

THE 2022 HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY PRIMARIES AND CHALLENGES OF INTERNAL PARTY DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This article examined what happened at the state party primaries when political parties elected their delegates and candidates to vie for state Houses of Assembly seats for the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. Successful aspirants to state Houses of Assembly are expected in the next four years to make laws on matters that are closest to the grass root. The article however limited its examination of state Assembly primaries to the two dominant political parties – the APC (All Progressive Congress) and the PDP (Peoples Democratic Party) because as of January 2022, these two parties, of the currently registered 18 political parties in Nigeria, controlled 92.8% of the entire state Assembly seats in the 36 states of the Federation. It was established from findings that the problems of imposition of candidates and sponsorship by godfathers characterized the conduct and outcome of party primaries at this level, the extant legal instruments that supposedly ruled against such infractions notwithstanding. This article, by providing a background to this study, established with examples that these problems have existed within the Nigerian political space and in party primaries in particular, during the first second, and third Republics respectively. This creates challenges of accountability when aspirants emerging through this process are elected into office. The article concluded with recommendations on what should be done to limit or eliminate the control of governors, money bags, and godfathers, especially at the level of state Assembly primaries. The emphasis in the recommendations was placed amongst others on the rank-and-file card-carrying members being attracted and retained, as strong financial members of their parties, committed to the party's ideology and programs, and being made therefore to own the party and its structures.

Keywords: Accountability, Constitution. Interference, Internal Democracy, Leadership, Party primaries

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Party primaries are designed to achieve internal democracy in political parties. The process throws up party candidates to contest elective positions through direct primaries or elect representatives at the ward and local government levels, who are mandated through indirect party primaries as delegates to attend state and national conventions of their political parties. They in turn as delegates elect suitable contenders from amongst their party members to vie for positions with flag bearers from other parties, either at the state assembly level, gubernatorial, senatorial level, or at the level of the house of representative as the case may be, or even for the post of the president of the Federal Republic. Thus, party primaries enable party members to indicate preferences from amongst their party candidates and mandate them to vie

for positions in upcoming elections. Accountability is an essential feature of constitutional democracy. Those elected into public office are expected to be accountable to the electorates for their actions and—actions while in office. Accountability on the part of the officeholder should imply his willingness to be judged by his performance in relation to his party's manifesto, under which he was presented to the electorates. His handling and utilization of resources made available to him while in the office are basis also for accountability. It has been established that a nexus does exist between how candidates emerge in party primaries and the ability of the electorates to demand accountability from them (Iwu 2020). Elected political office holders in Nigeria have not really been accountable to the masses, in whose trust they are supposed to hold office. This according to Iwu (2020) is because they either see their election or nomination, as the handwork of their godfathers or sponsors, to whom they owe absolute allegiance and must therefore be accountable, if they are to remain in office and be returned at the end of their current term. Such officeholders do not see their election as necessarily the outcome of votes cast at their party's primaries nor in the general election. Efforts being made through institutional reforms, by various governments in Nigeria to achieve internal democracy and secure the process and structures of political parties for the rank-and-file, as will be shown later, have so far been to no avail. Political parties are supposed to be made up of persons who organize to shape public opinion, influence public policy, and win elections. Sartori (1976) defines a political party as that political group, officially recognized as part of the electoral process, which can support or put forth candidates for elections on a regular basis. Diamond (1999) sees free and fair regular elections, as the minimum condition for democracy; for it is when there is true competition amongst political parties in the areas of policies and not necessarily on the popularity of individual political candidates, or voting being based on specialized interests that democracy as a form of government can be advanced. The political party machine controls the nomination process and mobilizes the resources required; according to Herrnson (1988), they also inform and activate the decisions of voters. By conducting party primary elections, political parties provide platforms for recruiting and granting individuals, active political roles that they seek within the political system (Czydnowski 1975). It is for this reason that party leaders in a pluralist democracy look out for prospective party members capable of assisting them in winning elections (Hazan and Rabat).

2.0 ACCOUNTABILITY AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATION – A CONCEPTUAL APPRAISAL

Accountability is the assurance that an individual or organization will be evaluated on their performance or behavior in relation to their responsibility. In terms of ethics and governance, Dykstra (1938) equates accountability with the expectation of account giving. Accountability has expanded beyond the basic definition of being called to account for one's actions. For Mulgan R. (2000), 'A' is accountable to 'B' when 'A' is obliged to inform 'B' about 'A's actions. He qualifies it as an Account Giving Relationship. Thus, political accountability is said to occur when a politician makes choice(s) on behalf of his people, who in turn should have the ability to reward or sanction him (Fearon 1999). In representative democracies, citizens delegate powers and therefore their sovereignty, periodically to elected representatives to represent their interests. The challenge here is how such elected representatives, who may possess divergent personal interests for example, can be compelled to act in the best interest of the electorates. Citizens, as have been observed in an earlier definition, can rely on sanctions to threaten erring politicians, while rewarding those that truly represented their interests with a

return to the office, if they choose to run again (Przeworski et al. 2003). This however is possible in climes where there is no culture of interference in the electoral process and the electorate is duly informed about the performance or non-performance of their elected representatives. Representatives can be held accountable, according to Stimson et al (1995) through two mechanisms. These are (i) by electoral replacement and (ii) through rational anticipation. Citizens will vote to replace Representatives who are out of step with their interests, under electoral replacement; while under rational anticipation, representatives are made to anticipate the consequences of being out of step with the interest of the people. The key term here is 'anticipation'. The electorate knowing perfectly the performance record of his representative may restrain such representative from pursuing interests other than those of his constituents because he, the Representative, knows for certain that by the fact of rational anticipation, there would surely come a day of reckoning (Amold 1990). It needs to be observed here however that in our political environment, rational anticipation will not stop a Nigerian representative to do the bidding of his godfather, his political sponsor, at the state house of Assembly level, if he is certain that votes don't usually count and that his godfather will always be there to see him through the primaries and subsequent national elections. Keefe (1998) identified six types of primaries. These are (i) direct (ii) closed (iii) open (iv) blanket (v) non-partisan (vi) run-off respectively. Political parties in Nigeria have claimed to either run open or closed primaries in electing candidates for general elections. They have even adopted such candidates by 'consensus' to represent the party – a Nigerian political contraption and lexicon, not listed by Keefe. However, the party leadership in most cases always held sway in determining the outcome of primary elections. Chris Uba, the one-time political godfather of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) in Anambra state was once quoted by the Sunday Champion newspaper (June 8, 2003) as boasting that -

“I am the greatest of all godfathers in Nigeria because this is the first time anyone has single-handedly put in position, every politician in the state. I also have the power to remove any of them who does not perform up to expectation, any time I like.”

In another show of dominance and control of the political process and structure of the PDP in Anambra state by the godfathers, a sitting Governor, Chinwoke Mbadinuju was prevented from going for a second term because he was alleged to have derailed on an agreement he had with his political godfather Emeka Offor, a billionaire businessman, who sponsored him.

3.0 PARTY PRIMARIES IN NIGERIA – A HISTORICAL APPRAISAL

The selection of party members to vie for elective positions in Nigeria is traceable to the colonial period when parties were formed as instruments for resisting and attacking colonialism and the colonial administration. What guided the selection of party candidates for elective positions at that time was their display of bravery in confronting the colonial government or bridging penetration by political rivals from other parts of the country (Iwu. 2020). It was not by way of the internal democratic process of conducting party primary elections, with candidates attending party conferences and conventions as we now know today. Leadership dexterity was accorded a lot more credence and therefore considered above internal party democracy (Joseph 1999). For example, Chief Obafemi Awolowo of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) exhibited such leadership control within his party, while still openly professing democratic socialism as his guiding ideology (Joseph 1999. 121). As far back as 1958, when

Nigeria was still under colonial rule, Chief Awolowo had argued that it was the height of absurdity for anyone to think that a largely illiterate electorate would be capable of deciding what is in its best interest, for it will be irresponsible to believe otherwise (Joseph 1999). It should however be noted that Chief Awolowo, who had earlier in his political life shown disdain for party rank-and-file's involvement in the recruitment process for elective positions, was to be prevailed upon subsequently, against Pa Alayande, his preferred candidate, for Chief Bola Ige, in the governorship primary election of Oyo state, in the second republic (1979-1983). General Ibrahim Babangida's attempt to tone down the strangulating hold of the party leadership on political parties during his government's transition project to democracy, though subtle, was not that different in terms of outcome. He wanted a grass root based political system that would drastically reduce the domineering influence of party leaders, especially their financial hold on the parties (Osaghae 2002 p 217); and for this reason, he established government-funded parties – the National Republican Convention (NRC) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP). Party offices were established in all the states of the federation. The intention supposedly was to deny moneybags, and total control of the political process, since all members of the parties were to be equal founders and equal joiners (Amucheazi 2008. 68). All of these were meant to strengthen internal democracy. However, money and closeness to the ruling military establishment at the time, according to Adekanye (2005. 11) still determined the direction and outcomes of party primaries, leading to the birth of the fourth Republic. Those who got the party tickets to vie for elective positions were largely hand-picked; contrary to the original intention of the government's sponsorship of the two political parties (Iwu 2008). The control of their structures fell largely into a few hands, who bought over the parties with money. These money bags financed the activities of the parties seized party organs, and ran the affairs of the parties, with little participation from members. Primary election results were largely ignored. Terminologies such as "Affirmation" or "Template" found their way into the political lexicon of the day, as methods of conducting party primaries, congresses, and conventions in the Fourth Republic, while direct and open party primaries were seldom applied by political parties. Mr. Rotimi Amaechi won his party's primary for the governorship election in Rivers State but was subverted. He later reclaimed his victory through the Supreme Court ruling of October 2007. Also, the PDP 2006 governorship primary election in Imo state disregarded tenets of internal democracy and denied Senator Ifeanyi Ararume, who won the party's governorship ticket in 2006 and was subsequently expelled from the party (Nzeakah G 2007. 18). Also, the wife of the Delta state chairman was declared winner of the primary election of the PDP for the Delta north senatorial seat, when she was alleged not to have even been seen canvassing for votes in the area (Okanlawon & Oyebode et al 2006. 2). Other instances abound, demonstrating the near absence of internal party democracy, necessitating the need to review existing electoral laws. Party leadership and political elites, who as full-time politicians, with no other known visible and credible sources of livelihood, would always find ways to corruptly circumvent the law and the good intentions of internal party democracy, which party primaries bring in their wake. There are enormous resources at stake that they would have to forgo, should free and fair primaries find them unworthy and therefore deny them and their cronies, easy access to political power and the public purse. Aggrieved party members, especially aspirants with financial muscle and the means to seek redress in court would have no choice but to challenge such outcomes. There is for example that case mentioned earlier of Rt. Hon. Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi, an aggrieved aspirant who won the 2007 governorship primary election for the PDP in Rivers state and had his name substituted by his party leadership. He won his case at the Supreme Court and was later sworn in as the Governor of Rivers State, without contesting

and campaigning as a gubernatorial candidate in the 2007 general election. Party primaries as already noted in this article are important recruitment exercises for political leadership. Good and credible leadership will only emerge if the process is free and fair, devoid of any form of interference.

4.0 SUBSISTING LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON PARTY PRIMARIES

It is rather heart-warming to observe, especially in the light of the foregoing, that our Lawmakers are sensitive to the harm that lack of internal democracy is doing to their political parties. This is even more so when some of them could have benefited substantially from the ugly practices of godfather sponsorship and parties, substituting qualified and duly elected candidates at party primaries, and preceding general elections. The amended Electoral Act signed into law in February 2022 requires under its section 29(1) that political parties hold their primaries and submit a list of their candidates, not later than 180 days before the confirmed date of a general election. This gives ample time for pre-election matters in court, arising from primaries, requiring to be sorted out, especially where concerned aspirants at the party primaries have reasons to contest their outcome. Before the latest amendment to the Electoral Act, not more than a 60-day period to the date of a general election was the required period for the submission of list of party candidates, arising from party primaries. The consequence has been for pre-election matters to be concluded in court, long after a wrong contestant had supposedly been 'elected' and sworn in. Another part of the amended electoral Act that is of interest to party primaries and their outcome is section 29(5) of the Act. It provides that contrary to the previous practice when any member of the public could challenge false information submitted by parties on their candidates, only aspirants, who participated in a primary election of a political party and therefore have the locus can now approach the Federal High Court for a review. This is where there are grounds to believe that information given by a 'successful' candidate at party primaries is false. Another provision of interest with regard to the conduct of party primaries as far as the amended electoral Act is concerned is found in section 84(12) of the Act. It requires anyone holding a political office to vacate such office before he can be eligible to participate as a candidate or a delegate, either in a primary election, convention, or congress of a political party. The understanding here is that it covers political appointees and does not extend to elected political office holders or public officers employed in the public service. Such officers must vacate their political appointments before the Conventions or Congresses of their party. In the event of the death of a candidate during primaries, section 34 of the Act provides that a fresh primary shall be conducted by the political party of the deceased candidate; and this should happen within 14 days following the death of the candidate if it is an election into a legislative house. However, candidates' running mates will continue with the election and nominate a new running mate, where the deceased person is a presidential or gubernatorial candidate. The 2022 electoral Act as amended can be said to be an improvement on the repealed version and is capable of reducing significantly, the volume of election-related litigations, if strictly adhered to and enforced. INEC's 2018 regulations for party primary elections require amongst others that political parties give a 21 days' notice to their would-be party aspirants, stating the date, place, and time of primaries and the type of primaries to be conducted. With regards to elections into leadership positions in political parties, considered crucial for free and fair party primaries, INEC's guidelines and subsidiary regulations on internal party activities provide for the need to make elections into leadership positions of political parties democratic. It provides that the constitutions and rules of a political party allow

for periodic elections of principal officers and members of the executive committee or other governing bodies of a political party, on a democratic basis. What has emerged from the foregoing is that Nigeria is not short of legal instruments and appropriate rules and regulations necessary to regulate the internal workings of political parties to ensure internal democracy and the conduct of free and fair primaries. We should perhaps look elsewhere for solutions to this hydra-headed problem and challenges to achieving internal party democracy, such that party's rank-and-file can own and run their parties freely, without let or hindrance.

5.0 HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY PRIMARIES IN NIGERIA

State Houses of Assembly were established under s. 90 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended). This section confers on them the powers to (i) make laws for the state (ii) consider matters brought to their attention by the state governors (iii) approve the state budget and (iv) perform general oversight functions on the performance of the state budget. Members of the State Houses of Assembly are elected to represent their constituencies for a period of four years, and each State House of Assembly must have not less than 24 and not more than 40 members. These members must be Nigerian citizens and registered and sponsored members of their political parties. The table below states the number of seats/constituencies per state at the State Houses of Assembly level and their current distribution on a political party basis, in terms of seats/constituencies, won and held by parties in the 36 State Houses of Assembly, on the eve of the 2022 state assembly primaries.

S/No.	State	No of seats/State Assembly Constituencies	Distribution on the basis of seats won and held by parties
1	Abia State	24	PDP 18; APC 3; LP 2; APGA 1 as at July 2022
2	Adamawa State	25	PDP 13; APC 11; NNPP 1 as at June,2022
3	Akwa – Ibom State	26	PDP 24; YPP; 2 as at July, 2022
4	Anambra State	30	APGA 17; PDP 7; APC 5; 1 vacant seat as at May 2022
5	Bauchi State	31	APC 16; PDP 15 as at April 2022
6	Benue State	30	PDP 24; APC 5; ADC; 1 as at October 2021
7	Borno State	30	APC 30 as at 2021
8	Cross River State	25	APC 18; PDP 7 as at March, 2021
9	Delta State	29	PDP 27; APC 2 as at September 2021
10	Ebonyi State	24	APC 17; PDP 5 and 2 vacant seats as at March, 2022
11	Ekiti State	26	APC 22; PDP 2; LP 1 and 1 vacant seat as at March 2022
12	Enugu State	24	PDP 24 as at December 2021
13	Edo State	24	PDP 9; APC 1 and 14 vacant seats as at February 2023
14	Gombe State	24	APC 21; PDP 3 as at March, 2023
15	Bayelsa State	24	PDP 20; APC 4 as at April, 2021

16	Imo State	27	APC 21: PDP 5 and 1 vacant seat as at December 2021
17	Jigawa State	30	APC 30 as at December 2021
18	Kaduna State	31	APC 20: PDP 10 and 1 vacant seat as at December 2021
19	Kano State	40	APC 30; NNPP 9; PDP 1 as at May 2022
20	Katsina State	34	APC 34 as at December 2020
21	Kebbi State	24	APC 24 as at August 2022
22	Kogi State	25	APC 25 as at April 2021
23	Kwara State	24	APC 21; PDP 1 and 2 vacant seats as at May, 2021
24	Lagos State	40	APC 40 as at December, 2020
25	Nasarawa State	24	APC 20; PDP 3; LP 1 as at September, 2021
26	Ogun State	26	APC 25: PDP 1 as at February, 2021
27	Osun State	26	APC 23; PDP 3 as at June 2019
28	Plateau State	24	APC 14: PDP 7: LP 1 and 2 vacancies
29	Rivers State	32	PDP 32 as at June, 2019
30	Niger State	27	APC 26; PDP 1 as at December 2021
31	Taraba State	24	PDP 15; APC 5 and 4 vacant seats as at June 2022
32	Sokoto State	30	PDP 17; APC 13 as at April, 2022
33	Yobe State	24	APC 21; PDP 1 and 2 vacant seats as at February 2022
34	Ondo State	26	APC 22; PDP 2: ZLP 1 and 1 vacant as at March 2022
35	Zanfara State	24	APC 21; PDP 1 and 2 vacant seats as at June 2019
36	Oyo State	32	PDP 26: APC 5; ADP 1 as at June 2019

Source: <https://en.m.wikipedia.org>

A total of nine hundred and ninety (990) seats or State Constituency delimitations are involved. 595 of this number was held by the APC while the PDP controlled 324 seats. The remaining 71 seats were either vacant or held by some of the other recognized political parties. It is equally instructive to note that the APC and PDP controlled between them 919 seats or 92.8% of the total elective seats at the State Houses of Assembly nationwide. It, therefore, stands to reason to come to the conclusion that Nigeria as a country, currently operating a multi-party system in theory, is in practice and for the purpose of this article running a two-party system since more than 92% of existing political space at the State Houses of Assembly level is controlled by these two political parties. Besides, there is a paucity of information on what is happening at the House of Assembly level within the remaining 16 political parties. They seem to be a lot more concerned about the Presidential, Gubernatorial, and Senatorial elections and how to constitute “a third force“ that could dislodge the dominant political parties at these levels than about party primaries, at the level of state houses of assembly. Some of those aspirants who lost out in their run for elective posts as president, governors, senators, or members of the house of representative at the primaries of the major parties usually proceed to the other financially

less endowed political parties to pick their party nominations, promising in return to improve their electoral fortunes. These highly mobile politicians cannot imagine being left out in the race. Party rules are usually waived for them, as they are listed, substituting whosoever must earlier have been slated for these positions and their names forwarded to INEC as aspirants for their new parties.

6.0 HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY PARTY PRIMARIES BY THE ALL PROGRESSIVE CONGRESS (APC)

The outcome of the 2022 State Houses of Assembly primaries organized by the All Progressive Congress (APC) across the states to elect candidates for elective positions in the 2023 general election could be said to be a mixed bag. There were in most cases attempts by the party leadership to ensure that candidates that emerged, either by direct primaries or indirectly, through elected delegates to party conventions were loyal and trusted party men and women that could work with their gubernatorial candidates if the party won the state governorship election. While there were instances of rancor-free primaries in terms of outcome, some other primaries were disputed and characterized by violence because of malpractices, and alleged imposition of party men by serving and former governors, ministers, and financially strong party leaders. At the Nasarawa Central State Constituency, for example, Hajiya Hajara Danyaro Ibrahim defeated the incumbent, Hon. Ismail Dambaba, who failed to turn up for the election. All 35 votes were cast in her favor. However, at the Udege/Loko state constituency also in Nasarawa state, Hon. Mohammed Odege Okpoku, an incumbent won a re-run, polling 40 votes to defeat 4 other aspirants who scored 0 votes (Vanguard Newspaper of June 3, 2022). In Taraba state, 20 aggrieved APC House of Assembly aspirants, of the 24 contestants, protested the outcome of the House of Assembly primary election. The protesting aspirants were reportedly led by one Shittu Mohammed, vying for the APC's Nguroje state constituency seat. They alleged that the electoral committee sent by their party to conduct the state Assembly primary election did not come to the state, talked less of conducting any primary election, and called for the intervention of the party's National Secretariat (Vanguard, May 30, 2022). In Yobe State, aggrieved party elders and youths were reported to have vowed to resist alleged moves by APC executives in the Potiscum local government area to substitute winners of the party's House of Assembly candidates in the area (Leadership On-Line Newspaper, June 6, 2022). One Alhaji Tsula was reported to have alleged that all delegates of the local government and the entire people of Potiscum were surprised to hear that another House of Assembly election was held for the local government in Damaturu, the state capital. Meanwhile, in Kogi state, there was direct interference by the sitting State Governor in the process, supposedly for altruistic reasons (Vanguard Newspaper, May 25, 2022). He was reported to have granted an automatic nod to one Mr. Emmanuel Adukwu to contest unopposed, in support of persons living with disabilities. He was in the same vein reported to have charged that not less than seven women got the ticket on the platform of the APC to vie for the state's House of Assembly seats. The involvement of a sitting Governor took a dramatic turn in Borno State where Governor Zulum organized the flag-off of State Congresses to hold simultaneously, across the 27 local government areas of the state to elect delegates for all elective positions ie the State House of Assembly, the Federal House of Representative, the Senate, the State's Gubernatorial Election and the President of the Federal Republic (Vanguard Newspaper, May 18, 2022). The flag-off was reportedly conducted in Mafa, the governor's hometown. The Chairman of the Party's National Committee on Congresses in Borno State, Professor Jones Ode Erue

constituted the Local Government Election Committees for the 27 local Government Areas in the state and presided over the election supposedly by consensus for Mafa local government. This was done by acclamation by aspirants instead of being conveyed by each aspirant in writing as required by the 2022 Electoral Act (as amended). By so doing, 5 Local Govt. Delegates, 5 State Delegates, and three National Delegates for example were elected to represent Mafa L G A in all primaries to be conducted by the party. The State House of Assembly primaries for the APC in Kebbi State saw Hon. Rilwanu Sahabi winning the APC ticket to represent Kalgo L G A with 44 votes to defeat three other contestants (The Sun Newspaper, 28th May 2022). The same could not be said for the APC party primaries in Ekiti State, where 17 aspirants were initially denied participation in the party primaries because they refused to fill a section of their nomination form indicating their withdrawal from the state Assembly race, even when no primary had been held (Premium Times, May 21, 2022). They petitioned the party's Appeal Committee and were subsequently cleared and allowed to participate in the primaries. This is yet another example of undue interference by the party hierarchy. The primaries for the party in Rivers State were reported to have gone smoothly, contrary to expectations. People from Senator Abe's faction of the party were reported to have participated in and endorsed the exercise. A total of 89 party aspirants were screened and cleared for the process. The Benue branch however opted for direct primaries. This meant that party card-carrying members in the state would vote directly to select from aspirants vying for elective positions at the state and national levels (Vanguard, May 26, 2022).

7.0 HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY PARTY PRIMARIES BY THE PEOPLES' DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PDP)

The objective of party leadership interference in the primaries, as earlier noted was to have trusted candidates voted in, to do their bidding. The same is true for the PDP. They rail-road their sons and daughters, through dubious and sometimes questionable state houses of assembly primaries to secure elective positions. In the PDP Houses of Assembly primaries in Delta State, Governor Ifeanyi Okowa's daughter – Marilyn Okowa Daramola was returned as the party's standard bearer for the Ika North East constituency. However, in the Warri North state constituency, former Governor Uduaghan's daughter came a distant second behind Hon. Fred Martins, while the son of a popular transporter – Hon Onoriode Agofure won in the Ugheli North state constituency. The incumbent house member representing Ugheli South state constituency Hon Reuben Izeze lost out as Mr. Festus Utuama, brother to a former Deputy Governor of the state Prof. Amos Utuama was returned as the party's flag bearer (Vanguard Newspaper, 23rd May 2022). Violence trailed the state house of Assembly primaries in Akwa – Ibom and Bayelsa States respectively. Two people lost their lives in the Ini local government of Akwa – Ibom State while one died in Ogbia LGA of Bayelsa State. Party Ad-hoc delegates' lists were used in the conduct of PDP party primaries in Lagos State. These were developed by the party's electoral committee, following the disqualification of statutory delegates by the Electoral Act as amended. Aggrieved Aspirants called for an outright cancellation of the process, alleging that the process had been skewed in favor of particular candidates. The party's National Working Committee tried to avoid this controversy in Kano State, via a circular in which it directed that

“...by s. 84(8) of the Electoral Act 2022, those qualified and eligible to vote as delegates in the forthcoming primaries and National Convention of our great party are the three (3) Ad-hoc

delegates per ward elected at ward congresses and one (1) National delegate per local government elected at the Local Government Area Congress” (Daily Post Newspaper, May 21, 2022)

Even at that, two factions still emerged and conducted separate primaries, leaving the party aspirants confused (Sahara Reporters, NY May 23rd, 2022). For Adamawa State, the PDP conducted its primaries successfully, electing 29 State Assembly Candidates, 10 of its incumbent members of the house inclusive. Benue State PDP House of Assembly primaries were conducted peacefully with names of the 27 successful aspirants to contest the 27 House of Assembly seats announced (Daily Post, May 23, 2022). The same outcome was reported in Enugu State for the party (This Day, May 5th, 2022). However, in Oyo State, violence erupted at the Ibadan South East House of Assembly Constituency II, where the Deputy National Chairman of the party Abubakar Taofeek and Chairman of the Pacesetter Transportation Service Company, Dare Adeleke were alleged to have chased away some delegates from the Saint John Primary School Alake Academy Ibadan, venue of the primary election and prevented them from participating (Guardian Newspaper, May 23rd, 2022).

8.0 CONCLUSION

A cross-sectional view by this article of party primaries conducted to produce 2023 State Houses of Assembly aspirants has largely shown that the process lacked internal party democracy. Party leaders, including some serving governors and godfathers, through imposition and substitution of candidates routinely undermined an otherwise democratic process that was designed to produce delegates and aspirants nationwide, to vie for elective positions on party platforms for State Houses of Assembly. There were in some instances, reported cases of rank-and-file resistance, resulting in violence and even the death of party members in some local government areas. This negative political behavior of interference consistently undermines internal party democracy. It appears to have become part of our political culture since independence, despite existing legal instruments that aim at checkmating such tendencies. Drastic political party reforms need to be undertaken to free party primaries of the shackles of moneybags and party-political leadership if party primaries are to produce party men that will be accountable and prosecute party programs.

9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Political parties must not only be run by the rank-and-file but be seen to be actually run by them. The yokes of godfathers, party leadership, and money bags are to be eased or completely eliminated if internal democracy is to thrive, especially during primaries and in the elections of party leadership. The following recommendations are suggested –

- Political parties should be weaned off their financial dependence and support by money bags, especially state governors, who spend state funds in most cases to run their parties. Sponsors of political parties would naturally want to have a say in who emerges as party delegates and aspirants for elective positions on party platforms.
- Card-carrying members of political parties should pay reasonable sums as annual dues for the running of their parties. Party membership retention should be made subject to being up to date in the payment of annual dues.

- In order to shore up party membership, the party leadership should routinely undertake membership recruitment drives nationwide. This will strengthen their financial base and whittle down the grip of moneybags and godfathers.
- Membership should be made a lot more attractive, with prospects for nomination to vie for elective positions amongst others being made available on merit, to deserving and interested members.
- There should be routine mass education of members on their rights, duties, and obligations to the party.
- The party's Constitution, produced in Nigerian languages should be readily available and handed out to new members, at the point of registration.
- Training and retraining of party men and women should hold periodically at the ward and local government levels.
- Training curricula should cover the party's Constitution, the provisions of extant electoral laws, the structure of the party, its manifesto and programmes of government(s) - where such party is in power, or proposed alternatives to what the government in power from another party is doing.
- Parties should publish periodicals quarterly and circulate to members for a fee, giving up-to-date information on social, economic and political activities in the country.
- Political parties should develop steady sources of income, through direct investments, such that they would not need to call on any one for assistance, as such benefactors could turn around to make demands, and wish to control the party and its operations.

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