

DIALECTICS OF INTRA-PARTY OPPOSITION IN NIGERIA’S FOURTH REPUBLIC: INSIGHTS FROM THE RULING PEOPLE’S DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PDP)

Okoli, Al Chukwuma

Ali Haruna Ali

Department of Political Science, Federal University Lafia, Nigeria

Abstract

This paper examines the essence and contradictions of intra-party opposition in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic with a view to underscoring its implications for democracy. This is against the backdrop of the rising incidence of wrangling and fractionalization particularly within the ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP), leading first to the emergence of a splinter party and then massive defections to the opposition party. By way of qualitative exploration and interrogation of secondary sources, the paper observes that the phenomenon of intra-party opposition is precipitated by the norm-less character of politics and partisan relations, which has been exacerbated by the ideological bankruptcy of political parties in Nigeria. From the standpoint of the PDP crisis in Anambra State (1999–2003), as well as the national PDP saga (2013/2014), the paper posits that intra-party opposition depicts one of the structural contradictions of party politics in Nigeria, which portends negatively for democratic consolidation. The paper makes a case for ideology-based partisanship as a panacea to the problem.

Keywords: Opposition, intra-party opposition, party politics, ideological bankruptcy

1. Introduction

Political opposition is one of the basic features of liberal democracy. In this context, opposition denotes organized partisan movement dedicated to opposing and possibly changing an incumbent government (Okoli, 2001). According to Robertson (1985:357), “an opposition is a political grouping, party or loose association of individual who wish to change the government and its politics”.

Political opposition obtains differently in various political systems. As observed by Robertson (1985), it can obtain within or without the platform of a political party. In effect, opposition is not solely a property of party politics, even though it is indispensable to it.

In parliamentary democracies, opposition is formally institutionalized in the process of public governance. In this context, the opposition party works to position itself as a ‘shadow government’ by over-sighting the incumbent government in-between elections and offering itself as an alternative platform in the next election (Okoli, 2001). The strategic place of the opposition in the parliamentary system has been aptly underscored thus:

There is also the opposition party which is organized in line with the governing party; its leader is often described as the leader of opposition, who is also recognized as an important government functionary. He organized members of his party in shadow government in readiness for a take over just in case the governing party makes a mistake (Ogunna, et al, 1988:147).

In presidential democracies, on the other hand, the place of opposition is largely obscure. This is because the system does not favour formal entrenchment of organized opposition in the machinery of governance. It is perhaps in recognition of this fact that Ekwueme (in Nwokonna, 1982:4) opined that “opposition is alien to Nigerian presidential system “.

In its ideal essence, opposition in a democracy is an inter-party phenomenon Hence, Okoli (2001:2) observes that “in advanced democracies of the world, political opposition is operated along inter-party lines”. This pattern of opposition is traditional and agreeable to modern democracy. There is however, an emerging trend in politics of opposition in developing democracies, whereby opposition obtain both across and within party platforms. The latter herein designated intra-party opposition constitutes the focus of this paper.

The paper, therefore, seeks to explore the contradictions of intra-party opposition with reference to the People’s Democratic Party (PDP’s) experience in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic (1999 to date) with a view to underscoring its implications for democratic consolidation. The paper argues that the phenomenon of intra-party opposition has been informed by the norm-less character of party politics and partisan relations, which has been complicated by gross ideological deficits of political parties in Nigeria. This anomalous phenomenon has led to some untoward outcomes that are inimical to sustenance of democracy in Nigeria.

2. Intra-Part Opposition: Theoretical Interrogation

For a vivid apprehension of intra-party opposition, it is worthwhile to consider it within a theoretical milieu. By the way, it should be noted that the

reality of intra-party opposition is a manifestation of the apparent conflictual character of politicking in developing states (Okoli, 2001). Hence, the contributions of the general conflict theorists would be germane in situating the subject matter.

Scholars of social conflict are almost unanimous that conflict is an inevitable social outcome (Radcliffe-Brown, 1935; Ritzer, 1996; Onyeneke, 1996). According to Ritzer, 1996:224), the attainment of “functional unity” in society does not foreclose the inevitability of conflict. In his words “Opposition, i.e. organized and regulated antagonism is of course, an essential feature of every social system” (1996:226).

Similarly, Onyeneke (1996:52) observes, with reference to the prevalence of social conflict in modern society, that “general experience is of heterogeneity, of wide variation of groups which often compete with, conflict with and oppose one another”. He added that:

Groups compete and oppose one another on religious ideologies; groups conflict in the work place and strikes occur; they struggle for political domination through opposed (sic) political camps... (1996:52).

The implication of the foregoing is that conflict and opposition are necessary outcomes of social relations, whereby clash of interests/values pervade (Ezeh 2001; Onyeneke, 1996). According to Coser (1970:20), conflicts occur as a result of “The clash of values and interests, the tension between what is and what some groups feel ought to be, the groups demanding their share of power, wealth and status...”.

With particular reference to power and authority, conflict arises from groups’ struggles for influence and dominion. This is true of any formal organization in the public domain where the exercise of power and authority comes into play. In this regard (Dehrendorf, 1959:166) rightly asserts:

In every formal organization, there is a division of people into two opposing sectors, those who have authority and those who do not have it. The two groups are opposed in so far as those who have power strive to enlarge on their power while those who do not have it struggle for access to it.

Indeed, struggle for power is at the root of most political conflicts. It arises from the clash of interests between those who wield power and those who want to wrest it. Usually, this form of conflict is critical in developing states where politics is associated with high stakes and desperation (Okoli, 2007). The phenomenon of intra-party opposition, which has engaged the attention of this paper, typically depicts an essential contradiction of party politics in such contexts.

3. The Nature and Contradictions of Intra-party Opposition in Nigeria

Intra-party opposition is an important dimension of the queer character of party politics in Nigeria. As it possibly suggests; intra-party opposition is political opposition obtainable within a political party. It is an internally generated opposition whereby a dissident group of a ruling party constitutes itself into a splinter movement that stands opposed to the activities of the parent party (Okoli, 2001). This is characterized by the emergence of parallel party structures and leadership, as well as partisan alignments and re-alignments among the party faithful around the attendant parallel party platforms.

Many factors account for the occurrence of intra-party opposition. According to Okoli (2001:3) these factors include “Personality difference, clash of socio-economic interests, ideological incompatibility, etc, among politicians”. Adding to the above is the contextual pathologies of (party) politics in Nigeria, among which are:

- (i) The Hobbesian character of politics where struggle for state power is seen as a ‘do or die’ affair; in this context, politics incidentally becomes a crude warfare.
- (ii) Internal characteristics of political parties, which are exemplified in organizational and operational defects, poor sense of party discipline and loyalty, lax party supremacy, and gross ideological deficits.
- (iii) Influence of money politics and personality cult, which gives rise to cabalism, godfatherism, and the likes.
- (iv) The incumbency factor, whereby the ambitions of the incumbent political executives (party leaders) contradict with those of some party elements in such a manner that precipitates gang-up and intra-party wrangling.

The inability of the party leadership to manage the afore-mentioned factors creates a veritable pretext for the rise of intra-party opposition. This has largely been the case with the Nigeria’s People Democratic Party (PDP), whose poorly managed internal crises have culminated in intra-party opposition.

In retrospect, intra-party opposition has been an abiding contradiction of party politics in Nigeria since the first Republic. The historic Action Group crisis of the early 1960s (Agusigbe, 1991) was a case in point. The politics of the Second Republic also manifested some traits of intra-party opposition. According to Ojiako:

For the time (2nd Republic) the Nigerian Public was bewildered by the spate of wrangling among the party leaders, accusations and counter-accusations, expulsions and counter-expulsions. Virtually all the parties (were) involved... in the intra-party fighting (1983:25; Brackets are mine).

The politics of the Fourth Republic has not only recorded critical incidents of intra-party opposition. This has been most pronounced in the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA). In tandem with its scope and objectives, this paper uses the PDP example to explore the problematique of intra-party opposition with the intent to underscoring its dynamics and implications. This constitutes the focus of the concern of the following sub-sections.

3.1 The Anambra PDP Example (1999–2003)

The intra-party opposition in Anambra State during the time under review had its antecedents in the disagreement between the then state governor, Dr. Chinwoke Mbadinuju and some influential members of the ruling PDP in the state. This disagreement centered on “who gets what” in the allotment of political offices and portfolios sequel to the inauguration of the PDP-led government in the State in May, 1999. This dispute later led to the polarization of the State House of Assembly into two opposing camps, with each of the factions identifying steadfastly with either the State governor or the dissident party stalwarts (Okoli, 2001:27).

The crisis reached a critical stage in 2001, following the assassination of a prominent All Peoples Party (APP) Chieftain, Chief Ezeodumegwu Okonkwo on February 18. Hitherto, the state governor had been accused of using the then Anambra Vigilante Services (AVS), a.k.a Bakassi Boys, to settle political scores. This allegation gained ground in the situation where the state government had adopted the AVS as a more or less formal state security agency. It was in this context that a powerful PDP Chieftain, Sir Emeka Offor, alleged that the state governor had politicized the AVS in order to use same to intimidate and eliminate political opponents (Offor, 2001).

Sir Emeka Offor was a multi-million political godfather who was believed to have facilitated governor Mbadinuju’s electoral victory in 1999. He had since fallen apart with governor Mbadinuju over the latter’s inability to honour his interest constituting the State Cabinet, but also in the general sharing of the perquisites of power (Okoli, 2007). The assassination of Chief Okonkwo presented Sir Offor with a veritable opportunity to galvanize opposition against the incumbent governor. Capitalizing on his vantage position as a super party chieftain, Sir Offor mobilized forces in a show-down against the governor. In the power play that ensued, Offor’s group utilized propaganda and campaign of calumny to disparage the State governor. As observed by Agbaegbu:

The voice of opposition has been so loud in the past two months that no week passes without advertorials critical of the government appearing in

the newspaper. The state has, in fact been turned into a battle field of verbal war, power show blackmail, and campaign of calumny (2001:31).

Apart from the use of blackmail and other instruments of propaganda, there was a successful attempt by the opposition to use the platforms of rallies and partisan movements to destabilize Mbadinuju's government, as well as scuttle his second term bid. The foremost of the movement was the Anambra Progressive Movement (APM), which sought to "campaign for good governance in the state and block a touted second term for governor Mbadiniju" (*The News*, April 22, 2001:19). There was also the Anambra People's Forum (APF), which accused Governor Mbadinuju's government of nepotism, corruption, deception, and non-performance (Adebanjo, 2001:19).

At its official launch on 21st July, 2001, the APF rolled out a grand strategy on how to ensure the ouster of Governor Mbadinuju come 2003. In what turned out to be an official slogan of the movement, the anti-Mbadinuju sentiment was laid bare:

PDP... Power
APF... Change
Change?... Odera
Odera... Odago
(Okoli, 2001:32).

The slogans imply that the APF was out to effect a regime change in the Anambra State PDP; and that the change was dedicated to ousting Governor Mbadinuju, who was deemed to have failed both as a politician and a serving governor (Okoli, 2001). In the events that followed, what played out was a crude power play between the APF and the Governor's camp. The consequences of this crisis have been documented by Okoli (2007) as follows:

- (i) Spate of politically motivated killings, as in the case of the murder of a couple, Barristers Igwe in 2002;
- (ii) Fractionalization of the State PDP into two opposing camps based on the antagonistic interests of the governor and his adversaries;
- (iii) High-jacking of the state PDP by some powerful party stalwarts who plotted the Governor's ouster in the 2003 electioneering.

3.2 The 2013-2014 PDP Crisis

The 2013 PDP crisis was precipitated by the grievances of some important party men who were not pleased with the conduct of the leadership of the party. Some of these grievances include:

- (i) "the increasing repression, restriction of freedom of association, arbitrary suspension of members, and other violations of democratic principles by the Alhaji Bamaga Tukur-led party leadership" (Okohue, 2013, para 6 and 7).

- (ii) the continued “suspension of the Rivers State Governor, Amechi, which the group considers arbitrary; the changing of the list of delegates of some states to the convention; the dissolution of the Adamawa State chapter of the party, which is considered illegal” (Okohue, 2013, para 6 and 7).

Also contributing to the crisis is the issue of 2015 presidential ambition of Present Goodluck Jonathan and other interested party-men. The aggrieved PDP members also appear to be also agitating that President Goodluck should not seek a second term in office. This position seems to be the undercurrent of the unfolding saga, wherein the ruling PDP has been enmeshed in intra-party opposition.

The Special Convention of PDP holding on August, 31, 2013 presented the dissident PDP faithful with a golden opportunity to drive home their agenda. Hence,

...while the Convention was going on, some governors who felt aggrieved by some actions of the party leaders stormed out of the venue to address a press conference, announcing themselves as the ‘New’ PDP, formed to salvage the party from those who they said have highjacked it (Okahue, 2013, para 3).

This event signaled the emergence of a splinter party within the ruling PDP. It marked a culmination of a process that has been on the steady build up over the recent months in the party. Shown below is a table that indicates the important dramatis personae of the splinter PDP.

Table 1: Notable Leaders of the Splinter PDP

S/n	Name	Political Designation	Role/Position in the Splinter PDP
1.	Atiku Abubakar	Former Vice-President (1999-2007)	Party Leader, interim
2.	Abubakar Kawu Baraje	Former acting national chairman of PDP	Party Chairman, interim
3.	Olagunsonye Oyiwola	Former Governor of Ogun State and National Secretary PDP	Party Secretary, interim
4.	Rotimi Amechi	Governor of Rivers State	Lead Member
5.	Rabiu Kwankaso	Governor of Kano State	Lead Member
6.	Sule Lamido	Governor of Jigawa State	Lead Member
7.	Murtala Nyako	Governor of Adamawa State	Lead Member
8.	Aliyu Wamakko	Governor of Sokoto State	Lead Member
9.	Babangida Aliyu	Governor of Niger State	Lead Member
10.	Abdulfatah Ahmed	Governor of Kwara State	Lead Member

Source: Authors, 2013 with information from Okohue (2013, para 4 and 5).

In addition to the aforementioned, a number of serving parliamentarians indicated their alignment to the splinter PDP. Based on media reports as at the third week of September, 2013:

At least, about 26 of the 74 PDP Senators have aligned with the new PDP, while 102 of the 205 members of the House of Representatives were announcing their support for the breakaway faction (Okohue, 2013, para 10).

As scarcely expected, the foregoing episode came to a climax with massive defections of members of the PDP to the opposition All Progressives Party (APC) by October, 2013. The emergence of intra-party opposition within the PDP and the subsequent defections of members to an alternative platform is a culmination of the perennial subterranean wrangling in the party; which stemmed from desperate ambitions, lack of ideological attachment to party system, and crass partisan opportunism. This has since led to the heating up of the Nigerian polity. It has also created unnecessary diversions and distractions capable of obfuscating leadership focus in that context. Implicit in this scenario is the possibility of propositioning the present democratic experience in the country for better or worse.

4. Betwixt Opposition, Intra-party Opposition and Democracy in Nigeria

The prevalence of intra-party opposition in a sense adumbrates the misery and failure of opposition politics in Nigeria. Generally, the idea of opposition does not seem to work true to its ideal essence in Nigeria. In this regard, Joseph (1987:37) succinctly avers:

The fact is that political opposition in Nigeria, as much as many of the developing countries, does not quite work the way it is supposed to in the literature of liberal democracy.

The aberrational character of political opposition in Nigeria applies to inter-and intra-party opposition alike. By and large, the following has been the practice:

... the use of state patronage and power by ruling parties at both the Federal and State levels to decimate or fractionalize and to weaken opposition parties, through cooptation, offer of cabinet-level or other public political appointments to the members of opposition parties, and through the strategic use of fifth columnists to penetrate and destabilize opposition parties (Jinadu, 2008:44).

This is in addition to the tactics of using the state security agencies to harass, intimidate, molest and annihilate perceived political opponents. The use of ‘carrot and stick’ to destroy the efficacy and vitality of political opposition in Nigeria has produced two important negative tendencies, viz:

- (i) non-existence of viable, ideologically committed opposition in most cases;
- (ii) existence of weak, ideologically bankrupt, and politically desperate, opposition in a few other instances.

In any case, the character of opposition politics has left much to be desired.

In the view of Okoli:

Where and when it obtains at all, it always tends to assume a rather deplorable dimension. In most cases, political opposition in Nigeria is equivalent to a warfare waged without regards to reason, political etiquette and party lines (author's modification added) (2001:18).

Intra-party opposition in Nigeria typifies the anomalous character of opposition politics in Nigeria. It is characteristically crude, reckless, desperate, and opportunistic. The emergence of this genre of opposition in Nigeria signifies the bastardization of the democratic tradition of political opposition based on the principles of civility, constructive engagement and ideological conviction. This depicts the odds of Nigeria politics characterized by desperation, lawlessness and ideological void (Ake, 1993:33).

Besides its crude, desperate and normless character, intra-party opposition demonstrates the culture of partisan indiscipline, impunity and recklessness in Nigeria. This makes nonsense of the notions of party discipline, loyalty, and supremacy in that context.

Furthermore, intra-party opposition threatens the internal cohesion and integrity of political parties. As has been observed in the case of Anambra State (1999-2003), it led to the utter destruction of party structures and ethos of the State PDP in such a manner that made it vulnerable to electoral defeat in the subsequent elections.

Meanwhile, intra-party opposition in Nigeria points to the failure of Nigerian political parties. By formation, organization and operation, most political parties in Nigeria have been bereft of deep sense of the ideal. More often than not, their visions and missions have curiously revolved around the question of wresting power for its own sake. This attitude to party politics has created ample opportunities for infighting that threaten the corporate existence and functional efficiency of Nigerian political parties.

Overall, intra-party opposition portends quite negatively for the progress of party system and democratic sustenance in Nigeria. There is no gainsaying the truism that political parties are indispensable to the democratic process. Hence, the survival of Nigerian democracy, to a large extent, depends on the role of the political parties in entrenching and propagating the democratic values. In a situation where the dominant parties are enmeshed in destructive infighting and anti-democratic tendencies as in the case of the PDP, it becomes worrisome what they can offer in nurturing the democratic project.

5. Conclusion

This paper set out to examine the phenomenon of intra-party opposition in Nigeria's Fourth Republic with a view to underscoring its essence and implications for democratic consolidation. From the perspective of the PDP crisis in Anambra State (1999-2003) as well as the 2013/2014 national crisis of the party, the paper observed that intra-party opposition is a manifestation of the normless character of party politics in Nigeria, which has been complicated by the organizational cum operational defects of Nigerian political parties. In view of the destructive impacts and implications of the politics of intra-party opposition, the paper submits that such pattern of opposition negates the essence and merit of democratic opposition. It is, therefore, concluded that intra-party opposition in Nigeria is not favourable to democratic consolidation in the country. The surest way out of this de-democratizing trend is the urgent revitalization of political parties in Nigeria by way of radical ideological revamp. This is to get them attuned to progressive virtues that build up rather than pull down the democratic edifice.

References:

- Adebanjo, A. (2001). "The Battle for Anambra State". *Tell*, July 30, 2001, p. 31.
- Agbaegbu, T. (2001). "War with Godfathers". *Newswatch*, May 14, 2001, pp. 31-49.
- Agusigbe, I. (1991). *Rebirth of a Nation (K.O. Mbadiwe)*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Ltd.
- Ake, C. (1993). "Is Africa Developing?" *The Guardian*, December 15, P. 33.
- Coser, L.A. (1970). *Continuities in the Study of Social Conflict*. New York: The Free Press.
- Dehrendorf, R. (1959). *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*. London: Rutledge and Kegan Paul.
- Ezeh, L.N. (2001). "Social Conflict and Conflict Resolution". In N. Nkemdilim, *Humanities and Development*. Enugu: NGID Publishers.
- Jinadu, A.C. (2008). *Political Succession in Africa: Nigeria: The Nigerian Political Science Association (NPSA)*.
- Joseph, R.A. (1987). *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd.
- Maduforo, O. (2001). PDP declares War on Mbadinuju. *News Week*, June 18-25, 2001, pp. 1-2.
- Nwokonna, U. (1982). "A Fatal Blow in North-South Dichotomy". *Weekly Star*, February 7, 1982.
- Offor, E. (2001). 'Interview.' *Tell*, July 30, 2001, pp. 50-52.

- Ogunna et al. (1988). *New Syllabus Government (Book One)*. Ibadan: Evans Brothers Ltd.
- Ojiako, J.O. (1983). *First Four Years of Executive Presidency: Success and Failure*. Nigeria: Daily Times Press Ltd.
- Okohue, P. (2013). “Cost of Resolving PDP Crisis”; http://www.mydailynewswatchng.com/2013/09/18/cost_resolving_pdp-crisis/ (Accessed September 20, 2013).
- Okoli, A. C. (2001). “Godfatherism and Political Crisis in Nigeria” M.Sc. Thesis submitted to the Department of Political Science, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (May).
- Okoli, A. C. (2001). “The Political Economy Intra-party Opposition in Anambra State (1999-2001)”. B.Sc. Project submitted to the Department of Political Science, Nnamdi Azikwe University, Akwa (December).
- Onyeneke, A. (1996). *Doing Sociology*. Enugu: Spiritan.
- Otite, O. (1994). *Sociology: Theory and Applied*. Lagos: Malthouse Press Ltd.
- Ritzer, G. (1996). *Sociological Theorizing*. Mc GrawHill Companies.
- Robertson, D. [Ed] (1985). *A Dictionary of Modern Politics* (Second Edition) London: Europe Publishing Ltd.
- The News (2001). “Editorial”; April 22, p.19.