

Intra-Party Crisis in Nigeria: A Study of the 2022 All Progressives Congress Primaries in Abia Central Senatorial Zone

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Abstract

This study focused on intra-party crisis in Nigeria with emphasis on the 2022 All Progressive Congress (APC) primaries for Abia Central Senatorial Zone. The increasing cases of intra-party crisis in Nigeria have remained a threat to the sustenance of democracy. Two hypotheses were evaluated and the study relied on the Structural Functionalist theory as a framework of analysis. The study used secondary data and adopted a survey research design, using questionnaires as an instrument of data collection. Data was collected from the sample size of 244 All Progressives Congress (APC) members randomly chosen from the population of 624 All Progressives Congress (APC) executives from the 52 wards in Abia Central Senatorial Zone. Responses were presented in tables and hypotheses were tested using a 5-point Likert scale. The findings revealed that intra-party crises have a significant effect on the performance of political parties in elections and poor implementation of the party constitution and Electoral Act are all enablers of intra-party crises in Nigeria political parties. The study concludes that political parties remain an important institution for any democracy to succeed and the continuous cases of intra-party crises have constrained political parties to contribute towards the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. Thus, if Nigeria's political parties must help deepen Nigeria's democracy, internal party democracy should be promoted, issues leading to factionalization addressed and the dictates of the party constitution and Electoral Act should not be compromised.

Keywords: Democracy, Election, Party Primaries, Politics, Political Party

Introduction

Democracy has been argued as not just an alternative, but the only credible option since the mere mention of these words dictatorship and autocracy remain unacceptable in terms of the government and the governed (Ndubuisi & Timothy, 2021). This is so, not considering the self-serving elitist conception of democracy or the challenges centred around bad governance and corruption in some democracies. It has remained a universal fact that election is viewed as the heart of representative democracy. Dahl in Gberevbie (2014) identifies the existence of civil liberties, political pluralism, and political participation that provides the choice for the electorate to select candidates in a free and fair election, as a prerequisite for a society to be viewed as democratic, anything short of this cannot be seen as democracy. The successful conduct of an election serves as an avenue for measuring the nature, character and political strength or weakness of a political system (Anifowose and Babawale, 2003). Thus, considering this, it is observable that every electoral process starts with the political parties, their involvement in the electoral process and after successfully winning elections.

Political parties have remained products of representative democracy designed to harness public opinion (Ofoeze, 2001; Anifowose & Babawale, 2003). Therefore, if political parties are important ingredients of democracy, it goes without saying that the organization of political parties and the modus operandi of their operations should demonstrate the democratic ideals they fight to enthrone in the polity (Ofoeze, 2001). Thus, political parties have devised mechanisms for choosing leaders and candidates for elective offices, and the most democratic is party primaries. Party primaries for this discourse shall mean the initial electoral contest amongst aspirants to win the nominations of their parties to become candidates of the party for the general elections (Eme & Anyadike, 2011).

It has been observed that political parties rely on one hand, on the democratic principle of popular mandate to contest and win elections. Therefore, it is expected that political parties as vehicles for democratisation should showcase democracy in their internal decision-making and selection process of leaders/candidates for election. It is observable that within the Nigeria polity, the political parties have been enmeshed in an unnecessary infighting resulting in the intra-party crisis on who represents the political party in the general elections (Ibeanu, 2018). Among the reasons highlighted for this intra-party crisis, the issue of lack of internal party democracy, monetisation of candidacy, factionalization and non-compliance to the provision of the party constitution and the Electoral Act have been observed as the most engaging problems facing the cohesion and objectivity of political parties in Nigeria.

Ndubuisi and Ebubechukwu (2020) explain that In Nigeria's representative democracy, the problem has become a despicable situation where political parties present more than one candidate for an elective position because each is armed with a court judgment declaring him or her as the legitimate candidate of their political party or each is supported by a faction of the same political party, with the attendant consequence that voters are not only confused but cheated out of an electoral contest in which they vote for a particular political party candidate while another is declared the winner either by the courts or by the national executive committee of the political party. The 2022 All Progressives Congress (APC) Senatorial Election Primaries in Abia State did not come up as an isolation of the constraints facing Nigerian political parties but also was swallowed up in this political brouhaha. The infighting among the All Progressives Congress (APC) chieftains and political blocs in Abia State has questioned the focus and purpose of the political party as it concerns taking over political power in the state.

Against, this background, therefore, this study shall attempt to discover if intra-party crisis has over the years enhanced Nigeria's democracy. Specifically, the main thrust of this study is to focus on the most notable enablers of intra-party crisis in Nigeria's political parties towards finding lasting solutions to these. Therefore, this study analyses the impact of intra-party crisis in Nigeria's democracy, especially the 2022 All Progressives Congress (APC) Abia Central Senatorial Zone Primaries.

Theoretical Framework of Analysis

Structural-Functionalist approach to the study of the political system was pioneered by Gabriel Almond and Bingham Powell in the 1970s. The structural functionalist approach which is an improvement of the system theory of David Easton focused not only on the political system and its institutions (structures) but also on the functions of these structures within the system as a whole. The Structural functionalist approach posits that the political system is made of institutions, which also are seen as structures. This includes interest groups, political parties, and branches of government, the bureaucratic machinery and others (Almond & Powell, 1978).

Almond and Powell identified certain system maintenance functions performed by the various structures within the political system. He categorised these system maintenance functions into input functions and output functions. Political socialisation and recruitment; interest articulation; interest aggregation; and political communication functions are identified as the input functions. The output functions include rule-making; rule application and rule adjudication. Almond and Powell in modifying and expanding the structural functionalist theory explained that changes occur in the political system. As such, it is only prevalent political culture within the political system that sustains the system, and the political party is important in promoting political culture. Thus, the theory undoubtedly best explains the role of political parties in sustenance democracy.

The All Progressives Congress (APC) as a political party performs interest articulation, interest aggregation, political communication and socialization functions, and political recruitment. The effectiveness with which political parties like the All Progressives Congress (APC), carry out these outlined input functions depends on the internal characteristics of the political party and the prevalent conditions of the political and social environment. The application of the theoretical framework to the subject of study highlights the central and unnegotiable role that political parties play in the sustenance of democracy.

Only parties can organize the required enthusiasm based on solidarity of interests with citizens outside the government. Therefore, it is obvious that a crisis-ridden political party cannot be effectively positioned to perform functions expected to sustain the political system (Ejumudo, 2010). To put our argument clearly, it has remained obvious that the intra-party crisis within political parties in Nigeria has remained a product of ideological differences, power struggles and even ethnoreligious factors. All these mentioned eventually lead to intra-party crises and result in the emergence of factions and defections to other political parties, leadership tussles and fragmentation of the political party. Suggesting a way out of the problem, Saliu & Ifejika (2018:124) explained that since political parties are the heart-beat of democracy, it is important for Nigerian political parties to do everything possible to cherish the values of internal democracy in managing their affairs.

An Overview of Intra-Party Crisis in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

According to Anifowose & Enemuo (1999), a political party is a group of people sharing common political views that come together to pool their resources seeking to elect their candidate to public office, providing a label or platform by which the electorate can identify them. Political parties can be described as an organized group of citizens with common views on fundamental political issues, who identify with a particular political system, pooling their resources together to occupy decisive positions through the electoral process (Ofoeze, 2001). Appadorai (1975:538) defined a political party as a more or less organised group of citizens who act together as a political unit, have distinctive aims and opinions on the leading political questions of controversy in the state, and who by acting together as a political unit, seek to obtain control of the government. All these illustrations of what connotes a political party highlight the place of unity of purpose among political party members.

Therefore, intra-party crisis portends a situation where cooperation and unity of purpose become unachievable due to the existence of factions with divergent interests within a political party. Intra-party crisis is the inability to achieve collaboration and unity of purpose due to factions with divergent interests within a political party resulting in most cases from factors like money politics, lack of internal democracy, elitist elitist-centred democracy among others (Unumen, 2019). Egobueze (2021) described intra-party as the evident disagreement among members of the same political party, usually caused by a clash of

diverse interests, in most cases ego and many other factors against the general interest of the party. It can be explained as a resulting conflict due to the pursuance of incompatible political goals or even a bid to influence the decision-making process of the political party for individual or group advantage (Mbah, 2011).

Unumen (2019) argue that party unity enhances party strength in the electoral arena and as such makes it easy to sell their ideas and policies as enshrined in their manifestoes to the people. In other words, conflict among members of a political party has horrendous implications for the success of political parties since a unified front is missing. Describing the nitty gritty of democracy, Dahl in Gberevbie (2014) highlighted the existence of civil liberties, political pluralism, and political participation providing choices (candidates) for the electorate to select from in a free and fair election, as a prerequisite for a democratic society. This implies that any likelihood of authoritarianism in handling democratic institutions like political parties would be a constraint on democracy and thus may result in an intra-party crisis. Thus, democracy needs political parties as strong and sustainable institutions with the capacity to represent citizens and provide policy choices that demonstrate their ability to govern for the public good of the citizenry.

Nigeria's political parties have constantly faced the challenge of how to choose the party leadership and candidates (flag bearers) in inter-party elections. This often has resulted in grievances and disagreements which in most cases consume the party itself or even lead to loss of members decamping to another party. It has remained obvious that if the wrong candidate is foisted on party members in flagrant disregard of democratic procedure, it would bring disaffection and agitations within the party, while also affecting the quality of alternatives that the electorate is presented with. Political parties are supposed to be pillars sustaining the electoral process and most especially democracy but, unfortunately, the unprecedented cases of controversial primaries question their continuous existence (Ereke and Ogendegbe, 2016). There has been an increase in cases of intra-party conflicts in Nigeria since the inception of the Fourth Republic. Both inter and intra-party conflicts have become recurring issues, and these conflicts in most cases when unresolved result in unmitigated factionalization, litigations and decamping of members to other parties, thus impeding the relevance and contributions of political parties towards the growth and progress of democracy in Nigeria (Olaniyan, 2009; Ereke & Ogendegbe, 2016).

In recent times, the mindset that politics is most profitable and ascension to political office giving access to control and use of public funds has made the issue of intra-party crisis increase as divergent interests are not tolerated since self-interests are put at the forefront. This eventually metamorphosed into an uninhibited culture of disregard for the rule of law which is popular among Nigerian political elites. Not considering the seemingly controversial nature of intraparty conflicts in Nigeria, the Nigerian elites have always strived to strike a balance in finding common grounds for settling their incongruous aspirations and concerns through coalitions or equitable distribution of political positions in the country (Momodu & Matudi, 2013).

After sixteen (16) years of military rule, the Nigeria military regime under General Abdulsalami Abubakar initiated a transition to civilian rule through a hand-over to the former military head of state, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, who emerged as the winner of the 1999 presidential election and thus the emergence of the fourth republic. As a result of the declaration of an intention to transition to civilian rule by the then military government before the 1999 general elections, a lot of activities kick-started and even continued after the general elections. Interest articulation, consultations, denials, betrayals and their implied effects became the order of the day, with the pervasive crisis rocking all the political parties and

most especially the major ones that have emerged from then till date. According to Joe-Akunne, Nnamani, Egodike, & Azuakor (2022:7):

In portraying the crises inside Nigeria political parties, a useful methodological course will be to provide indicators of crisis situations. One is the visible alteration within the ranks of party membership at all levels of the federal structure. The second is high turnover in the election and/or appointment of members of the executive committees of political parties. A third indicator is the breakup of parties and subsequent formation of factions. The fourth manifestation of party crisis is rampant defections across parties.

All Progressives Congress (APC) Abia State Intra-Party Crisis and the Abia Central Senatorial Zone Primaries

Intra-party crises have remained a cankerworm eroding the development of Nigeria's democracy. Egobueze (2021), explains an intra-party crisis as a situation where there is an evident lingering and pervasive disagreement among members of the same political party, usually caused by a clash of divergent interests and most times ego as against the general interest of the party. In most cases, these divergent interests would eventually lead to disaffection, factionalization and decamping of the party members to other political parties. Katz and Mair (1995) argue that the technique or method engaged by a political party in its candidate selection explains and provides adequate information on how the party functions internally and the location of political power in a particular country. Odigwe (2015), described internal democracy as the democratisation of a political party's internal decision-making structures and processes to provide opportunities for political party members to participate and influence choices that the political parties present to voters without considering status. As such whenever internal party democracy is not realisable it results in an intra-party crisis. Also in most cases, these crises largely stem from disagreements and power struggles among party members.

The All Progressives Congress (APC) in Nigeria experienced a significant intra-party crisis from 2015 to 2023. Abia State is one of the 36 states in Nigeria and is located in the South-East geopolitical zone. Abia State has 3 senatorial zones, Abia North, Abia South and Abia Central. In the case of Abia All Progressives Congress, allegations of imposition of candidates by party leaders have fuelled tensions and discontent within the political party. One of the notable cases of intra-party crises in the Abia All Progressives Congress (APC) was the intense competition for the Abia Central Senatorial ticket. Before the build-up to the All Progressives Congress (APC) Abia Central Senatorial primaries held in May, 28th 2022, various groups and factions aligned to different power brokers within the party battled for influence and control of the party structure, thus leading to intense infighting and disunity. Not only were members biased due to the intra-party crisis within the party, but also allegations of imposition of candidates fuelled tensions and discontent within the Abia All Progressives Congress (APC). This hindered the party's ability to effectively strategize and mobilise its members for electoral victories (Oko, 2022).

The All Progressives Congress (APC) Abia Central Senatorial Primaries held on May 28th 2022 was declared inconclusive, and rescheduled to June 7th 2022. The party leadership decided to substitute Representative Onuigbo with Chief Emeka Atuma in the rescheduled primaries of June 7th 2022. Based on moves by some leaders of the All Progressives Congress (APC) to substitute his name, Representative Sam Onuigbo approached the Federal High

Court, and sought among other reliefs, that under sections 29(1) and 84 of the 2022 Electoral Act, Chief Emeka Atuma did not participate in the processes leading to the conduct of the Abia Central senatorial primary and thus cannot be recognised as the flag bearer for APC in the Abia Central senatorial election (Eze, 2022).

In the suit filed by Representative Onuigbo, he urged the court to declare him the winner and flag bearer of the All Progressives Congress (APC) for Abia Central senatorial primaries. The party leadership declared Abia Central Senatorial primaries held on May 28th 2022 inconclusive and rescheduled it to June 7th 2022. Justice Anyadike dismissing the suit filed reiterated that the choice of candidate for an election is an internal party affair, thus agreeing with the position of the party to substitute candidates. In a suit appealing the judgement that recognised Chief Emeka Atuma as the Abia Central All Progressives Congress (APC) Senatorial candidate, the Court of Appeal sitting in Owerri nullified the candidacy of Chief Emeka Atuma of the All Progressives Congress (APC), for Abia Central senatorial election. Thus, granting the prayers of Representative Sam Onuigbo, the Appellate court upheld the legality of the party primary held on May 28, 2022, which produced Representative Sam Onuigbo as the winner having scored the highest number of votes, followed by Chief Henry Ikoh who was his only challenger in the race (Oko, 2022).

The contention remained about how a person who never participated in a party primary could be forced by party leadership upon the members. Chief Emeka Atuma not content with the pronouncement of the Appeal court filed a suit at the Supreme Court asking the court to set aside the judgement pronounced by the Appeal court. Chief Emeka Atuma, maintained that he emerged from a fresh poll held on June, 7th 2022, alleging that the initial primaries held 28th May 2022 were cancelled by the national leadership of the political party. The apex court dismissed the appeal filed by Chief Emeka Atuma due to its lack of merit (Ochojila, 2023).

Efforts to address these crises, resulting from conflicting interests of members, whether political heavyweights or party members, were made by various party leaders and stakeholders towards finding a common ground for engagements. Initiatives such as reconciliation committees and interventions by prominent party figures were employed to resolve conflicts among members and stakeholders. However, the deep-rooted nature of these crises or conflicts has made it challenging to achieve lasting solutions, especially when it has become a recurring anomaly in Nigeria's politics.

Table 1: Local Governments and Wards in Abia Central Senatorial Zone

Local Government	Wards
Ikwuano	Oloko I, Oloko II, Ibere I, Ibere II, Oboro I, Oboro II, Oboro III, Oboro IV, Ariam, Usaka
Isiala Ngwa North	Amasaa Nsulu, Umunna Nsulu, Isiala Nsulu, Ngwa Ukwu I, Ngwa Ukwu II, Ihie, Amasaa Ntigha, Amapu Ntigha, Umuoha, Mbawsi/Umuomainta
Isiala Ngwa South	Amaise/Amaise Anaba, Ngwaobi, Mbutu Ngwa, Ehina Guru Osokwa, Akunekpu Eziama na Obuba, Omoba, Ovungwu, Ovuokwu, Okporo Ahaba
Osioma Ngwa	Ama-Asaa, Amaitolu Mbutu Umuojima, Amasator, Amator, Amavo, Aro-Ngwa, Okpor-Umuobo, Oso-Okwa, Umunneise, Uratta

Umuahia North	Ibeku East I, Ibeku East II, Ndume, Ibeku West, Umuahia Urban I, Umuahia Urban II, Umuahia Urban III, Nkwoachara, Nkwoegwu, Afugiri, Umuhu, Isingwu
Umuahia South	Nsirimo, Ezeleke/Ogbodiukwu, Omaegwu, Ohiaocha, Ahiaukwu I, Ahiaukwu II, Old Umuahia, Amakama, Ubakala I, Ubakala II

Source: Fieldwork

Methodology

The study utilised secondary sources of data and adopted a survey research design, using questionnaires as an instrument of data collection. Data was collected from the sample size of 244 All Progressives Congress (APC) members, who were randomly selected from the population of 624 (12 from each ward) All Progressives Congress (APC) executive selected from the 52 wards in Abia Central Senatorial Zone. Responses were presented in tables and evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale, where Strongly Agree (SA) is 5 points, Agree (A) is 4 points, Undecided (UD) is 3 points, Disagree (D) is 2 points and Strongly Disagree (SD) is 1 point. The research adopted a cut-off point mean score of 2.50 to validate hypotheses raised.

To determine the sample size, the formula of Taro Yamane was used. The formula is given as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where, n is the sample size

N = population

e² = square of maximum allowance for sampling error at 5% level of significance.

$$n = \frac{624}{1+(624)(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{624}{1+(624)(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{624}{1+(1.56)}$$

$$n = \frac{624}{2.56} \quad n = 243.75$$

Approximately = 244. Therefore, the sample size (n) = 244

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were investigated.

1. Intra-party crisis has no significant effect on the performance of political parties in the electoral process.

2. There is no positive link between the poor implementation of the party constitution and the Electoral Act and intra-party crisis in political parties.

Results and Discussion of Findings

Table 2: Response on whether intra-party crises have a significant effect on the performance of political parties in the electoral process

Response	F	%	X	%
Strongly Agree (SA)	48	19.67	240	33.19
Agree (A)	50	20.49	200	27.66
Undecided (UD)	39	15.98	117	16.18
Disagree (D)	59	24.18	118	16.32
Strongly Disagree (SD)	48	19.67	48	6.63
	$\Sigma F = 244$	100	$\Sigma X = 723$	100

Source: Fieldwork

$$\frac{\Sigma X}{\Sigma F} = \frac{723}{244} = 2.96$$

From the responses gotten from the sample population, 48 respondents representing 19.6% strongly agree, 50 respondents representing 20.49% agree, 39 respondents representing 15.98% are undecided, 59 respondents representing 24.18% disagree, and 48 respondents representing 19.67% strongly disagree. Since the calculated mean score is 2.96 and is above the cut-off point of 2.50, we accept that intra-party crises have a significant effect on the performance of political parties in the electoral process.

Table 3: Response on whether there is a link between the poor implementation of the party constitution and electoral act and intra-party crisis in political parties

Response	F	%	X	%
Strongly Agree (SA)	46	18.85	230	31.85
Agree (A)	52	21.31	208	28.80
Undecided (UD)	39	15.98	117	16.20
Disagree (D)	60	24.59	120	16.62
Strongly Disagree (SD)	47	19.26	47	6.50
	$\Sigma F = 244$	100	$\Sigma X = 722$	100

Source: Fieldwork

$$\frac{\Sigma X}{\Sigma F} = \frac{722}{244} = 2.95$$

From the responses gotten from the sample population, 46 respondents representing 18.85% strongly agree, 52 respondents representing 21.31% agree, 39 respondents representing 15.98% are undecided, 60 respondents representing 24.59% disagree, and 47 respondents representing 19.26% strongly disagree. Since the calculated mean score is 2.95 and is above

the cut-off point of 2.50, we accept that there is a link between the poor implementation of the party constitution and electoral act and intra-party crisis in political parties.

Conclusion

The overreaching standpoint of this research effort is anchored on the fact that internal conflicts within political parties in Nigeria have multifaceted, subtle and obvious ways that affect the democratisation process in the country. It has been observed that issues bothering on lack of party discipline, internal party democracy, elite-centred leadership, monetisation of candidacy, factionalization, neglect and abuse of political party constitution and even the electoral law have remained chains clogging the wheels of progress for Nigeria's political parties. The study concludes that these anomalies observed by the masses or electorate, also send a strong illustration regarding what these political parties stand for. This has continuously affected the ability of political parties like the All Progressives Congress (APC) within the state to clinch political power.

It is unfortunate that while much is not seen in the area of increased political participation and competition due to political apathy resulting from the messy intra-party politics witnessed by the electorate; there is an evident increase in the infighting in political parties, both in major and minor political parties in Nigeria. The study concludes that political parties remain an important institution for any democracy to succeed and the continuous cases of intra-party crises have constrained political parties to contribute towards the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. Thus, if Nigeria's political parties must help deepen Nigeria's democracy, internal party democracy should be promoted, issues leading to factionalization addressed and the dictates of the party constitution and Electoral Act should not be compromised.

Recommendations

- i. Thus, based on the findings the study recommended the following:
- ii. Political parties must entrench internal democracy within their internal structure and activities, especially when selecting candidates for leadership within the party and for the general elections.
- iii. Members of political parties should show commitment as they uphold and practise the dictates of their party constitution and the Electoral Law.
- iv. Political parties must evolve through political ideologies and their activities must be guided by the ideologies they represent.
- v. Political parties should regularly organise capacity-building programmes to equip their members with the required knowledge of the values and ideals of democracy.
- vi. The process of selecting leadership within the party or representatives in a general election should be without any form of bias, but free and fair.

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