nnamdi Azikiwe. He and other disgruntled elements defected from the party and formed a new political party known as the Democratic Party of Nigeria Citizens (NDNC) which went into alliance with the AG for the 1959 elections (Mbah, 2011).

The Second Republic experience is not any different from the previous situation. The reincarnated UPN in the West was plagued with personality clashes that led to the defection of some of Chief Awolowo's loyalists, such as Adisa Oladosu Akinlola, Anthony Enahoro, Richard Akinjide, and Chief Akin Omoboriowo, all defected from UPN to NPN; in the same vein, due to irreconcilable differences between the then governor of Kano State, Alhaji Abubakar Rimi and the leaders of his party which is factionalised the party member Mallam Aminu Kano and Pa-Michael Imoudu groups. The paradox of party politics in the Second Republic is that intuitional attempt to evolve a party system which would promote stable contest between parties presumably characterized by different programmes manifested in issue-oriented ideologies, which would work towards the integration of the people with the governing of the society, what emerged in practice was transactional politics based on opportunistic and informal networks of politicking replete with intra party factionalism that constantly led to shifting of alliances, a situation which unavoidably supplanted the formal structures of party organization.

The aborted Third Republic had a two party system under the supervision of General Ibrahim Babangida (rtd). The two parties; Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC) had the same structure and objectives. There were pockets of internal crises during their primary elections at various levels across the federation. In spite of the fact that these parties were imposed and supervised by military, they were not without internal crises (Abubakar&Ibrahim, 2016). The SDP was split between late Musa Yar'adua and Babagana Kingibe who strived ceaselessly for the control of the soul of the party. The NRC was equally divided into the Tom Ikimi led Republican Action Committee and NRC Consultative Forum led by Adamu Ciroma and Bamanga Tukur (Olaniyan 2016).

The Fourth Republic came with lots of expectations and high hopes due to long years of military presence in the political arena of the country. The transition was horribly packed and three regionally based parties were bequeathed to the country by General Abdulsalam Abubakar-led junta. The transition programme which was the shortest in the history of the country was climaxed with the inauguration of a democratically elected regime of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo on the 29th of May, 1999. Political gladiators seem to have learned nothing or perhaps very little from the previous precarious intra-party conflicts in the previous republics. The republic was started with three parties viz: People Democratic Party (PDP), All Peoples Party (APP) and later All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) and Alliance for Democracy (AD). The number of the parties grew to 16 in

2003, 25 in 2007, 61, 68 and 91 in 2011, 2015 and 2019 respectively. It is safe to say that intra-party conflicts continue to increase as the number of parties increase in the fourth republic just as Muhammad (2008) captures it that the intra party conflict continue to remain a recurrent and a predominant feature of partisan politics in the Nigeria's Fourth Republic. All the major political parties continued to get imbued by series of crises. The PDP for instance during the first term of Olusegun Obasanjo between 1999 and 2003 had three party chairmen namely Solomon Lar, Barnabas Gemade and Audu Ogbah, but none of them completed their tenure in office due to crises within the party (Onyishi, 2016). Almost immediately after 2003 general election, PDP had been sharply divided into Pro-Atiku and Obasanjo groups. About the same time, the Anambra State chapter of the party was engulfed in a protracted crisis between the governor Dr. Chris Ngige and his godfather Chris Uba who was reported to be Obasanjo's close ally. The crises resulted to the kidnapping and orchestration of forceful resignation of the governor. The party's national chairman, Audu Ogbah had on December 4, 2004 dispatched a letter to the President on the need for him to intervene in the crises. As fallout from the crises, the party chairman who was said to be loyal to the Vice President Alhaji Atiku Abubakar was forced to resign in 2004. Atiku's presidential ambition under the platform of the party was consumed by the crises as he was forced to quit the party to join Action Congress to pursue his presidential ambition in 2007. Atiku later returned to the party in 2011 and played a leading role in the formation of New PDP. Splinter group of seven disaffected PDP governors and their staged a walk-out of the party convention on 31st of August 2013 in Abuja. A parallel party secretariat was set with Alhaji Abubakar Kawu Baraje as the chairman of the faction called New PDP (nPDP). Five of the PDP governors that formed the new PDP (Mr. Chibuike Amaechi (Rivers), Alhaji Ahmed Abdulfatah (Kwara), Dr. Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso (Kano), Alhaji Murtala Nyako (Adamawa), and Alhaji Aliyu Wamakko (Sokoto)) later defected to the APC while the duo of Dr. Mu'azu Babangida Aliyu (Niger) and Alhaji Sule Lamido (Jigawa) declined to move along with their colleagues to the opposition party (Innocent, 2012, p.6)

The May 16, 2016 convention of the party in Port Harcourt brewed yet another round of protracted conflict that rocked the party for over a year. The outcome of the convention was the factionalization of the party as the former chairman Sen. Alli Momodu Sheriff was removed by a group of stalwart and Alhaji Ahmed Makarfi was installed as the caretaker chairman of the party. Alli Momodu Sheriff insisted that the convention was not properly constituted. The crisis kick-started a yearlong fought legal battle that was settled on July 11th 2017 by the Supreme Court in favour of the Makarfi caretaker committee (Onyishi, 2016).

Since the inception of the fourth republic in 1999 till 2015, the PDP which prides itself as the biggest party in Africa has consistently dominated electoral fortune in Nigeria political space. The party besides winning the presidency has consistently maintained comfortable majority in the National Assembly while having majority of the state governors in its fold. The electoral fortune of other opposition continued to dwindle while PDP was waxing stronger, surmounting all known challenges and winning elections at all levels with much ease compared with the fragmented opposition parties (Saka & Amusan, 2018). A former PDP Chairman Prince Vincent Ogbulafor had boasted that PDP would rule the country for an interrupted 50 years.

Towards the end of 2012, an attempt was made to rally all major opposition parties under a single platform to provide a formidable challenge to the PDP political dominance. Several talks were held and an agreement was reached for four main opposition parties of Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), and Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) and a faction of All Peoples Grand Alliance (APGA) lead by Owelle Rochas Okorochoa. The merger arrangements were concluded on the 6th of February, 2013, hence the merging opposition parties dissolved their structures into the new party - All Progressive Congress (APC) and the mega party was formerly registered by the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) on the 31st of July, 2013 (Saka & Amusan 2018). The rank of the new mega party received a boost when it admitted 5 governors, 49 members of the House of Representatives, and 11 senators from the ruling PDP (Guardian, July 12, 2017). The event of party switching reached a climax with the then Speaker of House of Representatives, Honourable Aminu Tambuwal and former Vice President Atiku Abubakar announcing their decamping to the mega party, APC (Saka & Amusan 2018).

The merger though a huge success, and with the admittance of the 5 aggrieved PDP governors, speaker of the House of Representatives and former vice president of the federal Republic of Nigeria and many members of National Assembly as well as other members of Houses of Assembly across the country, the stage seemed set for electoral onslaught against PDP. The mega party was housing politicians with varying backgrounds, orientations and political ideologies; but were only united with a common goal of dislodging PDP mainly at the centre.

Elizabeth Donnelly, the Deputy Head of the Africa Program at Chatham House, in her view agreed that the foundations of the All Progressive congress (APC) did not provide it with a stable beginning. It does seem that this fragile, somewhat uneasy alliance is really starting to show significant stress. At the time, the formation of the APC was quite astute political thinking in seeing what could be done by forming an alliance across regions and with real political heavyweights in Nigeria. However, with the different regions and different

political heavyweight also come with complications. OlisaMetuh former PDP publicity secretary also described APC as “nothing but a party ill-bred frustrated and intolerant politicians; bad losers for whom resorting to personal attack, blackmailing and mudslinging in addition to promoting violence has become the ideology.”

Almost immediately after the take-off of the pledging party, it was rocked with series of internal tussle. There were crises in almost all the state chapters of the party across the nation, especially in the states where there were no sitting governors. Political gladiators tried to emerge as leaders in their respective states. Alhaji Ibrahim Shekarau, former Governor of Kano state announced his resignation from the party in January 2014 for reasons he cited including lack of commitment to hierarchy and disregard to him for handling the party structure in Kano State to the state governor that decamped to the party the previous year. Tom Ikimi who had played a very prominent role in the merger, felt he should be rewarded with the chairmanship position in the party but political gimmicks later played him out of favour of the political gladiators. Ikimi felt very frustrated and disappointed and angrily resigned from the party when he lost to Chief John OdigieOyegun. Senator Annie Okonkwo former National Vice Chairman (South) also resigned from the party citing issues relating to lack of internal democracy.

The party went into the 2015 elections and came out with very bright performance defeating the very incumbent President, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan. The party also secured majority of the seats in both houses of the National Assembly. The electoral fortune of the party ushered in a new set of intra-party conflicts that plagued the party for the entire dispensation. Bukola Saraki and Yakubu Dogara had emerged as Senate President and Speaker, House of Representatives respectively against the wish of the party hierarchy. The incidence later turned to be a nightmare that haunted both Bukola and Yakubu on one side, the party and the President on the other hand. The crises culminated in the quitting of the party by both Bukola and Dogara with their supporters.

The most destructive and injurious of the intra-party conflicts were that of leadership tussle that rocked the Rivers State chapter and the primary election crises that destroyed the soul of the party in Zamfara, Ogun and Imo States. The party state congresses had produced factional leadership in almost all the states. While some states were able to manage their crises, Imo, Zamfara and Rivers States wrecked in irredeemable damages on the party's electoral fortune in 2019.

In Zamfara State, the crises on the choice of the governorship candidate of the party tore the party into shreds that they failed to select candidates for all elective offices before the expiration of October 7th INEC deadline (Adakai&Olorunsuwa, 2020). The party lost all the elective offices through the law court. Eight aspirants had indicated interest in the governorship seat; the aspirants are serving Senator Kabiru Marafa; Alhaji Abubakar Magaji; serving Deputy Governor, Ibrahim Wakkala; former governor Alhaji Mahmud Shinkafi; Minister of Defense, Mansur Dan Alli, Dr. Dauda Lawal; Alhaji Sagir Haladu; Alhaji Aminu Sani Jaji and Mukhtar Shehu Idris, who is alleged to be Yari's favoured candidate (Onyishi, 2016). A new twist in the crises was a legal party instituted by Senator Kabiru Marafa and 141 others against the party insisting that the party never conducted primary elections as the state governor Alhaji Yari was trying to make INEC believe (Adakai&Olorunsuwa, 2020). The Supreme Court however voided the acclaimed primary election in Zamfara State ordering INEC to withdraw the certificates of return from the winners of the election all of which are members of APC. Senator Kabiru Marafa, the immediate past Deputy Governor of the state, Ibrahim Wakkala; and the member representing Kauran Namoda/Birnin Magaji Federal Constituency in the House of Representatives, Aminu Jaji were expelled from the party for playing the role of a spoiler (Onyishi, 2016). With this damaging outcome, the soul of the party in the state seems to have been severed from its body; its survival is only what may be a herculean task.

In Imo State, the party executive was sharply divided between the States Governor Owelle Rochas Okorochoa who was bent on having his son-in-law, Uche Nwosu succeed him and Senator Hope Uzodima who had the backing of the National Executive Committee of the party to contest as Governor of the state. The party governorship ticket was handed to Uzodinma after a lot of horse trading; the Governor was embittered and his own faction entered into an accord with another political party (Action Alliance) under whose platform the Governor's godson later ran for governorship. The party lost the governorship seat to PDP. After series of verbal attacks between the party's national chairman Comrade Adams Oshiomhole and the Governor Rochas Okorochoa, the latter was suspended for anti-party activities that resulted in the party losing the governorship election (Adakai&Olorunsuwa, 2020).

The experience in Rivers State was a replica of the Zamfara incidence. The party in Rivers State was factionalised along Rotimi Amaechi and Magnus Abe camps. The latter was interested in the governorship ticket but the former (a former Governor of the State and Minister) who is the leader of the party in the state preferred Tonye Cole. Stemming from the state congress of the party, the Magnus Abe led faction had instituted a legal proceeding against the state APC, faction loyal to Amaechi and the recognized state executive. Magnus Abe obtained a court order barring the state party executive from conducting primary elections pending the determination of the suit. The party (being aware of the INEC deadline for conduct of primary), in violation of the court order went ahead to conduct primary election that produced Tonye Cole as governorship candidate,

Magus Abe's faction approached the court to challenge the legality of the election that produced Mr. Cole. The primary elections of all party candidates were declared null and void having been conducted in breach of a subsisting court order (Adakai&Olorunsuwa, 2020). The party was denied the opportunity to present candidates for all elective offices in the 2019 gubernatorial election.

In all of these, the party was its own enemy and has demonstrated the most destructive and devastating intra-party clashes in the fourth republic. It is destructive that the party lost elections in its own strongholds due to unending opposition within the party. The crises were principally caused by inordinate ambition of the party leaders in those states to institute their wishes on the party, by sacrificing internal democracy and later plunging the party into irresolvable crises that caused it huge electoral fortune.

THE IMPACT OF THE ALL PROGRESSIVES'S CONGRESS INTRA-PARTY CONFLICTS ON DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN RIVERS STATE.

Tsaro, Egobueze&Nwaoburu (2021) expatiating on the extent to which intra-party conflicts hamper democratic consolidation in Rivers State revealed that the APC crisis in Rivers State began in 2015 when Abe's interest to fly the party's governorship flag in the 2015 elections was opposed to by Amaechi. In Abe's stead, a former Member of the House of Representatives, Dakuku Peterside was chosen as the Party's candidate. A little over three years after APC lost elections in Rivers State to the ruling PDP, the party has remained fractured due to the tussle between duos.

In 2018, the internal crisis that rocked the Rivers State APC ascended a worrisome crescendo such that there was emergence of two parallel factional State Party Secretariats. Hon. Ojukaye Flag-Amachree was the Chairman of the one believed to be loyal to Rt. Hon. Chibuike Amaechi, while Prince Peter Odike headed the faction controlled by Senator Magnus Ngei Abe. The sharp division in the party arose from the disagreement between the State Party Leader and former Governor of Rivers State and Minister of Transportation, Rotimi Amaechi and a former Senator and Secretary to the Rivers State Government, Magnus Abe. In the midst of this, suspected thugs fingered to be sponsored by Hon. Ojukaye Flag-Amachree, vandalized Abe-led APC parallel secretariat at No. 63 Aba Road, Port Harcourt.

The pro-Amaechi State Executive Committee led by Ojukaye Flag-Amachree accepted the indirect primary mode, as the pro-Abe State executive, led by Peter Odike insisted on direct primary. In a build up to this factional scenario, Chibuike Amaechi, the APC leader in the State had anointed Tonye Cole against all odds to fly the party's flag at the gubernatorial primary. This decision did not go down well with party members as other candidates among whom were Senator Magnus Abe, Dumo Lulu-Briggs, Prince Tonye Princewill and Dr. Dawari George, were not given fair chance. Flag-Amachree's faction hinged the decision to conduct indirect primary by his executive on issues of insecurity in the State and lack of membership data base of all APC members in the State; despite conducting Ward, Local Government and State congresses that were subjects of litigation. The bone of contention is that there had been a deliberate systemic attempt to alienate substantial segments of the party that supports Abe's governorship aspiration.

According to them, the endorsement of Cole by Amaechi is a signal of the indirect primary will go. The pro-Abe State executive led by Peter Odike stated that it was completely in agreement with the position of National Executive Committee because that would entrench equal participation of party members and entrench internal democracy in the party, through approval of the use of direct primaries as the mode of selecting candidates for elections.

He said that the State executive unanimously adopts and affirms the use of direct primaries for choosing all the candidates in the 2019 general elections as it affords party members opportunity to participate in the process. The above decision is in consonance with the party's position and desire to make election in 2019 and beyond reflective of the will and aspiration of the people. Magnus Abe argued that indirect primary is very vulnerable to financial inducement, as the delegates are known and an aspirant can easily target a particular number of people as those he needs to service in order to get nominated.

In order to whittle down Senator Abe's momentum and appease his Ogoni kinsmen, the Deputy National Secretary, Victor Giadom, who hails from the same town with Abe, was made Cole's running mate. Commenting on the emerging development, the MOSOP President, Legborsi Pyagbara, contended that it was an incontrovertible fact that there cannot be effective participation in a true democracy without corresponding adequate representation at levels of authority and governance. He asserted that the continual denial of the Ogoni people's representations at these levels smack of discrimination, injustice and political impunity and is antithetical to the practice of genuine and inclusive democracy. In the words of Richard Wokocha, Associate Professor of Law at the Rivers State University as reported by Ebiri (2018), Indirect primaries lead to indirect democracy and indirect democracy is anything but democracy, because democracy is about the people choosing and so any process that guarantees somebody choosing for the people is not democracy. Nevertheless, Tonye

Cole ended up as the party's flag bearer but was challenged in court by Senator Abe, while Dumo Lulu-Briggs defected to the Accord Party where he was made the party's gubernatorial flag bearer.

Furthermore, the appellate court sitting in Port Harcourt dismissed three appeals filed by the Pro-Amaechi faction, challenging the judgement of Justice ChinwenduNwogu of the Rivers State High Court, which nullified the candidature of Tonye Cole as APC governorship candidate, all senatorial, House of Representatives and House of Assembly Primaries; in addition to elections of ward executive, Local Government executive and State executive committees. Chairman of the Court of Appeal Panel, Justice AbubakarYahaya, struck out the application for joinder by Flag-Amachree executive, Mr. Cole and 48 other candidates of APC that emerged through the indirect primaries. It was dismissed on the ground that they filed their appeal outside the terms provided by the Constitution that an appeal ought to be filed within 14 days upon delivery of judgment by the lower court.

The All Progressives Congress (APC) lost the bid to reverse the judgment barring the Independent National Election Commission (INEC) from fielding candidates seeking elective positions in Rivers State. At the sitting of a five-man panel led by Justice Bode Rhodes-Vivour on Tuesday, February, 2019, the Supreme Court struck out the three remaining appeals filed by the APC, Ojukaye Flag-Amachree and Tonye Patrick Cole challenging the court's decision. According to the court, the appeals were filed outside the time allowed under Section 285(9) and (12) of the Constitution as amended by the 4th Alternative Act. Reading the ruling of the court, Justice AminaAugie, said the appellants were not parties to the original suit, were not allowed by the court of Appeal in Port Harcourt, to appeal the October 10, 2018 Judgement, because they filed their appeal out of the required time. In the suit marked SC/81/2019 (another appeal filed by APC), SC/1332/2018 (Ojukaye Flag-Amachree) and SC/1334/2018 (by Tonye Cole and others), Augie noted that the appeals were statute barred.

Similarly, the Supreme Court on 9th April, 2019 struck out an appeal filed by Senator Magnus Abe concerning the party's primaries for various elective positions in Rivers State. APC did not participate in the last general elections in the State after an order of the trial court nullifying the party's primaries, as upheld by the apex court. Abe, leader of a faction of the APC in Rivers State had in his own appeal urged the Supreme Court to determine which of the party's factions between his and the one led by the former Minister of Transportation, Rt. Hon. RotimiAmaechi held valid primaries ahead of the 2019 general elections. The court also ruled that INEC should not accept the candidature of both Abe and Tonye Cole to represent the APC party on the basis that they were not conducted according to the law. In fact, at a time when political parties were engaged in intense electioneering campaign, the APC in Rivers State were mired in internal wrangling that was bound to prove self-destructive and it did.

Point-blankly said, Amaechi, the principal was severally and ultimately blamed for his refusal to allow a free and fair process within the party in the choice of party candidatures for arbitrary imposition of a candidate; that in its self, suggests absence of internal democracy. Unfortunately, the poor masses have been politically alienated, subverted and hypnotized into believing that "Amaechi leads, we follow, not only when it suits us". It is not dependent on how he leads, where he leads, why he leads and when he leads. The question is: Why on earth will democratic leadership in a plural society be micro-zoned to the emperorship of one man all the time, all the way, any way and anyhow?

Similar to the Rivers State imbroglio, a five-member panel of Justices of the Supreme Court of Nigeria, on Friday, May 24, 2019 nullified all votes cast for the APC in the 2019 Governorship and National Assembly elections in Zamfara State. The panel led by Justice Paul AdamuGalinji, said the APC in the State did not carry out primaries according to its regulations. The panel described all votes cast for APC as waste votes and declared that all political parties with the second highest votes in the polls were elected into the different offices. Thus, the PDP benefited from the impunity of APC.

II. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The study identified several challenges bedevilling democratic consolidation in APC, Rivers State. The research would have been half-finished without making adequate recommendations. The recommendations provided by this study are to strengthen democracy for better measures.

1. The party constitution should be drafted by experienced legal practitioners in conjunction with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to reflect incontrovertible democratic tenets that would enhance democratic consolidation. The quality of rules and its unhindered implementation irrespective of the calibre of party member would guarantee the focus on political stability. INEC should closely monitor intra-party activities so as to reduce political friction.

2. Party discipline should be redesigned to adjust to the dynamic and changing nature of political behaviours which must be adhered to in any political discourse/meetings to engender democratic consolidation in APC, Rivers State.
3. Judicial pronouncements should consider the nitty-gritty of intra-party activities and ensure that the issue of political godfatherism and its excesses are curbed completely. This is one sure way intra-party conflicts can be reduced in the management of APC congresses.
4. The judiciary should prosecute speedily without option of fine whoever that is found guilty of igniting intra-party conflicts against democratic tenets which contravene section(s) of the 1999 Constitution (As Amended), party constitutions and INEC guidelines to reduce the level of political miscreantism in democratic consolidation.

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