

Contending Issues in Political Parties in Nigeria: The Candidate Selection Process

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Abstract

This article focuses on the issue of candidate selection process within Nigeria's political parties. Hence the article argues that in Nigeria, primary elections are the most common method of selecting party flag-bearers, and more often than not, this process is undermined by party elite who deploy money to influence choices thereby, leading to the outright collapse of the party structures, which are expected to breed internal democracy. This, in turn, hinders the emergence of credible candidates and also gives rise to internal party squabbles, litigation, and the exclusion of certain segment of society, notably, women, youth and the people with disability. Therefore, the authors conducted a series of interviews with party leaders from three political parties and officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and prominent members of civil society organisations.

Introduction

Elections in Nigeria cannot be thought of without political parties as there is no provision for independent candidacy in the country's constitution. Political parties remain the only platform in Nigeria for democratically elected leaders to emerge. The idea of political party's candidate selection process enjoys unrivalled eminence in political discourses and analyses in Nigeria. However, party primaries and conventions are mere platforms of voice affirmation of elite's consensus, which most times renders candidate selection process less credible. The process through which candidates emerge is often fraught with controversies, which often lead to violence and litigation. In fact, a greater percentage of those that emerge from party primaries are products of imposition, consensus and compromise (Egwu, 2014: 193). Emerging through consensus is not an aberration neither is it undemocratic but it becomes a problem when it is orchestrated by the party's godfathers who see themselves as the owners of the party.

Internal party democracy is one issue which the parties have to contend with. An assessment of the process of emergence of candidates in political parties therefore, becomes necessary to identify the democratic deficits inherent in Nigeria's parties. Focusing on the three main political parties in Nigeria - the All Progressives Congress (APC), All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the assessment is based on a two dimensional approach of party candidate selection, and political inclusion. Assessment of these parties was done within the following contexts: level of internal party democracy; presence of party rules on selection of candidates; doctrine of party supremacy in the selection process; use of elections to select candidates; consensus politics in the selection process; and finally, the inclusiveness of party dimensions of gender, age, and disability status. The main question the study seeks to answer is: are party selection processes in Nigeria governed by party rules and procedures?

Methodology

There are two main approaches to doing a research of this nature, namely - quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative research uses numbers and statistical methods, and seeks measurements that are easily replicable by other researchers whereas, qualitative researchers are interested in gaining understanding/insights into problems (King, Keohane and Verba, 1994). Qualitative approaches are widely used in disciplines where the emphasis is on descriptive analysis rather than on prediction. Since the study seeks to explain how political parties in Nigeria select candidates for general elections, the choice of qualitative method is appropriate. The preference for this method stems from the fact that a qualitative research allows for the study of motives and causal relationships. Additionally, the method aids in the understanding of why certain actions are or are not taken.

Some of the fundamental methods relied upon by qualitative researchers include in-depth interviewing, and document review. To observe directly parties' selection process is not possible since the authors do not belong to any political party in Nigeria and the timing of the work did not fall within the time frame of party primaries, conventions or congresses. Hence, the reliance on primary sources such as one-on-one interviews with party leaders. External stakeholders such as members of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), especially those who are well informed on party politics in the country, and officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) are not left out. These individuals have been carefully selected for interview on the basis of the positions they occupy in their respective parties or organisations.

The authors conducted a series of one-on-one interviews with prominent politicians, including party leaders from APC, APGA, and PDP. Officials of Nigeria's Electoral Commission (INEC), and prominent members of CSOs were also interviewed. These individuals were asked in sufficient detail about their views on party candidate selection processes in Nigeria. Without doubt, the views of these people are central to gaining an understanding of the phenomenon being researched. Through semi-structured interviews the authors were able to extract simple factual information from the interviewees. Put simply, the authors were able to gather information from the insiders' perspective. Furthermore, a wide range of literature on party politics in Nigeria was reviewed in order to provide the authors with the benefit of learning from the findings of other related research. A review of party policy documents such as constitutions and manifestos was also done. Party Constitutions in particular served as an important source of information. Moreover, INEC documents on regulation of party primaries, and monitoring were also reviewed. The use of multiple sources to help explain the internal democracy of the three political parties in Nigeria was aimed at enhancing the reliability of data.

Multi-Party Democracy and Nigeria's Electoral Environment

Political parties in Nigeria date back to when the Clifford Constitution of 1922 provided for the establishment of the Nigerian Legislative Council (Dudley, 1982: 45). The first political party to be formed was the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) founded in 1923. The party was led by Herbert Macaulay, a man regarded as the father of Nigerian nationalism. It must be pointed out that there was nothing 'national' about the party as its operations were confined to Lagos throughout its existence (Dudley, 1982; Sklar, 1963). In 1936, the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) was formed, initially as a pressure group but eventually became a political party, replacing the NNDP. However, leadership crisis later led to the collapse of the NYM, whose activities had also been restricted to the Southern part of Nigeria.

The first nationwide political party in Nigeria was the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), which was formed in 1944. Herbert Macaulay and Nnamdi Azikiwe were elected President and General Secretary of the party respectively. At inception, the party attracted many followers across the country.

However, Azikiwe's leadership of a pan-Igbo organisation, the Igbo State Union (ISU) weakened the support of the party nationwide (Ezera, 1960: 91-2). The second major party in Nigeria was the Action Group (AG) formed in 1948. The party was an offshoot of the pan-Yoruba cultural organisation, the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* (Society for the descendants of Oduduwa-the Yoruba legendary ancestor), which was formed in 1945 by a group of Yoruba students in London (Ezera, 1960: 92-3; Coleman, 1958: 344). Obafemi Awolowo, then, a student in London was the brain behind the organisation. The third party to be formed was the Northern People's Congress (NPC) in 1951. Likewise, this party grew out of a pan-Northern Nigeria cultural organisation, the *Jammiyyaar Mutanen Arewa* (Northern People's Congress), which was formed in 1949 (Ezera, 1960: 94-6). The party's leaders included Dr. R.A. Dikko, the first Northern Nigeria medical doctor, Yusuf Maitama Sule and Mallam Aminu Kano. It is important to note that the aforementioned political figures were in their youth when they played significant roles in Nigeria's independence movement, and in the political development of the country as a whole. The political inclusion of women in Nigerian politics, particularly during the First Republic shows an abysmal record. That era was dominated by men. Women were not known to occupy public offices and this is in spite of the role played by women such as Mrs Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Margret Ekpo and others during the struggle for decolonisation.

The three dominant political parties (AG, NCNC and NPC) that operated in the First Republic (1960 - 1966) were all embroiled in candidate selection crisis, which almost tore the parties apart before the federal elections of 1959, which ushered in Nigeria's political independence in 1960. What was discernible during that period was the imposition of candidates by the party leaders. The picture that emerged from the national conventions of these parties show that all the written and unwritten rules, procedures and guidelines on candidate selection process were irrelevant as the party lords dictated to the rest of the party. For example, the AG reserved the position of the Prime Minister to the leader of the party, Obafemi Awolowo. Similarly, the NCNC also set aside the position for Nnamdi Azikwe, likewise, the NPC which surrendered the party's ticket to Ahmadu Bello. The only political denominator underlying all these choices is the fact that they were all Premiers of their respective regions at that time.

The political parties that contested elections in the Second Republic (1979 - 1983) were also short of being ideological in character. The five notable political parties during this period were: the Unity party of Nigeria (UPN), which was a reincarnate of the AG and led by Obafemi Awolowo; the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), which was a coalition of the rump of the defunct NPC and a faction of all the other former political parties; the Nnamdi Azikwe-led Nigerian People's Party (NPP), which grew out of the defunct NCNC; the Great Nigerian People's Party (GNPP) of Waziri Ibrahim; and the People's Redemption Party (PRP) led by Alhaji Aminu Kano. Ideologically, the NPN, like the old NPC, was a conservative party in the sense that it made no pretext about changing the class nature of Nigerian society (Dudley, 1982: 194), and is also committed to the preservation of traditional institutions. Both the NPP and the GNPP articulated liberalist ideas and programmes to function within a mixed economy.

The UPN, like the defunct AG was a party with socialist/welfarist agenda like free education, free healthcare and so on. The PRP offered members of the left a platform for the struggle for power in the country (Dudley, 1982: 194). All the parties except the NPN were built around one man (UPN-Awolowo; NPP-Azikiwe; PRP-Aminu Kano; and GNPP-Ibrahim Waziri). These parties were personalised around their leaders who were in turn seen as patrons.

During the Second Republic, political parties also abandoned the principle of internal democracy and political inclusion, and embraced less democratic practices of candidate imposition. In fact, all the candidates that emerged to contest the 1979 presidential election never passed through proper party selection process. It is on record that from the presidential aspirants to the governorships, and right down to the National Legislature, political inclusion never existed in the democratic lexicon of the five leading parties. Women and youth were excluded in the scheme of things.

The multiparty system that characterised the first two Republics was jettisoned in favour of a two-party system in the aborted Third Republic as the military government of Ibrahim Babangida (1985 - 1993) decreed two political parties - the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC). In terms of ideological leaning, the SDP was said to be “a little to the left” while the NRC was “a little to the right” of the political spectrum. The imposition of these two parties on Nigerians gave rise to strange political alliances, which was later to play a part in the annulled presidential elections of 1993.

Nigeria's return to civilian rule in 1999 after thirteen years of military dictatorship brought about the resurgence of multiparty democracy in the country. The Nigerian political class converged to form political parties. As many as twenty-nine political parties contested the 1999 presidential election but only three were dominant - Alliance for Democracy (AD), All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP), and People's Democratic Party (PDP). By 2011, the number of political parties had grown to fifty. However, other parties offered no real opposition to the governing PDP at the centre, and no party had the prospect of winning elections, particularly, at the centre. The emergence of APC, an amalgam of three regionally-based opposition parties - the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), All Nigerian People's Party (ANPP), and the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) - in early 2013 changed the entire political landscape of the country. By 2015, APC, APGA and PDP had become the three main parties in Nigeria.

Understanding the Candidate Selection Process

In Nigeria, matters relating to internal party democracy and political inclusion are well spelt out in regulatory mechanisms such as the Nigerian Constitution, Party Constitutions, the Electoral Act, Party Manifestos, etc. These laws are legal instruments for guiding the conduct and behaviour of actors in the affairs of parties. For example, Article 1 of the INEC *Regulations for the Conduct of Political Party Primaries* for the nominations of candidates into various positions provides that:

A political party seeking to participate in any election organised by the commission (INEC) must conduct primaries, wherein all eligible members of the party must be given equal opportunity to participate in the primaries of the party for the purpose of selecting candidates for elective positions.

However, Nigerian political parties do not comply with this proviso. Instead, they create rules and/or impose conditions that exclude the underrepresented groups from emerging as candidates. This is in spite of Article 2 of the INEC *Regulations for the Conduct of Political Party Primaries*, which provides that, "political parties must not create rules or impose conditions or set high expression of interest or nomination fee that could exclude aspirants on the basis of sex, religion, ethnicity, circumstance of birth or wealth".

The culture of candidate imposition through consensus is now becoming a norm in Nigeria. For example, the APC constitution (as amended in 2014) provides that all positions of the party, as well as all nominations must be done democratically in line with the provision of its own constitution. Article 20 (ia) particularly states that:

All party posts prescribed or implied by this Constitution shall be filled by democratically conducted elections at the respective National Convention or Congress subject, where possible, to consensus, provided that where a candidate has emerged by consensus for an elective position, a vote of "yes" or "no" by ballot or voice shall be called, to ensure that it was not an imposition which could breed discontent and crisis.

This practice is not necessarily undemocratic but it portends danger for Nigeria's democracy. In corroborating this view, APGA National Secretary, Labaran Maku lamented that, "the greatest challenge facing party operations in Nigeria today is candidate imposition and flagrant abuse of processes, procedures and laws guiding candidate selection (this view was expressed during an interview with the authors in Abuja, Nigeria in March 2017)."

He went further to disclose that this is what led to his defection from PDP to APGA in 2014.

With regards to gender balancing, APGA's slogan of "Be Your Brother's and Sister's Keeper" is a direct reference to where the party stands on the inclusion of women. On the same issue, Article 20 (V) of the APC Constitution provides that:

Without prejudice to Article 20 (ii) and (iii) of this Constitution, the National Working Committee shall subject to the approval of the National Executive Committee make Rules and Regulations for the nomination of Candidates through primary elections. All such Rules, Regulations and Guidelines shall take into consideration and uphold the principle of Federal Character, gender balance, geo-political spread and rotation of offices, to as much as possible ensure balance within the constituency covered.

Likewise, in its manifesto for the 2015 general election, the PDP pledged that:

PDP will pursue a policy of inclusiveness for women through program that will address age long barriers imposed by cultural and economic factors. Accordingly, the PDP government shall develop programs to enhance the participation of women in national affairs...Specifically, the PDP will seek to integrate women by enhancing their capacity to participate in the economic, social, political and cultural life of the Nigerian nation...Ensure equitable representation of women in all aspects of national life including party organs by using affirmative action to ensure that at least 35% of the workforce are women (PDP Manifesto, 2015-2019: 38).

Clearly, there exist documents spelling out how the selection of candidates should be carried out. However, party godfathers do not respect these rules. The activities of these money-bags, as they are called in Nigeria, have, in many cases, resulted in the selection of less credible candidates, intra-party squabbles, and pre-election litigations.

In Nigeria, the unwritten rules and conventions outweigh the written rules and regulations when it comes to candidate selection within parties. This study reveals that the factors responsible for why women, youth and people with disability are not adequately represented both in political parties and elective positions are due to the overbearing influence of religion, custom and culture.

Without doubt, primordial factors such as ethnicity and religion play a critical role in the political calculations of the competing political elites. For instance, religion played a significant part in the choice of vice presidential candidate in the 2015 presidential election. The newly formed APC was confronted with the challenge of how to present a 'balanced' ticket to the voters. In Nigeria, a balanced ticket means that the presidential candidate and the running-mate must come from different ethnic and religious backgrounds and the 'tradition' has always been for the contending parties to present a balanced ticket. This tradition was, however, punctured during the 1993 annulled presidential election in which the Social Democratic Party (SDP) presented a Muslim-Muslim ticket, which defeated the Muslim-Christian ticket of the rival party - National Republican Convention (NRC). The APC was to have Bola Tinubu, a chieftain of the party and former governor of Lagos state as Buhari's vice presidential candidate but this would have resulted in a Muslim-Muslim ticket, a situation likely to spell doom for the party at the polls. The APC eventually picked Yemi Osinbajo, a Christian from the southwest as running mate. The PDP had no difficulty in fielding a balanced ticket as Jonathan chose his vice president, Namadi Sambo, a northern Muslim.

In most part of northern Nigeria, which is predominantly Muslims, woman leadership is believed to be contrary to the doctrines of Islam. In the same way, some cultures in this part of the country also frown at leadership by women. A good example of when the religious card was used to thwart a woman's political ambition could be found in the experiences of Senator Gbemisola Saraki of Kwara state who was unfairly edged out of PDP candidate selection process in 2011 due to the religious and cultural beliefs of her society (Ilorin). Ilorin is a Muslim-dominated city. Even when she decamped to the Action Congress Party of Nigeria (ACPN) to contest the gubernatorial seat, the religious and cultural factors also played out in truncating her ambition. It was similarly alleged that religion played a significant part in denying Senator Aisha Alhassan of APC to become the first elected female governor of Taraba state and indeed in Nigeria in 2015. According to an APC source, though without any evidence to support this claim, the people of Taraba were not willing to accept a woman governor because of their religious beliefs and cultural practices.

On the issue of gender balancing in the democratic space in Nigeria, the trend in the political parties paints a gloomy picture. For example, only one position, that is, that of the Woman Leader out of the twelve positions in the National Working Committee (NWC) of a party is usually occupied by a woman, the rest are male-dominated. Even at that, in some Muslim-dominated Northern states, between 2007 and 2015, for example, the Woman Leader positions were given to men. Similarly, the youth is still viewed as a boy/girl child to be fed, clothed, housed and tended to by their parents. For most political gladiators, a 30 year old person is still a child and is not capable of being assigned any position of responsibility in government. The common verdict in this regard is, leadership is not for boys and girls.

Same could be said about the persons with disability. This underrepresented group is politically reduced to an insignificant actor whose only democratic value is the voting card. None of the foremost parties in Nigeria has any semblance of disability policy either in their constitution or in their manifestos. Unlike the youth and the women that are represented at the NWC of the parties through their leaders, the disabled persons do not have such official portfolios designated to them. Apart from not having their own in the NWC, Board of Trustees (BoT), National Executive Committee (NEC) of these parties, the disabled persons experience a total black out in the affairs of these parties at all levels. Nobody is willing to lend them any support, apart from assisting them to vote during elections. This segment of the society remains the most politically marginalised and democratically suffocated.

Stakeholders and the Candidate Selection Process

The process of selecting candidates for election cannot be thought of without the activities of stakeholders. There are two broad categories of stakeholders - internal and external. Internal stakeholders vary from one party to another, and they include but not limited to, political godfathers who are usually former or reigning governors, members of the National Assembly, special advisers, etc, while external stakeholders include, among others, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) officials, civil society organisations (CSO), media and so on. In the real sense of the word, every party member is a stakeholder in the party but in Nigeria only a few see themselves as their party's stakeholders. Typically, these are the party's "godfathers". A godfather is a wealthy individual who controls party structures and determine who gets what, how and when within the party (Egwu, 2014: 196 - 200).

Within the structures of the parties surveyed, power lies with the godfathers instead of the party executives. Godfathers manipulate primordial sentiments, as well as use money to maintain their dominion over other party members. They render party organs impotent, especially during party primaries, conventions and congresses. Party constitutions and other extant laws regulating candidate selections are also rendered ineffectual. This group of people had at one time or the other taken advantage of their access to public office to amass fortunes for themselves. In Nigeria, political elites compete for some share of the "national cake", which they then distribute to their own followers. Political power is synonymous with economic power and it is a weapon to access some share of the national resources. This explains why most businessmen are in politics just as most politicians are in business. These business/political elites finance party activities and in turn reap the reward in the form of contract award and other forms of patronage. As Agbaje and Adejumobi (2006: 40) remarked, these powerful individuals,

... often constitute informal leaders, who are more powerful than the party chiefs and formal office holders. They sponsor candidates, control the internal party nomination process, finance electoral campaigns, rig elections on behalf of their candidates, corrupt election officials, and sometimes change the names of candidates after elections have been concluded.

Running political parties and funding of campaigns are endeavours beyond the reach of the ordinary citizen. And since political parties in Nigeria lack membership base from which to generate funds in running these parties, the parties resort to the godfathers for easy and painless means of raising funds for party activities (Olorunmola, 2016). This, in turn, leads political parties to the booby traps of the godfathers. The adage that who pays the piper dictates the tune becomes applicable. Godfathers influence party delegates to pick a particular candidate. For the godfathers, their financial contributions to party operations, including campaigns are investments that should yield material dividends for them as individuals. Both the parties and the candidates that emerge through these manipulated processes compromise not only internal party democracy, but also endangers the principle of political inclusion within these parties as women and youth become marginalised.

Contrary to all democratic norms, values and best practices, parties in Nigeria are run not through elected party leaders but through a clientele arrangement that every person elected into position of power and authority automatically becomes the leader of the party in his own domain. The political history of Nigeria reveals that from 1999 when the country returned to democratic rule to date, elected executives superimpose their interests, as well as candidates on the rest of the party. These godfathers/kingmakers are so influential that they turn their respective parties into their personal fiefdoms. Ironically, the main casualties in all these are the political parties. For instance, PDP party leaders interviewed claimed that the "culture" of candidate imposition cost the party the 2015 presidential election. Not only that, the party's control in 29 states of the federation was equally reduced to 12 states. Furthermore, the party, which had an overwhelming majority in the National Assembly became a minority party after the 2015 general elections.

Since parties on their own cannot guarantee level playing ground for all party segments within the constitutionally approved processes and the conventionally sanctioned procedures, then there is the need to look outwards within the democratic space. At the external level, all the stakeholders are collaborators with well defined roles, responsibilities, powers and relative degree of importance and influence. Some of them derive their powers from the laws of the land. For instance, the 1999 Constitution (as amended) empowers the INEC to organise and conduct elections in Nigeria, and also to register and monitor political parties. According to Section 153, Third Schedule, 15 (c), the Commission [INEC] has the power to "monitor the organisation and operation of the political parties, including their finances, conventions, congresses and party primaries."

In addition, INEC, through its Election and Party Monitoring (EPM) department, monitors parties' executive meetings at all levels. However, INEC's role in party primaries is purely advisory. The powers of INEC is diminished by the provision of Article 87 of the Electoral Act that empowers political parties with the final say on who emerges as a candidate of a party. In an attempt to address this gap, INEC through the support of UNDP/DGD II project in 2013 strengthened the operation and capacity of Inter-Party Advisory Council (IPAC), an umbrella body of all registered political parties in Nigeria to work and collaborate with INEC on elections and party monitoring. In line with the foregoing objective, IPAC code of conduct was produced and validated by all registered parties in Nigeria in June 2013 at Minna, Niger State. This collaborative effort resulted in an INEC/IPAC dialogue forum aimed at cementing relations, enhancing experience sharing, and providing platform for monthly dialogue between INEC and IPAC. Another issue worth discussing in regards to the role of INEC is the undue emphasis the Commission places on general elections at the expense of the primaries.

Another set of external stakeholders worth mentioning is the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). In an ideal democratic society, CSOs play an invaluable role as stakeholders in deepening the process and in enhancing its stability. In Nigeria, however, there is no love lost between political parties and the CSOs. There is no denying that the number of CSOs that engage in elections and party monitoring in Nigeria is tremendously increasing but there is no corresponding improvement in the candidate selection process of political parties. Political parties seldom invite the CSOs to their congresses, primaries or conventions. CSOs, nevertheless, gatecrash and attend these party activities but they are never accorded any recognition and are even seen as adversaries. Between 2007 and 2015, various CSOs through the support and funding from international donor agencies enriched the democratic environment by creating synergy between political parties and the CSOs. Among such platforms is the political Party/Civil Society Forum established as a multi-stakeholders platform for positive engagement aimed at enhancing and sustaining relations between the two stakeholders. This forum was established in 2013 in Abuja and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was validated and signed by about seventy CSOs and all registered parties under the aegis of IPAC with INEC and media organisations in attendance.

Systemic Problems with Candidate Selection Process

One thing that is undeniable in the political party structures in Nigeria is the fact that internal democracy has always not been allowed to flourish in the process of selecting candidates for general elections or positions within the party itself. This is evident in the manner political gladiators tend to struggle – at whatever cost – for positions within the party all in a bid to exert some level of influence in the decision making process of the party. The 2015 general election gives a lot of insight into this. The APC's success at the polls may be a result of the cracks in the wall of the governing party (PDP). Prominent members of the PDP, including governors, senators and members of the House of Representatives left the party for the APC, shortly before the general election.

One area of dispute was candidate imposition. The election-related petitions that characterised the 2015 election season were products of the near absence of internal democracy within the parties. A case to mention is the House of Representatives election of Ado/Ogbadibo/Okupokwu constituency of Benue state, where a PDP sole candidate was declared winner by INEC, but was later disqualified by the court, soon after the inauguration of the National Assembly. Also, the party's screening panel in Bayelsa state disqualified Senator Emmanuel Paulker, the sole aspirant challenging Governor Sariake Dickson for the PDP governorship ticket in the state. Although reasons for his disqualification were shrouded in secrecy, there are indications that the panel took the decision over alleged "inconsistent tax clearance". Similarly, although the APC, under the Bisi Akande interim leadership organised two national conventions, including the one that produced the incumbent national chairman of the party, John Oyegun. But the outcome of the convention led to the defection of Ali Modu Sheriff, the former governor of Borno State, and Tom Ikimi, from APC to PDP. It is also important to mention that the crisis currently rocking the APC also resulted partly from the party's godfathers trying to 'flex their muscles' in the imposition of candidates of their choice during the 2016 governorship election in Ondo state.

The absence of internal democracy that characterise political parties in Nigeria is responsible for women's under-representation in party leadership and elective positions. For instance, as revealed by a chieftain of the PDP, the gender makeup of the party's membership is 65% to men and 35% to women yet women are marginalised in the party. Women are grossly under-represented in party hierarchies and elective positions. Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, Nigerian women have made frantic efforts to aspire to high political decision-making positions by contesting elections at various levels of government. However, their efforts have not yielded the desired results. This scenario cuts across all parties in the country.

The question, at this juncture, is why are women not in top positions in the party structure and in elective positions? The answers are not far-fetched. In Nigeria, party structures are typically male-dominated. Another significant constraint to women's political participation is the lack of material resources available to women (Omenma, Onu, and Omenma, 2016: 203). Politics in Nigeria is about money and elections cannot be won without adequate funding. The Nigerian economic environment, like the political environment is also clearly dominated by men. It therefore, follows that the Nigerian woman is marginalised, politically and economically.

Just like the women, Nigerian youth are also under-represented within their respective parties. A close scrutiny of the parties' constitutions will expose the huge gap that defines the dismal place all parties in Nigeria place on the position of youth in party operations. Specifically, the constitutions of the political parties involved in this study have no single Article that categorically speaks to political inclusion of youth. In the Nigerian context, following the African Union (AU) categorisation, the youth represents a group of people within the ages of 18 and 35. However, none of the three parties as presently constituted has a youth leader that is below 40 years.

Moreover, apart from the position of the party youth leader, no youth is in the other organs of the party. Party chieftains were unanimous during interviews with the authors in their responses that in the last twelve years of congresses, primaries and conventions, Nigerian youth are not adequately incorporated into the various committees and sub-committees of these platforms.

Key Challenges in Candidate Selection Process

Clearly, one of the main challenges political parties in Nigeria face is that of internal party democracy. The most noticeable trend that runs through all narratives is the culture of exclusion and underrepresentation of some segments of the society. Political parties in Nigeria, overtly or covertly, fail to accord the underrepresented groups such as women, youth and the disabled a place within the democratic space. Party constitutions relegate these groups to the background in the affairs of the parties. Party structures are equally not accommodating to these groups. In Nigeria, more women are likely to vote than men yet women are underrepresented in the leadership of their parties and elective positions in the country. Many factors are responsible for these challenges and they are worth summarising here.

As explained earlier, the cost of politics in Nigeria serves as a hindrance for the marginalised groups because politics is oiled through monetary values that are beyond the capacity of the underrepresented groups. In Nigeria, party financiers or godfathers typically exert their influence in deciding who eventually picks the party's flag. State governors particularly wield enormous power within their respective parties. The governors, being the main financiers of the party, especially at state levels, believe that they have the 'right' to impose candidates on the party. In most instances, such undue influence leads to internal wrangling because a level playing field is lost in the process that produces the candidates. This explains why most election-related legal tussles are cases that mostly originate from pre-election activities of political parties. Political parties have become clearing houses for political patronage by godfathers who satisfy the material needs of their clients along the primordially segregated lines of ethnic and sectional agenda. In line with this, party primaries, conventions and congresses have been turned into platforms of producing godsons as candidates for elections. Another related issue is the delegate method. This method of candidate selection is open to fraud, manipulations and abuse by the godfathers who hijack the delegates by buying their votes and subsequently imposing their candidates and surrogates.

Another factor responsible for the underrepresentation of certain segments of the society in the political parties is the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society (Pogson, 2014). In most African countries in general, and Nigeria in particular, patriarchy is centrally embedded in all structures and institutions of society. As a result of the patriarchal nature and character of the Nigerian society and democratic practices in Nigeria, party structures, organs and elective positions are male-dominated, giving rise to the gender insensitivity that has become a feature of the political parties.

Customary practices and cultural norms serve as impediments to the implementation of internal party democracy and political inclusion during candidate's selection process. Party constitutions and structures relegate women, youth and the disabled persons to the background. Therefore, the political system, the democratic institutions and the political parties specifically see the marginalisation of the underrepresented groups as part of societal callings and responding to its demand.

In addition, despite being a secular state, religion has become an important determinant of who gets what in Nigeria. Religion has become the unwritten law that guides political calculations in Nigeria. For example, it has become the norm that for every Muslim presidential candidate, there must be a Christian vice-presidential candidate and vice-versa. Parties have no choice but to respect this unwritten rule. More often than not, internal party democracy and political inclusion are usually sacrificed on the platform of religious selectivism.

Another factor worth mentioning is the Electoral Act 2010, which empowers political parties to superintend the names of candidates that should appear on the ballot. This Act diminishes INEC's express powers to reject candidates that emerged through improper selection process on the basis of its monitoring reports.

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis shows that Nigeria's election environment, political party organs, the legal frameworks that guide the conduct of elections, stakeholders, be they internal or external, involved in elections have no significant influence over the process of candidate selection. The character of Nigeria's democracy, the political culture and the citizen's level of political education combine to limit the implementation of the principle of internal party democracy and political inclusion in Nigeria.

Political parties in Nigeria are institutionally weak, structurally defective and operationally fragile, and have failed to grow both vertically and horizontally to assume that enviable position of an institution with capacity to uphold the tenets of democracy. The most re-occurring decimal, which has become a noticeable feature of Nigeria's party system is the fact that party leadership across board remains nominal, subservient and submissive to party godfathers. The candidate selection process in Nigeria's political parties is typically abused and manipulated by party financiers (godfathers). Parties' inability to raise funds from within makes parties prone to being hijacked by party godfathers. This, in turn, diminishes internal party democracy and political inclusion. The concept of party supremacy, which underscores the absolute control of the affairs of a party by its leaders who are elected by the majority of its members is no longer tenable in Nigeria.

Party primaries, which serve as the litmus test for party stability, cohesion and party supremacy are often manipulated, which subsequently engenders intra party conflicts. These factors combined to weaken party cohesion and stability. Unfortunately, the country's election management body (INEC) that has the mandate of monitoring party primaries, enforcing the established regulatory mechanisms and punishing the offenders lack both the resources and technical capacity to monitor internal party processes effectively.

As Nigeria builds on the democratic gains made thus far, there is the need for political parties to exemplify a new level of commitment to the yearnings of the people for a sustainable development. The following are therefore recommended as measures considered necessary to improve on the candidate selection process across parties in Nigeria. Political parties should be encouraged to incorporate gender balancing, that is, provide a specific number of seats for women, in their constitutions to improve women's participation in politics. Gender quota could be in the following forms:

- Reserved seats - Here, parties should be supported to provide a specified proportion of seats (typically 10 - 30 per cent) in the legislature is reserved for women. This method is practised in Rwanda where 24 of 80 seats in the lower house are reserved for women.
- The most common method, especially in Europe, is the voluntary party quota in which a party adopts a certain proportion, say, 25 - 50 per cent of female candidates.
- The last method is the legislative quota. This method is mandated by law and applies to all parties. Electoral law requires each party to adopt a certain proportion (typically 25 - 50 per cent) of female candidates (Hague and Harrop, 2013: 135-6).

Similarly, party constitutions should be reviewed to provide for a broader democratic space for the underrepresented groups, particularly the youth and the physically challenged. Political Parties should endeavour to mass produce and distribute their constitutions and manifestos, and educate their members across all levels with a view to promoting the culture of party supremacy, especially as it relates to internal party democracy, inclusiveness, enforcement and appeal. All organs and structures of the party should be allowed to function and operate accordingly in line with all the written laws and established political conventions through institutional strengthening support to parties.

The federal government should also look in the direction of reviewing the electoral law, particularly, Section 87 of the Electoral Act to include conferring on INEC the power to reject candidates not properly selected on the basis of its monitoring reports. This should also include defining specific issues like aspirants/candidates and timelines for disposal of cases. INEC should be granted the power to recognise winners that emerged through credible party primaries only.

The process of selecting candidates within political parties has to be sanitised by the federal government and those who manage this process should be educated on the negative impact of lack of internal party democracy. This is imperative so as to consolidate upon the gains of Nigeria's nascent democracy.

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