

# Parties Parallel Primaries and Its Implication to Political Development in Nigeria

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## Abstract

Structurally, political parties in the country are weak and this has always led to lack of internal cohesion. Most political parties operate outside the purview of their constitutional guides. The lack of internal democracy in the political parties is therefore, not only worrisome but has become highly problematic with rising incidences of political parties' parallel primaries. The recent primaries conducted by the various political parties have only shown that the culture of inclusive democracy is still miles away from the nation's political space, which might take some time for Nigeria to catch up with the reality of representative governance. The primaries for nomination of candidates for the various political offices in preparation for the general elections from 2003 to 2015 may have come and gone, but the angst generated by the outcome of the primaries has continued to attract opprobrium. The effects of this malaise have threatened the very foundations of the Nigerian state and have slowed the pace of democratic consolidation and political development in the country. How then can we build democracy without democrats? Cries of candidate's imposition, parallel congresses, undemocratic conducts and mass protest have greeted the outcome of the so-called primaries across the states of the federation. The disagreement and anger generated by the undemocratic conduct associated with the primaries have culminated in threat of mass defection from some political parties. This paper sought to investigate political parties' parallel primaries in the context of Nigeria fourth republic with a view to ascertaining its implication to political development and proffering way forward.

**Key words:** political party, parallel primaries, political development, candidate selection, internal democracy.

## Introduction

There is no doubt that the idea of political party and candidate selection (what we have termed primary election), enjoy unrivalled eminence in political discourse and analysis on democracy, democratization and to a significant extent political development via democratic consolidation. Political parties feature as most critical aspect of the electoral process. Party politics, nevertheless, has suffered a chequered history in Nigeria. Right from the adoption of the Clifford Constitution of 1922, the Nigerian political space has been littered with the emergence of political parties in each of the epochs that have come up in the close to one hundred years of party politics in the country. Political parties, being central to democratic governance have come to occupy an important position in Nigeria's political process. With the establishment by Sir Herbert Macaulay of the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) several political associations have explored the political/electoral space provided by democratic governance to express their freedom of association to want to capture, organize and indeed exercise the political and governmental powers that control the Nigerian state.

Nigeria is presently forging ahead with the fourth Republic; and there are over 60 political parties. These notwithstanding, the nature and conception of political parties in Nigeria make them an inescapable fact of the Nigerian political life. The rationale for the above assertion is based on the fact that, it is only through political parties that politics and the quest to control and exercise governmental powers find expression. Nigeria as of today has no provisions for independent candidacy. Hence, the only acceptable way to play politics is to do so via a political party platform.

In Nigeria since the present democratic dispensation, more precisely from 2003 till date; elections and candidate selections were dominated by political party leadership and where a party is the ruling party in the state or at the national level, its activities particularly with recourse to candidate selection was dominated by the personality of the political leader been the president or governor as the case may be. These scenarios are detrimental to transparency and internal democracy and have remained problematic to political development in Nigeria. It is therefore against the above backdrop that the Nigerian political parties are marred by incidences of parallel

primaries in the quest by some political aspirants to realize their ambitions without recourse to the consensus seemingly imposed by the leadership. Evidences of this are more common in the political party that have perceived itself as the ruling party and which the members believe that any candidate presented under the platform of the party has already won the election, no matter what it takes.

For this reason, a proper perspective of the roles, issues and challenges of political parties in relation to parallel primaries in Nigeria must be established vis-à-vis its implication to the political development of the Nigerian state. Haven witnessed the all-important polls of 2015; it is obvious that these issues have played themselves out at various levels. Consequently, an analysis of political parties and party parallel primaries in Nigeria is very crucial. This paper analyzes conceptual and theoretical issues of political party, its centrality in democratic governance, and institutional framework for political parties' primaries. It further explores issues and problems of political parties' parallel primaries in Nigeria and its implication to political development and finally in drawing its conclusion also points to the way forward.

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Insight**

Implicitly and explicitly, conceptual innovations in political and indeed social science generally are difficult to come by. Little wonder, therefore, that simple and complex concepts elicit varying interpretations. This is the reason, why, it is important to review concepts and functions of political parties in this context. For the latter, it helps in distinguishing between ideal and substantive functions of political parties so as to appreciate the performance of Nigeria's Fourth Republic parties, particular as it affects candidate selection via primary elections. The important of this conceptual exploration and reviews of functions of political parties is that it will enable one to better appreciate the performance and capabilities of Nigerian parties, as this would have significant implications for the quality of democracy vis-à-vis its sustainability in the country. What then is a political party and what are its main functions?

Political parties may be conceptualized as organizations whose members have values, ideals and aspirations in common and at least participate in the organized contest/struggles for political power. Coleman & Roseberg in Smith (1996:199) defined political parties as 'associations formally organized with the explicit and declared purpose of acquiring and to some extent maintaining legal control, either singly or in coalition or electoral competition with other associations over the personnel and the policy of the government of an actual or perspective sovereign state'. This agrees with the views of Henig & Pinda (1969: 11) who earlier defined political parties in terms of a group of people acting together to achieve some political goals, which usually is control of government. Parties are simply organized or loosely organized groups under a recognized label with sole intent of controlling power through elections (Epstein, 1967). In addition to the above, Sartori (1976: 63) provides one of the widely cited definitions of political parties.

For him, a political party is 'any political group identified by an official label that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections (free or non- free), candidates for public office.' Catto (2000: 59-74) conceives of parties in terms of their place in legislature, as membership of organization, in the electorate, in government, in bureaucracy, and parties as systems. This has further complicated the idea of having a working definition(s) for the study of political parties, especially in emerging democracies, like Nigeria. For example, party as membership of organization constitutes the 'focal and rallying point for citizens actively interested in politics' and 'also a community taking care of many needs ranging from social protection to education, to leisure activities and even to personal relationships' (Catto, 2000: 63).

Any committed attempt at conceptualizing political parties is confronted with two challenges. The first and greatest is whether it should be limited to explaining purely competitive parties, as found in stable advanced democracies, or provide a broader conception that embraces single party systems and anti-systems or subversive groups in autocratic democratic regimes (Janda, 1993:166). This challenge is further informed by the dearth of research on political parties, especially in Africa. This is because of what Erdmann (2004:63) describes as sheer neglect of Western European bias of political party research and claims by Africanist scholars of 'uniqueness of the subject.'

However, in effort to minimize the problem of conceptualization, Lawson (1976: 3-4) argues that 'a political party is an organization of individuals that seeks continuing electoral and non-electoral authorization from the public (or a part thereof) for specified representatives of that organization to exercise the political power of particular government offices, claiming that such power would be exercised on behalf of that public.' Despite,

the seemingly theoretical and empirical utility of these definitions none seems to recognize the status ab initio of parties as political associations before qualifying as political parties.

Sequel to the above, therefore, political parties are defined by Kura (2005) as formally recognized organizations whose members share certain common values, ideals and aspirations about how society should be politically, socio-culturally and economically organized for the common good and aspire to translate these ideals and values through the control of government by placing their representatives in a competitive free, fair and honestly conducted elections, without harassment, intimidation and threat of violence. This definition captures the broad understanding of political parties and can be applied to the study of developing democracies. In this respect, the definition also identifies the characteristics of parties and the nature of parties in both new and old democracies. In new democracies, such as Nigeria, parties are still at their nascent stage and many were formed along ethnic, tribal or even, in some cases, religious line. In short, parties reflect the seeming socio-cultural and political cleavages in the society. Since parties as organizations are formally recognized to participate in the political process, they are to a very significant extent identified as political parties.

### **Centrality of Political Parties in Democratic Governance**

Participation in political contestations and establishing government is central to the role of parties in democratic governance. Katz (1986: xi) thus opines that "... modern democracy is party democracy; the political institutions and practices that are the essence of democratic government... would be unthinkable without them."

Thus far, all conceptualizations of parties, at least suggest their centrality in any democratic process. The centrality of parties in democratic process is informed by their unique functions. This is captured by Schattschneider's (1942: 3) classic observation that 'political parties created democracy ... [and] modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of political parties.' Political parties 'organize and rationalize politics' (Garrest, 2002:1). In politics, parties have been the 'main intermediaries between people and power' (Hilder, 2005). Political parties are imperative in the organization of the modern democratic polity and for the expression of political pluralism' (Van Bienen, 2004a: 1). Crotty (1993) submits that democratic system of government is 'unlikely and may not be possible in the absence of competitive political parties... orderly government, much less a democratic polity, cannot exist without some form of stabilized party representation.' Yanai (1999:7) similarly reasons that modern political parties are special political institutions of representative democracy. These cases categorically underscore the unique and central function of political parties in democratic system. More so, political parties are seen as inevitable in establishing the necessary link(s) between the state and civil society. They are the gatekeepers and the measuring political barometer for indicating the degree and effectiveness of the practice of democracy. Being the heart of democracy, they possess the capability to engender and/or endanger a stable political system.

To further buttress the centrality of political parties in this context there is need to bring to focus some essential functions/role performed by political parties in a democratic setting. These include: governance, representation, policy making and execution, interest aggregation and articulation, peaceful change of government, making government effective and responsive (opposition parties function also as pressure group), accountability, social and integration functions. Put together, wherever a political party exists, it tends to perform common functions at different stages of economic, social, political and judicial development. Reiterating the essentiality of political parties Diamond (1997: xxiii) arguably asserts that:

Political parties remain important if not essential instruments for representing political constituencies and interests, aggregating demands and preferences, recruiting and socializing new candidates for office, organizing the electoral competition for power, crafting policy alternatives, setting the policy-making agenda, forming effective governments, and integrating groups and individuals into the democratic process.

Furthermore, LaPalombara and Weiner (1966: 3) opine that be it in a democratically free society or under totalitarian regimes, political party is expected to organize public opinion and to communicate demands of the populace to the decision-making and executing powers of government. They maintain that 'the party must articulate to its followers the concept and meaning of the broader community even if the aim of the party leadership is to modify profoundly or even to destroy the broader community and replace it with something else'. Parties' ability to perform many or all of these functions depends on their ability to win control of government or a share thereof. It means that public office is important for patronage that helps in recruitment and retainment of party activists and potential candidates for public office and indeed essential for party leadership development (Manning, 2005).

More empirically, whether parties in a particular polity are able to effectively perform these functions is a matter of the degree of political party, party system and democratic institutionalization (Kura, 2008). By extension, party and party system institutionalization is measured by the internal and external activities of parties. Internal refers to all those factors that are only internal to party organization, such as internal democracy, party primaries (candidate selection), complexities, finance, adaptability, etc., and external refers to the relationship of parties with their external environment.

### **Understanding Candidates' Selection in the Context of Political Parties' Primaries**

Indeed, politics will be deprived of vital elements in meaning and content (from any ideological standpoint), if political struggle, which finds major expression in the existence of political parties do not exist. It will be difficult to make sense of politics and democracy without political parties. Political parties are the lubricants of democracy and, without which, democracy based on the western model cannot function (Adele, 2001). The modern idea and principle of democracy depends on political parties for meaning, content and context. This fact raises the idea of political party to a high pedestal. Olarinmoye in Agbaje (2005) alludes that Democracy is about representation and participation. Participation is the extent to which individual members of the society take part or get involved in the activities in their societies. Representation on the other hand, refers to the process by which people get chosen to act in the interest of the community or sector thereof. In modern day where the dominant form of democracy is indirect or representative democracy, political parties are the principal mechanism for ensuring citizen participation and representation in public policy decision-making.

Functional analysis of political parties effectively delineates them from other associations. Approaching the analysis of political parties from their structural prism often leads to confusion. Consequently, for us to appreciate political parties as platform for candidate selection we take recourse to the provision on political parties in the Nigerian context as illuminated in the constitution. Thus, Section 221 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) states:

No association other than a political party, shall canvass for votes for any candidates at any election or contribute to the funds of any political party or to the election expenses of any candidate at an election.

It can therefore be deduced from the above that a political party is first and foremost an association with the monopoly of platform to canvass for votes from the electorate for their candidates or that is legally licensed to contribute funds to the electoral pursuits of candidates during elections. This means that no other associations can field candidates in elections and that it is only political parties that are in the business of canvassing for votes in a bid to win the power of ruling the Nigerian state or parts thereof.

It is thus a truism that political party is the major organizing principle of modern politics. Whether they are great tools of democracy or sources of tyranny and repression, political parties are vital links between the state and civil society, between institutions of government and the groups and interests that operate within society (Haywood, 2007).

Political party primaries are provided by law to serve the purpose of candidate selection, which is one of the most important activities of party organization through which clientelistic networks are strengthened. It is also an important area, which if handled well can aid party institutionalization. In particular, research on the issues of political party primaries (candidate selection) is grossly limited. Fisher and Eisenstadt (2004) argue that ironically, despite extensive studies on virtually all aspects of parties, political primaries, albeit parallel primaries seem to have eluded and escaped the attention of academic researchers. In fact, such studies rarely exist on the nexus between political parties' parallel primaries and implication to political development in Nigeria. Yet there is substantial evidence in reality that party primary is potentially a relevant area that undermines and/or strengthens party organization. It must nevertheless be stated that the importance attached to party funding is underscored by rising impact of money politics especially in developing economies where few elites control both the sources and distribution of money. By implication, money more than anything, is a source of political power and political power in turn is a source of economic power.

Political parties' primaries or candidate selection and nomination procedures differ among democracies and among typologies of political parties. There are two categories of candidates selected and/or nominated by

political parties. Candidates are selected for manning party offices across all the branches and chapters of political parties. Candidates are nominated also to contest general elections. Unlike for party leadership positions, in the latter, candidates are selected by different political parties to compete in national or local elections. In any case, candidate nomination, which in broader terms is synonymous with recruitment, is one of the important functions of political parties across democracies. In fact, many party scholars define a political party in terms of this function (Schlesinger, 1991; Sartori, 1976). It is in this context that political parties' primaries find relevance in a democracy.

Katz (2001:277) notes that candidate selection "is a vital activity in the life of any political party. It is the primary screening device in the process through which the party in office is reproduced. As such, it raises central questions about the ideological and sociological identities of the party as a whole". The method(s) which a party(ies) employs in candidate selections and nominations has incontrovertible implications on those selected or elected and indeed how they behave in either party or public office (Gallagher and Marsh, 1988; Mainwaring and Shugart, 1997). Importantly, Katz and Mair (1995) argue that the technique of a party's candidate selection explains and provides adequate information on (i) how the party functions internally and (ii) the location of political power in a particular country.

Methods of candidate selection include primaries (either restricted to party caucuses only or extended to ordinary party members), internal party elections, centralization, consensus, etc. The differences in candidate selection procedures among parties is explained partly by the nature of a political party, and partly by "national laws, intra-party decision-making and the electoral fortunes of parties" (Pennings and Hazan, 2001:269). However, the extent to which parties democratize their candidate selection procedures, despite its generic importance depends on the national laws and internal party rules, as well as the extent to which party leaders adhere to these laws.

From the foregoing theoretical overview, it is obvious that political party primaries designed to actuate candidate selection are important activities of political parties. In this instance, not only that they are part of the general crises and challenges affecting contemporary political parties (especially in developing democracies), but they are also significant as they could strengthen and/or undermine the capacity and capability of any political party. Nevertheless, in developing democracies, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa these activities are interwoven. They are virtually two sides of the same coin. The major political actors of the party (the godfathers/incumbents) while funding the party also wield enormous influence in candidate selection, albeit imposition? The People's Democratic Party (PDP) provides relevant empirical example in the case of Nigeria.

### **Institutional Framework for Political Parties' Primaries in Nigeria**

Institutions defined as organizations or rules governing the structure and activities of organizations are important. They matter (Norris, 2004; Peters, 2000), because they define operational structure, influence, regulate and change behaviours and outcome. This is the perspective of the rational choice institutionalism. That political actors have a "fixed set of preferences or taste ... behave entirely instrumentally so as to maximize the attainment of these preferences, and do so in a highly strategic manner that presumes extensive calculation" (Hall and Taylor, 1996:12). It is, however, important to caution that not all institutions produce desired outcomes. Political actors could manipulate institutions to achieve their goals. In extreme circumstances, institutions are even jettisoned for personal aggrandizements. In such situations, conflicts and misunderstandings could lead to organizational incapacity or even the most debilitating outcomes.

In analyzing the issue of political party and political parties' primaries in Nigeria we are predisposed to the Peoples Democratic Party, which has dominated the political landscape of Nigeria in the last sixteen years of democratic experience. In this direction, therefore, reference is given to the operation of the party within the contexts of the relevant institutional designs. Evidently, there are five categories of institutional designs governing the formation, operations and activities of political parties in Nigeria. These are:

1. The 1999 Constitution;
2. The Constitution of various political parties;
3. The Electoral Acts (2002, 2006 and 2010 as amended);
4. Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) statutory rules; and
5. Other informal rules.

Sections 221-29 of the 1999 Constitution stipulate criteria for the creation of political parties. This is where our definition (of parties) becomes relevant to understanding the formation and operation of political parties in

Nigeria. Importantly, for any political association to qualify as a political party, it must fulfil the following criteria:

- a) Its names and addresses of its national officers are registered with INEC;
- b) Its membership is open to all Nigerians;
- c) Its constitution is accepted and registered with INEC;
- d) Its name, symbols or logo does not contain any ethnic or religious or regional connotation;
- e) Its headquarters is located in Abuja (Section 222).

Similarly, the constitution and other statutory rules of the political parties must accordingly provide:

- a) for the conduct of a periodic election on a democratic basis for the election of its principal officers, executive members and members of its governing body, at regular intervals not exceeding four years;
- b) members of its executive committee and other principal officers must reflect the federal character of Nigeria, and these officers must belong to different states not being less than 2/3 of the 36 states and FCT (Section 223, Sub-sections 1-2).

Individual political parties' constitutions provide detailed rules and regulations governing the internal operations of the party. It also provides the statutory laws establishing all relevant structures and organs of the party as well as their functions. The constitution provides procedures for the establishment of ad hoc committees, such as disciplinary and inquiry committees. It also, as well, provides procedures for amendments. Importantly, party constitution provides the modus operandi for the appointment, selection, nomination and/or election of the principal officers and nomination of candidates for public office. The procedure for election/selection or appointment is prima-facie for engendering internal democracy within the party. There are two categories of party candidates that are elected: the principal officers that are selected or elected through congresses and conventions and candidates fielded to contest elections against other parties' candidates across all levels of government.

In addition to constitution, guidelines are also periodically formulated to regulate party conventions and congresses. Electoral Act is another category of statutory rules governing the activities of parties. It is usually provided by INEC subject to enactment by the National Assembly. It is provided prior to general elections. Nigeria had 2002 and 2006 Electoral Acts for 2003 and 2007 general elections, respectively. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is the second most important source of institutional designs governing the activities of political parties in Nigeria. The 1999 Constitution empowers it to register and monitor all the operations and activities of political parties. No wonder therefore, often times, INEC is at logger heads with most of the parties. The conflicts range from that of funding to complying with constitutional provisions on internal and external audit to congresses and conventions. The last category of the source of institutional designs is the informal rules. These rules are not usually statutory or coded. They are generated from socio-cultural norms and values governing people's behaviours and activities. For example, the issue of rotational presidency seems to be accepted within the PDP and political elites, even though it's not constitutionally enshrined.

The informal rules also work in the guise of clientelism and neopatrimonialism. To a large extent, it is a universal norm that patronage is provided to party loyalists. In advanced democracies, there are internal party rules guiding the distribution of patronage, whereas in new democracies, such as Nigeria, the highest donor and strong political party architects determine who gets what, when, why and how. In some cases, personal, family, business relations and even ritual interaction strongly influence how patronage is distributed. It is this chain of patronage distribution that holds some political parties, like the PDP together.

Rules and regulations are essential in creating institutions, regulating and changing actors' behaviours and in achieving organizational objectives. The extent to which those institutional designs achieve the expected outcomes is a function of the socio-cultural context under which organizations operate and the actors' behaviours. Institutional designs are not ends in themselves but means of achieving outcomes. That is perhaps why institutions are not fixed and static. They change in accordance with circumstances and changing objectives of organizations driven again by changing human needs and desires. Ironically, some political parties have been jettisoning the rules, regulations and guidelines governing its operations and activities, and this resulted in internal conflicts and crises. It can be argued, therefore, that institutional designs provide marginal contribution to the stability of most political parties. In contradistinction, what seems to work perfectly for most political parties in Nigeria is the power of clientelism and neo-patrimonialism, of course, superintended and/or supplemented by the inherent abuse of power of incumbency? The interplay of these forces have further degenerated the already ugly scenario in terms of internal party democracy, thus the consequence of clientelism

and neo-patrimonialism in candidate selection is rising political parties' parallel primaries, which has far reaching implications to political development in Nigeria.

### **Political Parties' Parallel Primaries: Barrage of Conflicts and Litigations**

Structurally, every political party is organized and administered at Ward, Local Government, Senatorial District, State, Zonal and National levels. At each of these organizational levels, there are relevant organs responsible for managing the party affairs. Employing the PDP as a point of reference, at the National level, there are five organs, viz: the National Convention (NC), National Executive Committee (NEC), National Working Committee (NWC), Board of Trustees (BOT), and the National Caucus. There are also similar organs at all other levels of the party structure.

The duties and functions of each of these organs are clearly stated in the party constitutions (as amended). What seems crucial here is not actually the organ of the party but the process of selecting, nominating or electing officers to man these organs effectively. Already the 1999 Constitution and INEC statutory rules mandate parties to conduct periodic democratic congresses and conventions to select these officers. In doing so, parties must inform INEC about such exercises for it to supervise the process.

Article 16, Section 16.1-4 of the PDP constitution unambiguously stated the mode of election of these officers. It states that:

The National Convention, the Zonal, State, Local Government Area and Ward Congresses shall meet to elect the officers of the party at the various levels of the party structure as specified in this constitution except in the Federal Capital Territory where officers of the party shall be elected based on geopolitical zones. Every registered member of the party who has satisfied the requirements for nomination and election under this Constitution, the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria or any other law, rules or regulations in force shall be eligible to contest for any of the offices of the party: Provided that officers of the party shall also be eligible to re-contest for any office as long as they conform with (sic) the provision of the party guidelines.

The guidelines for elections to any office of the party shall be approved by the National Executive Committee of the party in accordance with the provision of this Constitution; No member of the party shall be qualified for nomination or election or appointment into any of the offices of the party, unless he or she has been a registered member for at least 18 months, and is of good financial standing in the party, except there is a waiver by the appropriate executive committee (emphasis added, Article 16, Section 16.1-4).

Besides the selecting and/or electing of officers to manage party organs, the party also conducts congresses and primaries to nominate candidates for national elections into public offices as defined in the 1999 Constitution. Depending on when national elections are to be conducted, the process of electing party officers and the period of such are different from primaries for nominating candidates for general election. In selecting party officers, members of the PDP contest against one another, while in the general election PDP candidates contest against other party candidates.

However, where party congresses coincide with the period of national elections, the two processes are simultaneously conducted. This was the case in 2007 when PDP conducted congresses and primaries simultaneously to elect party officers and nominate candidates for general elections. The guidelines for nomination of candidates into public offices are stated clearly in Article 17, Section 17.1-17.2a-i.

For example, the party Constitution states that:

The National Executive Committee shall, subject to the provision of this Constitution, formulate guidelines and regulations for the nomination of candidates for election into public offices at all levels and shall be the final authority for resolving all disputes relating to the choice of candidates for the party for any elections and for confirming the names or list of names of candidates for the party for any elective public office in the federation (Section 17.1).

In addition, to the above, section 17.2a-i in particular, states that the National Executive Committee shall regulate the procedure for selecting the party's candidates for elective offices. For example, NEC is to regulate National Convention where the party's presidential candidate is to be nominated. Similarly, primaries for governorship candidate should be held at state congress, at local government constituency headquarters for council chairman and House of Assembly, at constituency headquarters for House of Representatives and at

Senatorial constituency headquarters for senators. At ward level, councillorship candidates and 25 delegates by direct primaries in which all registered party members participate are to be elected. As required by the PDP Constitution, NEC does formulate additional guidelines to regulate congresses and National Conventions.

Evidently, despite these rather laudable democratic institutional designs guiding party primaries, the questions still remains; why is it that very often the process of candidates' selection (party primaries) have turned out factionalized, chaotic and quarrelsome. In some instances, the exercise results into violent conflict with attendant consequences of participants sustaining fatal injuries and even loss of lives? The simple answer might be that these rules and regulations are swept under the carpet. It is worthy to note that the institutional designs in the parties are meant to stabilize the party operations and ensure internal democracy in its organization. Scholars of political party democracy believe that institutional designs strengthen internal and external democratic practice of political parties and democracy in general (Ballington, 2004; Scarrow, 2005).

As stated earlier, the Peoples Democratic Party, just like most other political parties, constitutionally adopt primaries as mechanism for selecting party officers and nomination of candidates for public office. The party constitution is very clear as to who is qualified to participate and contest election. However, even though the constitution states that all registered members of the party are qualified to contest any party office and/or be nominated, controversially, the same constitution clearly states that any member of the party contesting election must be of good financial standing in the party (Section 16.4). By implication the same provision seems to favour only individuals with strong financial-base or must obtain the approval of some wealthy political moguls, popularly known in Nigeria as godfathers. It is therefore, not an exaggeration to say that since the formation of the party in 1999, it has been radically hijacked by notorious wealthy political elites. Thus all its congresses and conventions always turn out to be controversial.

'Consensus' has become a household name in Nigerian political system since 1999. It is a political vocabulary introduced to convince someone sometime forcibly - to step aside in their political ambition for their opponents. In fact, most of the local and national primary elections organised by political parties were simply seen as window-dressing. Based on this seemingly undemocratic arrangement in the conduct of party primaries, it is therefore not unexpected that most party primaries and conventions create more problems than they solve, leaving parties divided and factionalized. Parallel primaries have emerged as serious indictment on transparency of party leadership and its compromised leverage to so called godfathers. The trend is sustained by deficient internal democracy.

Lamenting over the above scenario, the then Vice President, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar while delivering a keynote address to the National Conference on 'Election 2007: Protecting the People's Mandate' states that:

Most elections are "rigged" before they occur because candidates are eliminated through various methods. These include subverting party constitution and rules, the use of thugs, corrupting officials to disqualify or annul the nominations of some candidates and other illegal methods of distorting the wishes of the electorate.... In a recent interview with the Board of Editors of Thisday, I stated that I was worried about the undemocratic tendencies in Nigerian political parties.... [He further stressed that] political elites have become used to the centralization, concentration and personalization of political power which are the central elements of modern despotism (Abubakar Atiku, 2005: 13-7).

The seeming intractable crisis in the PDP from the year 2002 led many aggrieved members in collaboration with some members of AD, to form another political party – the Advanced Congress of Democrats (ACD). Sklar et al (2006) argue that ACD launched on 20 April 2006, consisting mainly of former PDP members who oppose the President and others from AD. ACD went into alliance with factions of other parties like AD, APGA and others to transform into Action Congress (AC) (Suleiman, 2006; Shariff, 2006). The PDP and Obasanjo sacked Atiku Abubakar as a member of the party and as Vice President, respectively, a decision which the VP contested in court challenging the powers of the President to sack him from his job.

The deepness of the crisis in the ruling party took yet another dimension when some members of the party, under the leadership of Chief Solomon Lar, the pioneer National Chairman of PDP, announced the formation of a parallel PDP.

Announcing the formation of the parallel PDP on 9th June 2006, the former Deputy National Chairman (South), Shu'aibu Oyedokun stated that following an emergency NEC meeting, a decision was reached for the formation of a parallel executive to that of Senator Ahmadu Ali, the National Chairman of the party. Furthermore, the contention of the parallel PDP was that the leadership of the party was not elected in accordance with the party constitution and that the party was "being run by persons not recognized by the party's constitution or the laws



of the land.... Pursuant to the above situation and in order to give a sense of direction for the party and to ensure that our party does not continue to die into oblivion and [...] to ensure that the leadership vacuum existing today is filled up, we held a meeting to take action and convey same to the larger group of our party members nationwide” (Ajayi, 2006). The creation of parallel primaries in PDP was the consequence of the problematic nature of its congresses and conventions.

Just like the preceding ones, the 2006 congresses and convention ended in chaos, confusion and defections. In fact, the PDP gubernatorial primaries led to a series of litigations and threw the party into further turmoil. What distinguished the 2006 exercise is that many candidates that had been elected at the congresses were later changed by the party. For example, in Lagos State, Mrs Hilder Williams won the primary election, but Senator Musliu Obanikoro was officially declared the candidate. In Rivers State, Speaker Rotimi Amaechi won the primaries only to be expelled out of the party and Celestine Omehia used as substitute. It took the Supreme Court to overturn the result.

In Imo State Senator Ifeanyi Ararume won the primary election, but the party replaced him with Charles Ugwu who came last at the election. However, Ararume took his case to the Supreme Court, which overturned the decision of PDP and ruled that the party did not follow democratic processes and violated its constitution in replacing Ararume, declaring that he remained the candidate of the party. Dissatisfied with Ararume’s action, the NWC expelled him just two days to election (Okocha, 2007; Ogbodo et al, 2007; Ajayi and Nkwopara, 2007; Leadership, 2007). Whilst this represents a brazen disregard of the rule of law, undermining the right of party members to seek redress at a court of law, it left the party without gubernatorial candidates in Imo and Rivers States. The situation was similar in Oyo, Sokoto, Kebbi, and Katsina, among others. The 2006 congresses left the party with even deeper divisions and acrimony. Cases of political parties’ parallel primaries in Nigeria are plethora not only in PDP but other parties across the board.

### **Political Parties’ Parallel Primaries: Implication to Political Development in Nigeria**

In an article titled “Lack of internal democracy still albatross of party primaries” published on the 22nd of January 2011 wherein Mr. Fidelis Soriwei wrote commenting on the conduct of the parties’ primaries before the April polls as follows:

“The recent primaries conducted by the various political parties have only shown that the culture of inclusive democracy is still miles away from the nation’s political space, which might take some time for Nigeria to catch up with the reality of representative governance. The primaries for the nominations of candidates for the various political offices in preparation for the 2011 general elections may have come and gone, but the angst generated by the outcome of the primaries has continued to attract opprobrium. Apart from the presidential primaries, which were marked by what observer described as a remarkable improvement in the struggle towards passable democratic conduct...the same cannot be said of the governorship and the legislative primaries at the national and state levels. Cries of candidates’ imposition, parallel congresses, undemocratic conduct and mass protest have greeted the out come of the so-called primaries across the state of the federation. The disagreement and anger generated by the undemocratic conduct associated with the primaries have culminated in threat of mass defection from some of the political parties.

Furthermore, in another article titled “INEC, Parties and Internal Democracy” reported by the Daily independent published on the 23rd January 2011, Mr. Mark Mayah reported as follows:

“The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is presently faced with the onerous task of ensuring the enthronement of internal democracy within the various registered political parties in the country. This was necessitated by the internal bickering and in-fighting that has almost torn the party apart as a result of disagreement over party primaries and nomination of candidates. In fact, the electoral agency has in the past three weeks been in the forefront of the campaign to bring sanity in the crisis-ridden political parties...it is on record that before the commencement of the congress, almost all the parties were engaged in internal crisis over who should fly the flags of their parties.

Indeed, in Lagos, Edo and Ekiti states where the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) has significant strength, the situation is not any different, when taking into cognizance the party’s penchant for criticizing the activities of the electoral body. In fact, the outcome of the ACN primaries in Edo and Ekiti states, even though without reported bloodshed, appears to have rubbished the party’s democratic credentials as it has not known peace since then...in ACN, where tempers have practically risen to boiling points, the allegation is that the arrowhead of the party, and former Governor of Lagos State, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu personally chose all the candidate for

virtually every elective position and foisted on the party, a development that is said not to be going down well with some faction within the party in Edo, Ekiti, Osun and Lagos.”

Unfortunately, with the apparent non-compliance with the provisions of the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended) governing the adherent to the principles of internal democracy in the selections of candidates for the election by political parties in Nigeria, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) appeared to be helpless in enforcing the strict adherent of the law because of the inclusion of a proviso to section 31(1) to the amended 2010 Electoral Act which made it impossible for the Commission to reject the name of any candidate submitted by the political party for any reason. Thus it was possible for political parties to submit names of candidates different from the names of the candidate that won the primaries that were supervised or monitored by INEC.

The negative effect of the proviso to section 31(1) to the amended 2010 Electoral Act, and the deleting of old section 87(9) of the repealed Electoral Act 2010 from the current Electoral Act, was well articulated by Mr. Mike Igini the then INEC Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) in Cross River State in a paper titled “Amended Electoral Act 2010: The Death of Section 87(9) and the Internment of Internal Party Democracy” wherein he stated as follows:

“...the lawmakers introduced a new provision to Section 31(1) which completely strips INEC of any say in the matter of disqualification of nominees submitted by the political parties. This new provision states that: “Every political party shall, not later than 60 days before the date appointed for the general election under the provision of this Bill, submit to the commission in the prescribed forms the list of candidates the party proposes to sponsor at the elections, provided that the Commission shall not reject or disqualify candidates for any reasons whatsoever” by using this blanket phrase ‘any reason whatsoever’ the law makers have stripped INEC, the supposed umpire, of the ability to determine the qualification or status of any candidate submitted by a party, irrespective of any circumstances surrounding a candidate’s status, the party now dictates, how and why a candidate can contest in an elections in which they are participating even if INEC has doubts, it must seek legal interpretation in a court that has no timeline and cannot stop a party’s candidate from taking part in an election conducted by INEC. This is akin to a referee being asked to play the role of a spectator regarding who participates in an election.

This development can only spell doom for internal democracy of the parties, which as we all know has been the primogeniture crisis for much of the conflict that have bedeviled development of parties and therefore the development of a sustainable democratic culture in our country because an open elitist field only selected candidate who have in most cases, not gone through proper party democratic approbation, as we are currently witnessing in the crisis within most parties”.

The importance of internal party democracy to the over all- political, and economic development of any country cannot be over emphasized. Internal party democracy affects the credibility of the elections but also the quality of leadership, governance, and economic development. “Many respondents believe that credible election can not be conducted on the foundation of prior imposition of candidates during the primaries of the political parties. The growth of democratic institutions and party politics are positively related. However, internal party democracy is the most important ingredient of a successful democracy, and that it has a way of affecting the credibility of the elections both at the primaries and general elections.

Internal party democracy plays a major role in the quality of leadership. Credible general elections couldn’t be conducted in an atmosphere where candidates are imposed at the party primaries elections. On the over all impact of imposition of candidate, it is believed that those who successfully imposed candidate on the party members during party primaries will also want to do the same during the general election.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Elections since return to civil rule have been marred by crises arising from the misgivings from undemocratic conduct of primary elections. The cost of weak structure and lack of internal democracy have not been marginal. A cost analysis of these problems shows that the country suffers in political, social and psychological terms at a national level.

However, where there is a will there is always a way. The crises associated with political parties’ parallel primaries are daunting and may spell political doom to the country if not effectively regulated. Democratic consolidation must start with internal democracy in the form of level playing ground for all aspirants within the

party. To achieve this therefore, there is need to open up all processes and conduct Party primaries that is manifestly transparent, that will give credence to its outcome. The slot for any elective position is one, while interests shall understandable be multiple. We owe ourselves the duty to manage the process so that the outcome will engender confidence in the minds of all and sundry; the winners, the losers and all participants in the process.

Political parties as major building blocks of democracy have to function optimally in order to have a functioning electoral system. As we move towards the enthronement of a new administration come May 2015, there is need to take a holistic look at party politics and party system with a view to strengthening our democratic institutions.

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