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Party Politics and Parliamentary Conflict in Nigeria: A Critical Analysis

Dr. Abeki Sunny Okoro

University Of Africa, Bayelsa State

Dr. Ojie Peter Abang

University Of Calabar, Cross River State

Abstract:

The study critically assessed the influence of party politics on parliamentary conflict in Nigeria with focus on the Fourth Republic. The paper adopted survey research method. To this end, ex and serving parliamentarians, party leaders and academia were purposively sampled. To achieve the aim of the study, four investigative questions were formulated: 1. Did party leaders interference into National Assembly leadership composition contribute to National Assembly conflict? 2. Did inter and intra party politics influence National Assembly conflict in the republic under study? 3. Did the executive arm of government interference into parliamentary affairs contribute to parliamentary conflicts in Nigeria? 4. Did parliamentarians strict compliance to party interest on the fact of party supremacy against parliamentary mandates contribute to parliamentary conflicts in Nigeria. The paper also employed social exchange theory as the frame work of analysis. Analysis of data gathered showed that all the variables investigated contributed to parliamentary conflicts in Nigeria. Based on the study findings, it was recommended that parliamentary mandates and constitutional provisions on parliamentary functions should be the cardinal guide in the performance of legislative business. This will certainly put to an end, the cat and dog relationship in the parliament.

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Introduction

The idea of democracy originated in ancient Greece more than two millennia ago without an organized political party (Apter, 1968). Efforts at democratization were attempted in India (Sen, 2006 cited in

Banyo, 2013). However, it was in Ancient Greece that the idea of democracy took shape and was seriously put into practice (albeit on a limited scale). Democracy, as we know it today, took a long time to emerge as a working system of governance. This was bolstered by many developments such as; the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215, American and French Revolutions in the 18th Century and Widening of franchise in Europe and North America in the 19th Century. These developments notwithstanding, it was in the 20th century that the idea of democracy became established as the normal form of government to which any nation is entitled, whether in Europe, America, Asia or Africa. At this stage, the idea of democracy as a universal commitment expanded dramatically. The number and percentage of democracies increased and became a global phenomenon, a predominant and broadly legitimate form of government. Today about three-fifths of all the world's states (by the count of Freedom House) are democracies. 164 of 193 are democracies (Webb, 2012). This suggests that democracy exists in virtually every region of the world, and more pronounced in developed countries (all of the top 20 countries) in human development are liberal democracies.

It is interesting to note that democracy is not practised through a single or identical political format. Each society selects a political format that it finds capable of maintaining. Thus, some practise presidential democracy while others practise parliamentary democracy (Lijphart, 1992). Despite the difference in practice, it remains a fact that democracy is universally practised through party politics with Parliament such as the US Congress, United Kingdoms House of Lord and Common and Nigeria National Assembly. There is no democratic nation without political party and parliament (Gunther, 2002): Parliament is one basic feature of democracy and political party is the mechanism through which parliamentarians are recruited. It is therefore an undisputable fact that democracy in its true sense, was given birth to through party politics (Linz, 1994). Political parties are often a standard by which a country's political freedom can be measured; China-Communist party, United States-Democratic and Republican, United Kingdom – The Labour and Conservative Parties, Italy- the Christian Democrat, Japan- the Liberal Democrat, Nigeria's People's Democratic Party and All Progressive Congress and many others existing in the various democratic nations of the world. The import of the above is that political parties are leveraged because of democracy. Every society in the world strives to create a minimal free and conducive political environment capable of accommodating a democratic system of choice supported by the fundamentals of their society. Inherent in the practice of democracy is choice and decision-making.

Statement of Research Problem

Members of National Assembly recruited through party politics have often engaged in undemocratic conflicts that indicate the nature and character of inter and intra-party relations among themselves in the Assembly chambers. This situation has further worsened in the Fourth Republic, where majority of the political parties have assumed similar political behavior (Ndebe, 2007). Today, inter-party conflicts have become the hallmark of party-politics in Nigeria. National Assembly has turned into a battle field characterized by hatred, enmity, victimization and suspicion resulting from bitter struggles among party members in the National Assembly in their quest to either achieve personal interests, party interest and or public interest. This confirms Elaigwu (2013) assertion "that members of National Assembly perceive their function as a battle" in the interest of party politics. The multiplying effect is that most of the time, there is rancor and acrimony, physical brawling and fistcuff, undue bureaucracy in the passage of fiscal budget, firing of key Assembly officers and sometimes threats of

culpable impeachment of its leaders on party basis by members, impeachment threats by members of National Assembly against Mr. President by members of opposition parties (Agbafé, 2004).

These situations are unhealthy in the context where parties are expected to assist in integrating a fragmented society, engender political communication, national development and be in the vanguard for the realization of the dividend of democracy by the citizens.

Many studies on democratic politics in Nigeria tend to focus more on the functional nature of democracy in the country without in-depth study of the party politics and the National Assembly conflict as well as the philosophies which Assembly members rely on to relate to each other at that level of government. The temptations to focus only on the failures of democratic politics as presented by some scholars create an incomplete analysis of the real problems confronting democracy in the country. The need to avoid the gap in knowledge inherent in previous studies that ignored facts well shaped by party politics in terms related to National Assembly conflict underscores the relevance of this study.

Research Questions

The following research questions would be addressed in this study:

- (i) Did the interference of party leaders into the National Assembly leadership composition contribute to National Assembly conflict in Nigeria?.
- (ii) Did the interference of the Executive arms of Government into the National Assembly Legislative business generates National Assembly conflicts in Nigeria?
- (iii) Did the inter and intra party politics in the National Assembly influenced National Assembly conflicts in Nigeria?

Conceptual and Theoretical Review

The word conflict is derived from a Latin word “configure” which means to strike together (Albert, 2001; Barash, 2002). From time immemorial, conflict has been an indispensable character of human social interactions. In fact, conflict is present in every human social interaction. Flippa (1999) believes that a total absence of conflict would be unbelievable, boring and a strong indication that conflicts are being suppressed. Wolff (2006) opines that the term “conflict” is used to describe “a situation in which two or more actors pursue incompatible, yet from their individual perspectives, entirely just goals”. He further argues that sometime, conflict is a result of the struggle for power and material gains by leaders and followers alike. Because of such vested interests, conflict entrepreneurs prefer conflict to cooperation and prefer violence over negotiations. To have a thorough grasp of conflict, therefore, one must cautiously examine the various actors and factors and their interrelationship in each conflict situation.

According to Weber (1971) cited in Ayodele (2009), conflict is any action oriented intentionally to carry out actor's own will against the insistence of the other party or parties. He further asserts that conflict is an everyday normal on-going institutionalized process that is natural of social reality. For Coser (1966 in Maor (1998) social conflict is a struggle over status, power and scarce resources in which the aims of the groups in conflict are not only to gain the desired value but also to neutralize, injure or climate rivals. Generally speaking, conflict entails struggle and rivalry for objects to which individuals and groups attach values. These objects can either be material scarce resources employment, promotion in public service, creation of new state or local government or non-material such as culture, language and religion, though to Osaghae (2001), these tend to be mixed.

Following from the above conceptual definition of the term conflict, it is also imperative to define National Assembly Conflict. According to Bassey (2000), National Assembly Conflict can be defined as a situation where by National Assembly Members are divided and opposed to each other on matters of policy and their perception of the value of good governance. It is a state of partial or absolute incompatibility, where House members belonging to a political party are in constant confrontation with the other. It is also a situation whereby the executive and the National Assembly Pursue interests or goals that are incompatible. It could also be understood as a situation when one of the institutions either executive, National Assembly or party leaders perceive the other as trying to frustrate or block the achievement of the goals or interests of the other. Basically, National Assembly Conflict can also occur when both institutions compete to gain influence on the policy making and implementation process. In view of this, National Assembly conflict is informed by party-politics. At the extreme, it involves the use of power to cause destruction. On this, Duvenger (1980) observes that in political struggle, such as the National Assembly conflict, when members and their various political parties are in conflict, they tend to employ different kind of weapons. But the instruments they employ are absolutely influenced by the type of government, type of society, the composition of groups in conflict as well as the period of history. He further stresses that, although politics is a conflict, yet it is a limitation to conflict. That is, when in politics, party members in National Assembly conflict convince each other with persuasions, influence and lobbying. When it involves the use of rifle, machetes, and fists, then, we are outside the boundary of politics. Once conflict turns violent, it becomes detrimental to the growth and stability of the system.

The import of the above analysis is that one may see conflict absolutely everywhere depending on perspective and definition. At the level of the National Assembly, when House Members feature in an event and exhibit incompatibility as they interact, then, obviously, the National Assembly could be said to be in conflict. This explains why the term “conflict” may be applied to struggle of wider effects, that is, struggles that have important consequences for some larger organizations. To this end, conflicts that promise damage, not only to the contenders but also to the system are most terrible. Conflict or strife of this nature may contribute to the creation and maintenance of an order or become means of its destruction (Mainwaring, 1995). In a democratic set up, conflict in the National Assembly could be among competitive parties, between the executive arm and or even among party leaders (Van, 2000). As a corollary, party clashes as a form of political conflict involve the destruction of lives and property of members of, or supporters of the other political parties. It has to do with individual or group violence against party leadership or officials, supporters and possessions. Party conflicts are low intensity political violence which include intra and inter party clashes (Gyinah, 2005).

The constitution provides for a bicameral legislature comprising of 360 member House of Representatives and 105 member of Senate both jointly referred to as the National Assembly (Mershon, 2007). To some analysts, the political behaviour of Nigeria elites draws its values from the legacies of the colonial state whose political culture was embedded in traditions of political totalitarianism. However, democracy has its core values, different from colonial legacies and even the military dispensation which many argued finds its way into civil governance.

Theoretical Framework.

The study employed Social Exchange theory propounded by Michael in 1964. Social exchange theory explains the socially rewarding relationship between and among members of the National Assembly.

In Nigeria, this relationship is commonly expressed between National Assembly members and their various political party leaders. The theory maintains that the drive for exchange is based on self interests, group or party interests, egoism with the calculation of gain and reward. In the context of this study, “Give and take” (social exchange) literally means that party leaders gain power or control of the National Assembly through the sponsorship of the party National Assembly members who are expected to protect the party interests and policy in acknowledgement of the position they occupy while political party leaders make their demands on their party members in National Assembly, placing them under pressure to support policies in favour of their party even though such policies are against national interests(Thomas,2000). To avoid party wrath, members go all out on such policy, and in the process conflicts ensue. The adoption of the social exchange theory will help the study, to reveal however, that primordial interests of National Assembly members and party leaders manifest in National Assembly Crisis.

The Study Method

Design

Research design means the structuring of investigation aimed at identifying variables and their relationship with one another. “This is used for the purpose of obtaining data to enable the researcher test hypotheses or answer research question” (Ofo, 1994).The study utilized survey design. Surveys facilitate the collection of tremendous volume of information in a shorter period of time and take less time to analyze than qualitative data. Obikeze (1990) defined the survey as a "careful, detailed examination of the perceptions, attitudes, and opinions of members of various publics". Osuala (1994) says that surveys can be used for descriptive, exploratory and explanatory purposes. They are also used in studies where individuals constitute the main units of analysis. To select sample size for the study, the Taro Yamanni’s formula was used in determining the sample size of the study from the sample frame.

Table 1: Sample frame

| Category of Respondents | Population | Sampling Size | Percentage |
|--------------------------------------|------------|---------------|------------|
| Political Party Leaders | 410 | 82.25 | 25.70 |
| Ex and serving parliamentarian | 209 | 41.93 | 13.10 |
| Academia | 405 | 81.25 | 25.39 |
| Leaders (once in executive position) | 191 | 38.31 | 11.97 |
| Total | 1595 | 320 | 100 |

Note for clarity

410 political party leaders were carefully selected from two leading political parties namely:The People’s Democratic Party(PDP) and All Progressive Congress(APC).

Of the 209 EX and Serving Parliamentarians,129 from National Assembly and 80 from State Assembly. The academia were season professors and senior lecturers with political science and it related disciplines background. Leaders once in executive position are ex ministers and State Commissioners. To determine the sample size, the study as stated earlier, utilized Taro Yamanni’s tools.

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

Where n is sample size, N is the population size and e is the level of precision, the range is which the true value of the population is estimated to be.

$$\text{Thus } n = \frac{1595}{1 + 1595 (0.05)^2}$$

$$n = 399.$$

From the above 1595 (One Thousand Five Hundred and Ninety Nine) is the population of the study, while the study sample is Three Hundred and Ninety Nine (399).

Method of Data Analysis

The study used descriptive statistics for data analysis. This includes tables, sample percentages for data analysis with the aid of statistical packages for social science (SPSS).

Table 2: Did the interference of party leaders into the National Assembly Leadership composition influence National Assembly conflict in Nigeria?.

$n = 318, P < 0.05$

| Variables | Option | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Did party leaders interference into National Assembly Leadership composition influence National Assembly conflict | Yes | 278 | 87.4% |
| | No | 40 | 12.6% |
| How would you rate the level of interference of party leaders into the composition of National Assembly Leadership | Low | 31 | 9.7% |
| | moderate | 138 | 43.4% |
| | High | 149 | 46.9% |
| What is your prescription on the party leaders interference into National Assembly Leadership composition | Bad | 89 | 28.0% |
| | Good | 24 | 7.5% |
| | Very bad | 141 | 44.3% |
| | Very good | 64 | 20.1% |
| To what extent has the inference affected legislative leadership? composition in the National Assembly | High | 148 | 46.5% |
| | Low | 72 | 22.6% |
| | Moderate | 76 | 23.9% |
| | No effect | 22 | 16.9% |

Table 3: Did inter and intra party politics in the National Assembly influenced National Assembly conflict in Nigeria?

| Variables | Option | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Did inter and intra party politics influence National Assembly Conflict? | Yes | 213 | 67.0% |
| | No | 105 | 24.2% |
| | Undecided | 2 | 10.1% |
| Did inter and intra party politics affect legislative mandates | High | 226 | 71.1% |
| | Moderate | 71 | 22.3% |
| | Low | 21 | 6.6% |
| Perception on inter and intra party politics in the | Good | 201 | 63.2% |

| | | | |
|--|----------|-----|-------|
| National Assembly | Bad | 105 | 24.2% |
| | Moderate | 12 | 33.0% |
| | | | 3.8% |
| Would you encourage strong and intensive inter and intra party politics in the National Assembly | Yes | 286 | 89.9% |
| | No | 32 | 10.1% |

Table 4: Did the interference of the executive arm of government into the National Assembly legislative business generate National Assembly conflict in Nigeria?.

| Variables | Option | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Does executive interference into legislative business have any influence on National Assembly Conflict? | Yes | 259 | 81.4% |
| | No | 59 | 18.6% |
| How would you rate the effect of such executive interference | High | 254 | 79.9% |
| | Moderate | 36 | 11.3% |
| | Low | 28 | 8.8% |
| Perception on executive arm interference into the legislative business | Good | 10 | 3.1% |
| | Bad | 113 | 35.5% |
| | Very good | 32 | 10.1% |
| | Very bad | 1569 | 50.0% |
| Appointment of those not confirm by the legislators Budgetary process Impeachment of National Assembly members Intimidation of House members against executive will | Yes | 259 | 81.4% |
| | No | 59 | 18.6% |

Table 5: Did parliamentarians' strict compliance to party interest based on party supremacy against parliamentary mandates contribute to National Assembly conflict?

| Variables | Option | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|--------|-----------|------------|
| Did strict compliance to party interest influence National Assembly Conflict | Yes | 278 | 87.4% |
| | No | 40 | 12.6% |
| Fear of party discipline made National Assembly members to compromise parliamentary mandates | Yes | 286 | 89.9% |
| | No | 32 | 10.1% |
| Did protection of the interest of their Godfathers influence National Assembly conflict? | Yes | 234 | 73.6% |
| | No | 84 | 26.4% |
| Self-interest of House members influenced National Assembly conflict | Yes | 259 | 81.4% |
| | No | 59 | 18.6% |

Result and Discussion

The result obtained from the analysis of four variables of the study namely. Party leaders and the composition of National Assembly leadership, Executive arm of government and legislative business, inter and intra party politics and National Assembly Conflict, party supremacy and parliamentary mandates were found to have direct impact and significantly influenced National Assembly Conflict in Nigeria, especially in the Fourth Republic. The findings of the study corroborate with earlier researches on party politics and Democracy in Nigeria with focus on National Assembly crisis (Ladan-Baki, 2017, Makinde, 2001; The interest of power seekers in the ruling party in sharp contrast with parliamentary mandate created conflict in the National Assembly. The party in its assertion believes in

the supremacy of the party over the parliament. On the basis of supremacy, party leadership resorted to hand picking of legislative officers, which turned the National Assembly into battlefield for proxy wars for the control of the power structure of the parliament: Unity Forum Group with Lawan Akurme as party candidates on one hand and the Like Mind Group, a coalition of PDP and APC headed by Senator Bukola Saraki” on the other. The findings agreed with Mankinde (2001) and Jide (2003 cited in Anthony ,2007)) who earlier observed that: party leaders struggle with the legislature over the appointment of key officials in the parliament, first with the PDP from 1999-2014, and APC from 2015 to date, more than anything, influenced parliamentary conflict in the period of study(Abugu,2001)The followings were noticeable crises: the impeachment of Senator Evans Enwerem, Chuba Okadigbo as Senate president and the enthronement of two Speakers of House of Representative in 2003 crisis and Tambuwal’s emergence in the 7th Assembly, Saraki and Dogara’s emergence and crisis driven 8th National Assembly, National Assembly invasions by thugs allegedly sponsored by some Senators, and Department of State Security(DSS) invasion of National Assembly , 110 days after thugs invaded the same Assembly and took away the Mace. Party leaders in connivance with the executive tacitly undermine parliamentary politics of supremacy through imposition of key officials which today, affects parliamentary values of dignity, integrity and the requisite capacity needed for securing legislative independence. In the same vein, the 9th National Assembly to be inaugurated, the APC, against parliamentary mandate, had endorsed some persons as senate president and speaker of the House of Representative. This position attacked resentment and criticism that would soon generate, yet another round of National Assembly conflict.

The likely explanation for the findings of this study is that the interference of party leadership in the composition of National Assembly key officials, is a politics of who gets what, when and how. Obviously:

“Since the politics of every political system is determined by the interests and fears of power seekers, the perceived indifference of political elites resulted in the desire to take over governance in the country through control of the legislative structure.”

Such actions contravened section 50 of the 1999 constitution which explicitly, defines the process of selecting the leaders and key officials of the National Assembly. The section particularly states that election of key officials of National Assembly must be carried out inside the two chambers among the members without outside interference.

In Nigeria, the belief however, that, anyone who controls the internal election of key official of the National Assembly, controls the parliament. This, no doubt, made and what if does made party leaders to intervene into the politics of the parliament, and therefore, contributed to National Assembly conflict.

On the executive arm of government and National Assembly Conflict, the result of this study agreed with the findings of Manwodu (2013) who found out that pride, personality clash and executive dominance, struggle for power and superiority, contributed to National Assembly Conflict in Nigeria. Ogochie (2014), Captured executive interference into legislative business in the following ways:

“The National Assembly took a life of notoriety following executive interference under the Obasanjo administration with the removal of three senate presidents in three years. In the circumstance that led to the removal of Senator Evans Enwerem, Chuba Okadigbo and Adolphus Wabana as presidents.

The connivance, collusion or involvement of the executive arm of government was always alleged. Political watchers saw the executive as the unseen hand behind the crisis that wrecked the National Assembly especially the Senate. The House of Representatives then, resisted the executive where attempts to unseat Ghali Umaru Na-Abba was aborted. The executive arm, with its awesome powers was more inclined to overturning the leadership of National Assembly that refused to bend to its dictates. In a related manner, the executive in the area of appointment, interfere into the legislative business. For instance, Section 18(1) and (2) of the Armed Forces Act, Cap A20, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004, states that the appointment of service Chiefs without the approval of the National Assembly is null and void. The findings of the study also agreed with Banjo (2013). He traced parliamentary conflict in 53 African countries, 29 countries in Latin America, 29 countries in Asia and 51 countries in Europe to show contradiction between party supremacy and parliamentary mandates which accordingly created scope within the parliamentary process for reconciling interests and preferences existing in society. This mandate empowers National Assembly to participate actively and without formal constraints imposed by either political parties or the executives (Mathisen, 2001). Under the conditions of the present party system in Nigeria, however, the National Assembly seems to be less capable than before (Ndibe, 2001). Ultimately, the position of the National Assembly and his/her ability to maintain autonomy vis-à-vis party discipline is declining (Okafor, 2002). This is because party loyalty is stronger, as party leadership use various incentives to win loyal support. Where a party member disobeys or refuses to comply strictly with party interests, he or she stands disciplined. Fear of party discipline made some power seekers in the National Assembly to compromise parliamentary mandates, thereby causing National Assembly conflict.

Based on the analysis of the four variables, the following results were found:

- (i) Political party leadership interference into National Assembly leadership composition significantly influenced National Assembly conflict in Nigeria.
- (ii) The interference of the executive arm of government into the National Assembly Affairs, especially in the areas of appointments, hand picking process and above all imposition of executive will against parliamentary mandates generate conflict in the National Assembly.
- (iii) Inter and intra party politics in the National Assembly is another conflict-induced factor in the National Assembly.
- (iv) Finally, National Assembly members' self-interest, fear of party discipline and party supremacy against parliamentary mandates influenced National Assembly conflict.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The issue of party politics and parliamentary conflict in Nigeria has been examined in this paper. The focus of our analysis has been party leaders and executive arm of government interference into legislative affairs, drawing on examples from the Fourth Republic, 1999 – date. Having given a detailed evaluation of party politics and parliamentary conflict, the paper therefore, concludes that the Executive see the National Assembly as a pawn in the game of politics that should be used according to the whims and caprices of party leaders and the Executive organ of government. In this sense, the quest by the party leaders and the executive arm of government to influence and control parliamentary process and procedures contributed to National Assembly conflict.

Basic Recommendations

The national legislature should consequently protect the basic elements of the parliamentary mandate.

Electoral laws should seek to prevent excessive party control and, in particular, counter the “trade-off” practices making National Assembly hostages to arbitrary party decisions.

Political party control over implementation of the mandate by MPs, including the enforcement of party discipline, should be basically seen as an internal matter of political parties and their membership.

The national legislature should avoid linking the relationship between National Assembly and their political parties with the legal status of parliamentarians.

Political parties should apply cooperative and participatory methods in seeking the adherence of National Assembly to the party line.

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