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Political Conflicts and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria: A Study of the National Assembly in the Fourth Republic

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the effect of political conflicts on democratic consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic National Assembly. In achieving the general and specific objectives of this study, two research questions were raised to guide the research in analyzing the qualitative data derived from the secondary sources. The researcher consulted some extant literature relating to the study and as such the Marxist Political Economy Theory was adopted as the theoretical framework for the study. The historical design was used to investigate the effect of political conflicts on democratic consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic National Assembly. Hence, the secondary data was analyzing using contents analytical method. Based on the analysis, the study established that sectionalism and regional politics are at the root of politic. The study also found that intra and inter party conflict has affected Nigeria's democratic process so much so that the rule of law and constitutional provisions are laid aside where party interest comes to play by members of the legislative body at the National Assembly. It was also discovered that intra and inter party conflict has caused a rift in the political and democratic process in Nigeria. The study recommends that there must be a moral rebirth of Nigerians that would engender discipline and respect for the rule of law by all and sundry. Constitutional restructuring was also recommended to make the work of the Legislators as part-time; this would reduce the amount of money earned by them and eliminate Legislators whose interests are on the money earned, but not service to the people. The study established that the political economy of Nigeria has brought about political class use of party structure to win elections with the intent of controlling economic resources. Politicians and members of the bourgeoisie class constantly balkanize the democratic process in order to subvert the rule of law to promote party interest.

Keywords: *Politics, Political Party, Party Conflicts, Legislature, National Assembly, Fourth Republic, Democracy, Democratic Consolidation, PDP, APC.*

INTRODUCTION

The dimension and density of modern society makes it a far cry from the ancient city-states of Greece where direct democracy was practicable. The emergence of modern societies rehabilitated the atomized individuals into political parties with the primary responsibility of capturing and running democratic government (Olatunji, 2019). Thus, the survival of democracy in modern society rests partly on the ability of political parties to recruit people into party and elective offices, aggregate and articulate interests, politically educate, socialize and integrate the people. There is growing evidence of declined public confidence in parties in the world over; political parties have deteriorated in membership, organization, and popular involvement and commitment to democratic idea (Saka & Abubakar, 2019). Well-functioning political parties are vital for the success of electoral democracy and political development in Nigeria (Adetula and Adeyi, 2020). A political party is much more than an organization for seeking and controlling political power. More critically, it is an organization for expressing and harmonizing interests, and that intermediates between the citizens and political society, government and state (Ikelegbe, 2019).

There are numerous types of political parties such as elite-based parties, mass-based parties, ethnic-based parties, electoralist parties and movement parties (Gunther and Diamond, 2021). Political parties have been defined in different ways. Nnoli (2019) defines a political party as a group of people who share a common conception of how and why state power should be organized and used. Political parties have also been conceived as an instrument for contesting elections for the purpose of selecting candidates and parties to exercise political power (Yaqub 2021). A political party is simply a body of organized individuals whose ultimate aim and goal is to contest for governmental power through the instrumentalities of elections. While it should not be mistaken that the mere existence of political parties presupposes that a society is democratic or otherwise, however, competitive and periodic elections have come to at least define the character of liberal democracy (Momoh, 2021).

Political parties perform functions that include; mediating between citizens and state institutions; recruiting and preparing individuals for political leadership; organizing election campaigns; aggregating societal interests, and providing a participatory, responsive relationship with the people; political recruitment and training; education, socialization, breeding consensus, providing alternative world views and political communication among others (Pogoson, 2019). Political parties are product of democratic process and as such they represent democratic ethos. Democracy in Nigeria has not really been what it is expected to be when compared to what is observable in other parts of the world. "The respect for human rights and the rule of law, which

are the main characteristics of democracy, were not visible between 1999 and 2007; election rigging and gangsterism became the order of the day that one can hardly differentiate between democratic government and autocracy (Osabiya, 2019). Accordingly, this author corroborates that in contemporary civilizations, political parties are vital to the political process. Not only are political parties' instruments for acquiring political power, they are also tools for interest aggregation and the fulfillment of those interests through government control (Jamo, 2020).

The Nigeria situation is not an exception. Since the Nigerian State returned to democratic governance in 1999, party activities especially in the areas of selection, election, accountability, discipline, etc appear to be far below democratic requirements such that Nigeria democratic project has been the subject of intense debate in many quarters. Besides, political parties were neck-dipped into all manners of antidemocratic activities including: electoral manipulations during primary and secondary elections, thuggering, hooliganism and vandalism during elections, party cross-carpeting, political assassination of political opponents, arising from unfair method of selecting party's flag bearers and generally lack of party's internal democracy(Dike 2018).

The power tussle and interests of the political parties in the Fourth Republic has taken another dimension which has led to intra and inter party conflicts in Nigeria. Virtually all the major political parties in the Fourth Republic have experienced intra and inter-party conflicts. These conflicts find expression in the political process at the National Assembly, where legislators are expected to uphold their party position (Obadan, 2020). The magnitude of the conflicts tends to depend on the strength and size of the party. This is particularly true with the APC and the PDP. For instance, the PDP, having ruled the country for sixteen years, has contended with series of internal and external conflicts. They include the division within the party in two camps in 2000. One faction was led by Chief Sunday Bolorunduro Awoniyi, and the other was headed by Chief Ume Ezeoke, the major conflict was in Anambra State between the former Governor, Chris Ngige and his godfather Chief Chris Uba. In the same vein, the Ekiti State case led to the defection of former Governor Segun oni to the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN). Also, internal conflict within the PDP led to the defection of former vice President, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, to ACN in 2003, and to APC in 2014 and finally to the PDP. Former Senate President, late Chuba Okadigbo, and late Harry Marshall defected to the All Nigeria Progressive Party (ANPP) (Chukuma & Ali, 2020; Nwanegbo et al, 2021 and Ibrahim & Abubakar, 2020). The PDP crises which contributed substantially to its defeat at the Presidential election in 2015 started in august 2013.

Political party conflicts are classified into two-intra and inter-party conflicts. Intra-party conflict occurs within a single political party, whereas inter-party conflicts cuts across political parties. Inter-party conflict is an obvious, expected conflict because of differences in formation, leadership, manifestos and ideologies competing to control the State in a democratic setting. Tyoden (2015), argues that while inter-party conflicts are commonly inevitable in every democratic set up, due to different political ideologies and principles, the functions that political parties play are very crucial in a democratic system. Tyoden's analysis aptly provides a useful theoretical framework that underpins the nature and character of party relations and conflicts in contemporary democracies like Nigeria. According to Tyoden (2015), there are three fundamental explanations to party relations and conflicts, namely: the quest to capture power between, or among political interests; the nature of the society, particularly its structural alignment, and the level of socio-economic development of the society, as well as the party system, with major concerns over the nature and the origin of the parties, the nature of such relationships exist between or among them, as well as the cohesiveness of the ideologies of the parties.

The National Assembly which comprises the Senate and the House of Representatives is one of the arms of government which came about as a result of the democratic project, not only in Nigeria but around the globe in all other countries practicing democracy. West African countries have undergone transitions and several other countries in the sub region are undergoing democratization process and establishing electoral institutions, political parties and governments with three arms; Executive, Legislature and Judiciary. There is no doubt in saying that each of these three arms of government is expected to make its enormous contribution to the democratic consolidation of any country (Yusuf et al. 2018). It has already been observed that none of the major political parties was free from internal crisis. The 2015 general election made the APC the ruling party in Nigeria. Having produced the President, and also majority of members in the two houses of the National Assembly, one should have expected that rancorous and conflictual relationships could be reduced to the barest minimum. It is assumed that a party with majority in the two chambers of the legislature and controls the executive will then be able to carry out its responsibilities seamlessly. This was not the case with both the PDP and APC (Mbah & Egobueze, 2020).

The 8th National Assembly, especially the Senate, was inaugurated on June 9, 2015, amid controversies. The conflict started with the competition between Senator Bukola Saraki, APC member representing Kwara central Senatorial district in the north-central geo-political zone, and Senator Ahmad Lawan, another APC member representing Yobe North in the North East geo-political zone of Nigeria, in the race for the office of the President of the Senate. The Senate instantly became divided into two factions. The party eventually endorsed the candidacy of Lawan, and asked Saraki to step down to no avail. In order to outwit his party, Senator Saraki reached agreement with PDP, the main opposition party to help him win in the election as Senate President while offering them the office of the Deputy Senate President. With some of his supporters in the APC, the main opposition party, the PDP on his side, Saraki got elected as Senate President, contrary to his party's wish. A member of the opposition party, Senator Ike Ekwerenmadu of the PDP, also got elected as Deputy Senate President. This caused disaffection and serious in-fighting in the APC and in the National Assembly as a whole. The same scenario played out in the House of Representatives (Mbah & Egobueze, 2020).

The APC, zoned the position of the Speaker to the South-West Geo-Political Zone, but some members of the party and the main opposition, the PDP, thwarted it and elected different candidates. This made the ruling party to lose control of the National Assembly, and subsequently found it difficult to secure approval for its policies and programmes from the National Assembly. To this end, Haber (2015) had argued that the space and speed in the passing of bills depend on the governing party's internal cohesiveness and ideological distance to the opposition. Throughout the duration of the 8th National Assembly (2015 – 2019), the APC, which had majority seats, was not in the firm control of the National Assembly. There were different factions within the party that fought against each other for their own interest, as against the interest of the party and the nation. Due to intra and inter party conflicts, there were lots of controversies ranging from allegation of alteration of the Senate standing order, to the controversial screening of ministerial nominees

in 2015 in which the opposition party walked out of the chamber in protest. There was also the issue of budget padding and budget disappearance saga in 2016 and 2017 respectively.

Party politics in the National Assembly has become warfare characterized by hatred, enmity, victimization and suspicion, resulting from bitter struggles among party members and among political parties that are represented in the National Assembly, in their quest to achieve public and/or personal interest (Toyin, 2015). The inordinate ambitions of some members and among political parties cause political tension and problems in the National Assembly in particular, and in the polity in general. More often than not, it took the National Assembly five months to approve the 2016 Appropriation Bill. This negatively affected the implementation of the budget. Furthermore, it took the Senate over two months to approve the list of ministerial nominees sent to them by the President of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari. Besides, there were series of confrontations between the executive and legislatures. This led to the impeachment of some officers of the Senate and the House of Representatives and has been responsible for the frequent decamping of politicians from one party to another, closure of the National Assembly for security reasons, and so on. Most of the time which the National Assembly would have used to carry out its responsibilities were lost or wasted in conflicts. In view of this, Ibrahim and Abubakar (2020) opined that much of the sitting of the National Assembly that would have been used to initiate and pass bills were used to tackle the controversial issues of the status of party members that defected to other parties as a result of intra party conflict in the national Assembly.

In the same vein, Saka and Abubakar (2019) noted that the Nigerian Fourth Republic has been characterized by political violence which portend great danger for democracy and undermines democratic governance and its process. Party conflicts also discourage qualified and active citizens from participating in the political process that would enhance democratic sustenance. Party conflict in the Fourth Republic has also induced politically motivated assassinations such as the assassination of Bola Ige (Former Attorney General And Minister Of Justice). Marshall Harry, Engineer Funsho Williams, a Lagos State PDP gubernatorial aspirant, and professor Ayodele Daramola, another PDP gubernatorial aspirant in Ekiti State (Alemika & Omotosho, 2020 and Anyaegbunam, 2018). The main thrust of this study, therefore, is to review the incidences of party conflict in the National Assembly of Nigeria in the Fourth Republic, with a view to unraveling its impact on democratic consolidation in Nigeria

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In our daily human interaction, there is politics. Politics is exciting because people agree and disagree with overpowering and the management of scarce resources. They also agree or disagree about the conduct of people over who gets what, when and how? Also important is disagreement over how collective decisions are made; who should have a say and what qualifies him or her to assume such influence and power. Since the return of democracy in Nigeria in 1999, the National Assembly has been enmeshed in intra and inter-party conflicts. Its Twenty three years after the enthronement of the Fourth Republic, the National Assembly is yet to stabilize. Whereas intra and inter-party conflicts are phenomena that find expression at different stages in the democratization process, its dimension magnitude, and impact on the National Assembly continues to be a worrisome phenomenon as it affects the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.

Ibrahim and Abubakar (2020) argued that party politics in the National Assembly has adorned the toga of notoriety to the extent that its defining characteristics have been intrigues, bickering, back-biting, schisms and violence. There were unending defections or decamping from one party to another, which is clear evidence of lack of political ideology and disregard for the party constitution. Considering the fact that party conflicts in the legislature contributed in no small measure to the collapse of the Macpherson constitution in 1951, the first and second Republics, and the aborted third Republic in Nigeria, it was expected that the politicians would have learnt their lessons and spare the Fourth Republican from a repeat of an obnoxious history. Due to the conflicts, there were delays in the passage of very important bills such as appropriate bills.

The 8th National Assembly of Nigeria was worse off. After its inauguration on June 9, 2015 amid controversies, the majority party, the APC, was at war with itself and with the main opposition party, the PDP, as a result of the conflict, it took the National Assembly over five months to pass the 2016, 2017 and 2018 appropriation bills into law, which negatively affected the implementation of the budgets. It also took it more than two months to scrutinize and approve the list of ministerial nominees sent to it by the President of Nigeria. The conflict also impacted negatively on the quality of some bills enacted by the National Assembly. Haber (2015) was right to opine that the speed at which bills are passed and peace maintained is driven by the governing party's internal cohesiveness and its ideological distance to the opposition. The conflicts have also promoted massive defections of members from one party to another, especially, from the opposition parties to the majority party and from the majority party to the main opposition party. This is an indication of the poverty of ideology. It also weakened the internal cohesion of the parties. To this end, Ibrahim and Abubakar (2020) stated that much of the sitting of the National Assembly that would have been used to initiate and pass bills were used on controversial issues of the status of the party members that defected to other parties. These negative tendencies contributed to citizen's poor perception and weakened faith in democratic governance. In other words, the patriotic spirit which should be a fundamental character of the legislature is brought to question.

OJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of the study is to examine the effect of political conflicts on democratic consolidation in Nigeria with reference to the National Assembly in the Fourth Republic. The specific objectives are to

1. examine the nature and causes of political Conflicts in the Nigeria's National Assembly.

2. examine the effect of Inter and Intra Party Conflicts in Nigeria's National Assembly on Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guide the study:

1. To what extent has the Nature and Causes of Political Conflicts affect the National Assembly in Nigeria?

2. To what extent has Inter and Intra Party Conflicts in the National Assembly contributed to Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study serve as an additional work to those existing ones as it concerns intra and inter party conflicts in the national Assembly. In practical terms, the study is significant as it explained the various dimensions of political party conflicts in the National Assembly of Nigeria and identified whose interest the conflicts serve and how it could be managed to engender democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Furthermore, it deepen the understanding of the general public on the role of the National Assembly in democratic consolidation and clarified how the National Assembly and political parties could be persuaded to entrench accountability, good governance and democratic consolidation. In general, the findings of this study are beneficial to members of the legislature, the electorate and the public. For the legislators, it draws attention to the fact that conflict diverts attention from performing the function for which they were elected. The study makes a case for the sacrifice of personal interest for that of the entire citizenry.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Marxist Political Economy Theory was adopted as the theoretical framework for the study. This theory was propounded by Karl Marx which focuses on struggle between capitalists and the working class. Marx argued that the power relationships between capitalists and workers were inherently exploitative and would inevitably create class conflict. The adoption of the political economy approach was not arbitrary. It was necessitated by its interdisciplinary character which offers penetration insight into the phenomenon under study. Political economy analysis enables us to better understand the political, economic and social processes promoting or blocking change. Political economy analysis prompts us to ask 'why is the situation like it is?

It proceeds from a holistic examination of the country's historical experience and its implication for the present day political economy (Falola & Ihonvbere, 2016).

The political economy approach derives from the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. However, V.I.Lenin made important contributions to this approach. Other scholars like Claude Ake and Eme Ekekwe also contributed robustly to the understanding of the theory, especially as it affects the African situation. The political economy approach has its basic thrust, the assumption that the nature of the economic base (substructure) of any given society, to a large extent determines every other relationship in society (Efebeh, 2020). Marx and Engel (1979:) opined that Neither legal relations, nor form of State could be grasped whether by themselves or on the basis of so-called general development of human mind but on the contrary; they have their origins in the material existence... material life conditions which include the social, political and intellectual life process in general.

The Marxian political economy scientifically studies the society in its totality, and takes into consideration the interconnectedness of social relations, class conflict and the organic relationship between the sub-structure (economy) and the super-structure (polity). Marx tried to lay bare the sterility of the classical political economy and attempted a scientific understanding of capitalism. He thus, sees political economy as the science for understanding society in its entirety (Anifowose & Enemuo, 2015). For there to be a change in society, the political economy stresses the imperative of the role of social classes, productive forces and the social relations of production, both of which constitute the mode of production, every social system has its mode of production and each mode of production has its own peculiar social classes, class relations and contradictions, upon which ideology, philosophy, dominant values, legal and State institutions etc. are based.

The Marxian political economy is based on historical materialism and dialectical materialism. It asserts that it is the material existence of an individual that determines his/her consciousness. Marxian political economy gives primacy to the material existence and production in the society, especially the role of the economy in the study of the society. Ake (2014), supporting this position, argues that every student of society must pay attention to the economic structure of society and indeed, use it as the point of departure for studying other aspects of society. He further asserts that once we understand what the material assets and constraints of a society are, how the society produces goods to meet its material needs, how the goods are distributed, and what types of social relations arise from the organization of production, we have come a long way to understanding the culture of that society, its laws, its religious system, its political system, and even the mode of thought.

With the materialist conception and interpretation of society, it is scientifically argued that the dialectical nature of society is the basis of its "law of motion of development." In other words, the contradiction in society with key contents such as the transition from quantity to quality, the law of the unity and conflict of opposites and the law of the negation of the negation, as inherent in any mode of production, are the basis of societal change and development. This explains the history of the movement of human society from communalism to slavery, feudalism, capitalism and communism. While dialectical materialism emphasizes the contradictory nature of society; male and female, day and night, motion and rest, birth and death, positive and negative, bourgeoisie and proletariat etc., as the basis of contradictions, change and development in society; historical materialism explains how human

society has moved through the various epochal periods to date. Historical materialism is rooted in a materialist conception of human history (Anifowose & Enemuo, 2015).

According to Barongo (2020), the nature of political life in a particular society, the types of institutions that are created and sustained and the peculiar patterns of political process are a function of the interplay among three main factors, namely, the condition of the material base of the society, the historical experience of that society and the actor's perception, interpretation and response to environmental stimuli. The role of culture, that is to say, the values of the people, their belief and the dominant systems of ideas in shaping the political process and in dictating particular systems of political organization, is by no means being minimized. But the values, belief and ideas have their basis and reflect very fundamentally on the nature of the economic base and the relations it creates among the people, as well as in the historical experiences of the society. It is primarily the material environment which determines the formation of cleavages in terms of social groups and class with competitive bargaining situation that could ignite intra and inter party conflict in the legislature and the entire political superstructure.

It is germane to state at this juncture that a major shortcoming of mainstream social science is its discouragement of dialectical thinking. Western social science is conservative in the sense that it is heavily oriented towards the problem of how to maintain the social, economic or political order. This is quite different from the African situation which is grappling with the problem of underdevelopment, and therefore, is more interested in change, rather than maintaining the existing order (Ake, 2014). In defense of the political economy approach, Barongo (2020) has accused Western theories like the modernization and cultural pluralism models, as being static, a historical and non-explanatory. They are a historical because they do not take into account the historical experience of the African society as a major variable in explaining contemporary patterns of behavior. They are non-explanatory because being static and a historical; these perspectives are not able to help the analyst in identifying the essential variables that he must take into account to understand and explain the nature, content and dynamics of African politics.

From the foregoing argument, the understanding of party conflict in the National Assembly of Nigeria and other problems must be located within the context of the country's political economy and historical evolution. This is necessary to enable us understand the forces that influence and shape the present-day realities in Nigeria, especially as it affects intra and inter party conflicts in the National Assembly of Nigeria. The conflicts emanating from the National Assembly is as a result of the accumulation of resources and fame. It is a shame that Members of the Senate and House of Representatives who are selected or elected to represent the interest of the people are been relegated to the background without addressing the social, economic and political problems befalling the people rather they pursue their personal interest. These interests have aggravated to class struggle and competition for the highest office for their personal aggrandizements which is the reflection of the Marxist political economy connotations and assumption.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Nature and Causes of Political Conflicts in the Nigeria's National Assembly

Nigeria's Fourth Republic has been characterized more by recurring inter party conflicts resulting in fractionalization of the major political parties at the local, state and national levels, than bequeathing a legacy of progress and development on the nation. According to Olaniyan (2019), the Fourth Republic has recorded bitter and acrimonious struggles between parties as well as violent inter-party (and intra-party) relations. The ubiquity of intra and inter political party conflicts in the country's democratic system can be attributed to the mindset and perception that politics is the most lucrative industry in the country. This is displayed by the executive and particularly legislative arm of government at the federal level. Allowances and allocations for constituencies' development make politicians scramble for electoral seats at the National Assembly, with the intent of acquiring both economic and political power. This from the onset lays the foundation for rivalry and conflict among political parties, whose ideological are not borne with the intent to further development through democratic process but elitist amassment of wealth, influence and relevance in government. This perception is exacerbated by the increasing culture of impunity and flagrant disregard to the rule of law exhibited by the Nigerian political elites.

Unfortunately, political parties have become veritable platforms for the political elites to capture power through elections that are often marred by fraud and other forms of malpractices. This is because the occupancy of political power gives the political elites the direct access to primitive accumulation of public wealth for their selfish gains and this has heightened the desperation for the acquisition of political power among the political elites. Nna-Emeka (2021) also corroborates this line of argument that politics in Nigeria is often conceived as a big investment to be pursued with deadly seriousness‖. Tragically, O'Donnell (2014) has affirmed that many new democracies have successfully installed competitive electoral regimes but their elites are corrupt and lack a commitment to the rule of law that is needed

In most developing nations like Nigeria, political parties face a number of distinctive challenges towards achieving their specific roles and functions (Maiyo, 2020). In most fledgling democracies, National Democratic Institute (NDI, 2014) have particularly identified lack of clear ideologies by political parties, failure to initiate coherent policy objectives, weak party structures that remains dormant apart from electioneering period, shallow and narrow support base usually defined by personal, ethnic or regional inclinations as some of the problems of political parties which their members bring along with them to the National Assembly. Elected representatives at the National Assembly have often than not worked for party interest rather than national interest. Very worrisome is the fact that this party interest is not pursued to strengthen democracy but rather weaken the foundation of democracy in Nigeria with regionalism, ethnicity, godfatherism and elitist pursuit of political economy been the order of the day. NDI (2014) further show that, as a result of this party developmental process, through which political parties seek to formulate and implement policies, its activities is considered key to the healthy nature of representative democracy. Though, sustainable party system is built over generations, which is a byproduct of different political processes. According to Omotola (2020) the democratic experiments in Nigeria is unfortunately regressing towards authoritarian regime or what some

scholars termed as democratic reversal. This is based on the unhealthy rivalry and show of shame at the legislative arm of government at the national level, where senators and house of representative members have a free for all fight as a result of greed, quest for power and wealth. With the return of fourth republic in 1999, the democratic process indicated some unusual features in the country (Abbas, 2015). Most prominently, Jega (2021) and Omotola (2020) show that Nigeria was under military rule for about three decades of its post independence which practically stunted its democratic ethos and values. According to Omotola (2020), the high level of political instability witnessed in the country characterized by series of coup against coups cannot be divorced away from the present garrisoned nature of party politics with implications for democratization.

With the introduction of multi-party democracy, the expectation is that, the principles of democracy which signifies sovereignty of people, freedom, fairness, and justice, equality which demands nationhood, patriotism, unity, rationality, progress and dignity should ease tension and attract peaceful coexistence. However, since the return of multi-party democratic governance in 1999, Nigeria has continued to grapple with the problem of national unity, such that she can be described as nation with tripod stand, made up of three blocks, the North, the West and the East that are in a perpetual state of wobble (Ogundiya, 2019). While interparty conflicts are inevitable in democratic set up, due either to different political ideologies and principles, numbers of such political parties and the nature of such relationships that exist within, between or among them, the functions that political parties play are crucial to democratic sustenance (Tyoden, 2015). Political parties struggle to win majority seats at the National Assembly with the sole intention of having a say with almost zero opposition from other parties in the legislative arm of government. This has made the seat of the senate president, deputy senator president, speaker of the house of representative and majority leader of the house hot beds that are heavily contested.

The contestation is not for quality leadership but control of government by parties. This is to have bills passed without opposition, budgets signed without verifications and appointments and contracts given the green signal without check. Political parties' conflicts are borne out of greed, conflicting ideologies which in the first place are meant to pursue party interests that do not align with national interest. This further means, since political parties are avenues of articulation and aggregation of diverse interests which forms an important part of the working of a political system, conflicts are bound to happen. Unfortunately, while such political parties can maturely and peacefully handle such democratic conflicts, the Nigerian political parties since 1999 do not seem to guarantee peace amongst the people (Tyoden, 2015). This idea reflects the view of Maiyo (2020) where he posits that, instead of fostering healthy political competition in Africa, political parties have often helped to fan the embers of conflicts and violence through divisive and explosive forces. This fact is not farfetched from what Aleyomi (2020) described as Nigeria's modern political parties which exhibits three fundamental characters.

First, most political parties in Nigeria are mostly centralized institutions with structures heavily relying on figure personalities. Second, party leaders are not necessarily working towards national but local, religious, regional, or economic interests. Third, parties are usually organized as electoral machinery to capture power for personal gains. It is therefore not surprising that, the democratic regression that Nigeria has been entangled since the return of democracy are largely attributable to undeveloped and fractionalized party system (Omotola, 2020). Thus, one of the main deficiencies to democratic consolidation process in Nigeria today is lack of proper identification, management and resolution of inter-party conflicts that continue to result into sporadic outburst of violence at the legislative arm of government where the maze can be taken with the assistance of hoodlum and this has direct consequences on national cohesion and political stability (Babatope, 2020).

Conflicts in the Legislature in particular and the political system at large are common phenomena in developing polities and Nigeria's experience is not new. The causal reason for this unhealthy state of affair is the nature of the political power wield by individuals which is seen as an end in its self. The quality of representation, together with the real and perceived consequences of acquiring and managing power calls for questions. Generally speaking, political victory is seen as a "winner-takes-all" form concerning wealth and resources, patronage, and the prestige and prerogatives of office.' This hideous trend tends to truncate efficiency in administration and affect democratic consolidation.

Political instability arises as a result of greed, ravenousness, gluttony, the veracity of elected officials who see the office as a conduit pipe for primitive accumulation. This has been a defining feature of the polity in Nigeria, shaped by corruption and designed dishonesty and perpetrated with impunity. Nigeria's legislative conflict has a chequered history, with corruption and the zeal for primitive accumulation at the echelon of the activities of politicians and most technocrats. This unbridled appetite is typically attributed to how leaders are selected and sustained in power. Leaders across the country hold onto office by purchasing support through the distribution of state resources; as such, they commercialize the polity and use crude and crooked means to retain power at all costs for their selfish interest.

In trying to achieve this, they make themselves as 'demigods', and see themselves as 'godfathers' as well as capons. They equally fight their former godfathers and acquire the power to their advantage and become political buccaneers. Conflict erupts either because some elites crave a larger share of the spoils controlled by the leader or because those outside the leader's patronage-based coalition want access to resources to which they have been denied to become leaders themselves. Legislative conflict in particular therefore is caused by some or all of the following factors: leadership, corruption, political affiliation, greed and selfishness, societal influence, the unbridled ambition of the members of the legislature, the impunity of members, absence of legislative independence and management/staff relations.

Consequently, the legislative conflicts in the Fourth Republic National Assembly of Nigeria are associated with some or all of the above. Suffice it to say that the conflict did not leave without many casualties. Apart from the image issue associated with them, other socioeconomic quagmires were consequential for a scholarship which the conflicts also left behind. Bello-Imam and Obadan (2020) states 'democracy is a global maiden which every nation woos.' The statement above from Bello – Imam explains the global rejection of authoritarian regimes and the acceptance of democracy and as an alternative to those regimes. The acceptability of democracy is anchored on the fact that it is globally recognized as the peoples' government where the people are given the freedom to elect their leaders, especially, their representatives in the various legislative houses in the states.

The Inter and Intra Party Conflicts in the National Assembly and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

The 6th Senate was inaugurated on June 5, 2007, and exited on June 6, 2011. Leading the Red and Green Chambers were allies of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, who shortly before he left, used his influence to facilitate the emergence of Senator David Mark as Senate president and Mrs. Patricia Olubumi Etteh as the Speaker of the House of Representative respectively. This was compensatory for their unalloyed support for his ill-fated third-term bid. The Senate under Mark witnessed little or no conflicts. Upon his emergence, he introduced an antidote to the 'banana peel', as he was able to endear himself to his colleagues and even the Executive; he ushered instability to the volatility which the Chamber was associated with. This era marked a paradigm shift in the Executive-Legislative relationship, as Mark's influences continued to grow, especially in the face of the controversy which trailed the illness and subsequent death of President Yar'adua. No thanks to this constitutional lacuna, the NASS was expected to step-in and invoke the 'doctrine of necessity,' to enable Goodluck Jonathan to take over as acting president.

Unequivocally, it is important to note that Nigeria had a tranquil Senate; the Senate under Mark was peaceful and had robust Legislative/Executive relations under Presidents Musa Yar'adua and Goodluck Jonathan respectively. The Green Chamber, on the other hand, did not have a restful House. After the inauguration of the House of Representatives in June 2007, the PDP's anointed candidate, Hon. Patricia Olubunmi Etteh, clinched the speakership of the House, making her the first female speaker of the House of Representatives. Five months down the line, however, she was accused of financial recklessness - attempting to buy a body massage machine for N90m. She was also accused of attempting to renovate her official residence with an amount big enough to build the same house. In the brouhaha that ensued between the 'pro' and 'anti' Etteh lawmakers, Hon Aminu Safana from Katsina State slumped and died. Hon Etteh was eventually pressured into resigning in October 2007. With time, it became clear that the issues involved in her predicament were more socio-cultural than administrative. Egburonu, Dare, Remi and Sunday (2015) noted that the polarization of the House led to the formation of the Integrity Group led by Hon. Farouk Lawan. Other members include Halims Agoda, Lynda Ikpeazu, Mercy Almona Isei, Igo Aguma, Ikechi Nwogu, and Abike Dabiri.

The group cut the image of a group seeking an ideal National Assembly, where decorum and integrity reign among members and in which legislators conduct themselves in a responsible, dignified and transparent manner. Within weeks, the Integrity Group swelled in ranks and became very dominant in the proceedings in the House. And in September 2007, Etteh faced a committee to answer charges that she acted inappropriately for the N628 million scandals. The three-month crisis in the then 6th Assembly, of the House of Representatives, ended with the election of Hon. Dimeji Sabur Bankole, also from the South-West, as the new Speaker. He represented Abeokuta South Federal Constituency in Ogun State. Bankole's time in the saddle was marred by controversies. Free-for-all fights at the hallowed chamber were a current feature and allegations of massive corruption were hauled at the Speaker incessantly. Members like Hon. Dino Melaye and several others were dragged out of the chambers for trying to stand in Bankole's way. A comparative analysis of the Senate and House of Representatives reveals that while the Sixth Senate was unwavering and stable, the House of Representatives boiled and almost melted, with corruption being celebrated at different times.

The 7th Senate and the House of Representatives of the Federal Republic of Nigeria were inaugurated on June 6, 2011, and the assembly ran its course till June 6, 2015. The Senate was again led by David Mark. There was no departure between the Sixth and the Seventh Senates. Mark continued with his leadership styles and he maintained a friendly relationship with his colleagues and the Executive. Mark could be regarded as an epitome of native intelligence as he regularly brought that to bear in leading the House. The Senate maintained a level of maturity and tranquility in almost all its activities. The amity in the Senate was a departure in the House as Hon. Tambuwal who eventually emerged as the Speaker was not the preferred candidate. The preferred candidate of the PDP establishment for speakership was Hon Mulikat Akande Adeola, from the South-west. However, owing to a twist, Hon. Aminu Waziri Tambuwal, in connivance with the then Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), ambushed the PDP. The party never forgave the duo and, arguably, set landmines on their way, but, despite the frosty relationship between Tambuwal and the PDP, his time in office was a delight to observe, thanks to the active support of the ACN. The action of Tambuwan it came with its attendant consequences.

In September 2013, the factional chairman of the PDP (New PDP), Alhaji Abubakar Kawu Baraje, led the seven dissenting PDP Governors and their supporters to the green chamber, to address the PDP caucus, but it came to naught. In the twilight of Hon Tambuwal's leadership of the House, his long-standing 'romance' with the opposition parties came to the fore. He abandoned the PDP and decamped to the newly-formed All Progressives Congress (APC). This led to a further deterioration of his relationship with the PDP. The party, in turn, used every known ploy to remove him from office - including using his trusted ally, Ihedioha. The PDP's desperation got messier when Hon. Tambuwal and his loyal lawmakers were locked out of the National Assembly complex, leaving anti-Tambuwal lawmakers and Hon Ihedioha with the active support of the then Senate President, Mark, in the green chamber, to effect Tumbuwal's impeachment. The impeachment plot was kicked against by fierce-looking lawmakers who would have none of it. Hon. Tambuwal was able to serve out his term on the platform of the APC and was later elected governor of Sokoto State.

The Seventh Senate and House of Representatives witness a lot of intra and Inter-Party squabbles. There were severe issues of decamping and cross – carpeting from one party to the other. Again, while the Senate handled these issues with demureness, the House on its part handled the matter with a misdemeanor. Furthermore, it is important to state that the leadership and indeed the National Assembly in the 4th, 5th, 6th, and 7th Senate and House were dominated by the Peoples' Democratic Party, the current opposition party in the Country.

As it is the political order, the Eight National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria was inaugurated on June 5, 2007, and the assembly ran its course till June 9, 2015. Following the triumph of the APC in the 2015 general election, the godfathers in the party began wetting ground for their anointed candidates to assume 'command' of the 8th National Assembly. Groups began to emerge in pursuit of their various goals. Asiwaju Bola Tinubu's group had allegedly anointed Senator Ahmed Lawan of the Unity Forum for the position of the Senate Presidency and Hon Femi Gbajabiamila as Speaker of the House. Just like it happened in the days of Tambuwal's emergence, while the Senators were holed up at the International Conference Centre (ICC) to make a decision, Bukola Saraki and Mark led what could best be described as "the greatest political ambush of the Fourth Republic" and installed Saraki as Senate President, with the required number of senators required for the victory. Distinguished Senator Saraki the then-Senate President was called

upon by the party many times to rescind the office which he got 'behind' their back, but he held on. Shortly after his victory, his political travails with the Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB) began and many have insisted that it was not unconnected to his emergence as Senate President, but he has managed to hold onto the leadership of the Senate, thanks to the undying support of the PDP bloc in the Senate. Just like in Saraki's case, Hon Dogara was elected in defiance of party preference, but he was smart to have adopted Hon Femi Gbajabiamila as House Leader. He has been able to stabilize the House, but that did not leave him free of threat to his leadership position.

The conflicts analyzed above show that Nigeria's National Assembly has witnessed series of conflict that has threatened the very essence of democracy. Checks and balances for which the legislative arm is known to represent carries along with it conflict. This conflict arises in the defence of democracy against selfish and corrupt individuals who pursue politics for the purpose of manipulating machineries of governance for selfish and group interest. However, the trend in Nigeria's democracy has witnessed an attempt to sabotage the very essence of democracy. Conflict has been for personal interest rather than national interest. Transformed political gladiators from the military and bureaucrats have hijacked political seats to perpetuate their influence through direct or indirect means. The character of the National Assembly has been that of competition and struggle over resources and policy formulation. This is made manifest in the unhealthy romance with the executive arm of government in policy formulation, budgetary allocation and appointments of ministers. This situation is not healthy for Nigeria's democracy as it does not indicate progress but slow and gradual deface of democracy in the country.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study adopted the historical research design to examine political conflicts and democratic consolidation in the National Assembly. This design is appropriate because it allows the researcher to appraise the historical contents of political conflicts and how this incident affects democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The study relied heavily on secondary data which is a reflection of the historical data that allows the researcher to drawn conclusion about the present happenings or current realities. Such data were access through the internet, academic publications, government bulletins, Libraries and periodicals. The data derived from the secondary sources were analyzed by using contents analytical method which allows the researcher to extract the reviewed literature to answer the research questions raised.

Major Findings

Based on the analysis of data, the following findings were observed:

- The study findings established that sectionalism and regional politics are at the root of political party n=conflicts in Nigeria. This is because party formation and movements in Nigeria since independence have been borne out of the interest to foster regional and ethnic interest. This eventually gave birth to the zoning formula adopted by the PDP in the fourth republic. The National Assembly senate president and speaker of the House of Representatives seats have been contested for under ethnic and regional politicking.

- The study also found out that intra and inter party conflict has affected Nigeria's democratic process so much so that the rule of law and constitutional provisions are laid aside where party interest comes to play by members of the legislative body at the National Assembly.

- It was also discovered that intra and inter party conflict has caused a rift in the political and democratic process in Nigeria. This has introduced unhealthy conflict and struggle into the political system as violence and conflict is not only a platform to get elected but also used to manage the activities of legislators as since in the forceful collection of the maze and the free for all fight.

CONCLUSION

The study has shown that despite the party system and structure in Nigeria has grown to become a veritable ground for the control of government by elected representatives to the detriment of the masses who gave their votes in trust for quality leadership. Political parties are not built to further democracy as it is meant to be but an avenue for unjust and manipulative use of power by elites and the political class. This has resulted in the staggering of the democratic process as the very principles of democratic are flagrantly laid aside and partisan politics and regional interest development have become the reasons for members of parties struggle. This is why sectionalism and ethnicity has always come to limelight in Nigeria's political struggle.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion drawn, the following recommendations were made:

i.   To end the hydrophobic legislative conflicts in Nigeria, there must be a moral rebirth of Nigerians that would engender discipline and respect for the rule of law by all and sundry.

ii. Also important in abetting conflicts in the National Assembly and consolidating democracy is a radical restructuring of the Nigerian Judiciary to address the issues of corruption. If these restructuring is not achieved, Nigeria would be placed on the front line of consolidating democracy and reducing bickering that has shrouded the National Assembly. Today, justice is sold to the highest bidder and has affected party politics in the National Assembly in particular and the entire nation at large. This is indeed dangerous and debilitating to the polity

iii.   Constitutional restructuring is recommended to make the work of the Legislators as Part-time; this would reduce the amount of money earned by them and eliminate Legislators whose interests are on the money earned, but not service to the people.

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