

Internal Party Democracy and Zoning System in Nigeria: The Case of Peoples Democratic Party 2022 Presidential Primary Election

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Abstract

The 2022 presidential primaries of Nigeria's Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) marked a significant turning point in the party's history due to its departure from the traditional zoning principle, a core aspect of its internal democracy. This shift had profound consequences for the party's internal dynamics. This research was driven by three key questions and objectives, rooted in Neoinstitutionalism theory. It utilized historical and descriptive research methods, primarily analyzing documentary sources through thematic and content analysis. The findings revealed multiple challenges to the PDP's internal democracy, including ideological issues, the abandonment of the zoning system, and the dominance of party executives. Specifically, the study highlighted how the 2022 deviation from the zoning principle in the PDP's presidential primaries significantly disrupted the party's internal democracy. This decision led to notable implications, causing internal divisions and fragmentation within the party along zonal lines. Thus, the study underscored the need for the PDP to take decisive steps to repair and strengthen its internal democracy. Recommendations included a public reaffirmation of its commitment to democratic values, particularly the zoning system, as a means to regain trust and credibility among party members and voters.

Keywords: Internal, Political Party, Democracy, Zoning, Election

Introduction

Nigeria's transition to democratic rule in 1999 marked a significant turning point in the nation's political landscape. After enduring over three decades of military regimes, the country embraced democracy as its preferred form of governance, aligning with the global trend. Democracy is characterized by a set of fundamental principles and values that are agreed upon and upheld by political parties, which serve as vehicles for the participation and representation of the people. Within the political parties, the application of democratic principles and values is critical, particularly in ensuring fairness in the selection of political leaders, who will then represent the party in general elections. However, in Nigeria, as in many other countries, the practical implementation of these democratic principles within political parties has been challenging. The lack of internal party democracy has therefore been a persistent issue in

Nigeria, dating back to the pre-independence era (Ojukwu & Olaifa, 2011), and continues to plague the Fourth Republic (Nwaigwe, 2019).

One of the prominent issues in Nigerian democracy is the prevalence of ethnic politicking and grievances. The historical context of disunity and division within Nigeria, as exemplified by the views of Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Sir Abubakar Tafawa Belawa, further underscored the need for a unifying mechanism. Nigeria was described as a mere geographical expression, lacking unity and a shared vision among its diverse ethnic groups. The power hegemony of particular ethnic groups aggravated these divisions, leading to complaints and disputes. The People's Democratic Party (PDP), which held power from 1999 to 2015, recognized this problem and sought to address it through the adoption of a zoning system. The zoning system was designed to counteract power imbalances and perceived ethnic marginalisation. While not formally incorporated into the party's constitution, it was implied in the party's founding principles and aimed to ensure equity, justice, and broad participation in the political representation process (Abati, 2022). The party as a major political force in Nigeria, saw the zoning system as a means to foster unity among ethnically fragmented communities. The system was proposed to ensure that different geopolitical zones took turns in the presidency, promoting inclusivity and reducing ethnic bias (Ekwueme, 2013). It was envisioned as a solution to the long-standing issue of ethnic friction in the country.

The zoning system was seen as an inclusive policy by the PDP, aimed at creating a sense of unity in diversity among party members from various ethnic and religious backgrounds. Although initially informal, the zoning system was later incorporated into the party's constitution in 2011 to prevent violations (Mbah & Nwangwu, 2014). As the 2023 presidential election approached, the PDP, while working to regain power, aimed to choose a candidate from the South, in keeping with the party's principle of rotational zoning. However, events unfolded differently, with a Northern candidate winning the party's presidential primary. This outcome challenged the zoning principle and exposed divisions within the party, ultimately undermining the party's commitment to inclusiveness and equity. In addition to the party's internal efforts to promote inclusivity and equity through the zoning system, Nigeria's Electoral Act of 2022 and the amended Constitution provided provisions that could support internal party democracy. The 2022 Electoral Act mandated primaries for aspirants to all elective positions and outlined three methods for selecting party standard bearers, emphasizing popular participation (Section 84). The 1999 Constitution, in Section 14, introduced the federal character principle to create a sense of unity and inclusivity in government institutions.

Furthermore, the founders of the PDP in 1998 incorporated the zoning system as part of the party's internal management to align with the spirit of the federal character principle outlined in the Constitution. This principle was later enshrined in the party's constitution in 2011. The practical application of this policy has been marred by controversy and internal divisions, as evidenced by the 2022 Presidential Primaries. This election served as a contentious battleground where personal and geopolitical interests clashed, and the party's commitment to the zoning system was abandoned in favour of individual and group ambitions. The 2022 Presidential Primaries, held on May 28, 2022, in Abuja, brought together members of the People's Democratic Party to select the party's flag bearer for the 2023 Presidential Election. The outcome of the primaries was marked by a significant deviation from the zoning principle, as the former Vice President, Alh. Abubakar Atiku, emerged as the party's standard-bearer. Atiku secured 371 votes out of the total 776, while the strongest contender from the South-

South, Chief Barr. Ezenwo Nyesom Wike, received 237 votes. Atiku's victory signalled a return of power to the North if the PDP were to win the 2023 general election. This outcome triggered a strong resistance from the second runner-up from the South, who firmly believed that the presidential ticket should have gone to the South.

The aftermath of the primaries revealed deep divisions within the party, threatening its internal party democracy. This departure from the agreed-upon zoning system underscored the party's vulnerability to selfishness and personal ambition, which overshadowed the party's initial response to ethnic complaints at its foundation. The primary election process exposed disunity among the geopolitical zones, a lack of zonal commitment to the election, and a failure to uphold the party's constitution. The voting patterns reflected personal and zonal differences, highlighting the political cohesion of the North and the servitude of Southern politicians. This deviation from the zoning principle not only weakened the party but also endangered its prospects in the 2023 general election. The abandonment of the zoning system created divisions, ethnic marginalisation sentiments, and a sense of unfair treatment within the party. The focus of this research is to critically examine the problems arising from the abandonment of the zoning system and its implications as a deliberate policy to promote internal democracy within the PDP.

Research Questions

- i. What are the challenges of internal democracy in the Peoples Democratic Party?
- ii. How did the deviation from the zoning system during the People's Democratic Party (PDP) 2022 Presidential Primaries impact the internal party democracy of the PDP?
- iii. What are the implications of the PDP's decision to disregard the zoning principle in the 2022 Presidential Primaries?

Objectives of the Research

The main thrust of this study is to examine the dynamics of internal party democracy and the zoning system in Nigeria with a particular focus on PDP's 2022 presidential primary election. Specifically, the study will:

- i. examine the challenges of Internal Democracy in the Peoples Democratic Party.
- ii. investigate the extent to which the deviation from the zoning system in the 2022 PDP Presidential Primaries influenced the internal party democracy of the PDP.
- iii. assess the implications of the PDP's decision to disregard the zoning principle in the 2022 Presidential Primaries.

Literature Review and Methodology

Democracy

Democracy is a system of rule by the people and for the people. In this system, the people choose from the pool of contestants the party bearer of their choice to govern them within a given time or stipulated term. It is a people rule system through the process of electing their leaders in various offices. Simply put as a system where the people elect who rules them. It is said to encompass freedom of choice of who, what, when, where and how to be led or ruled, at the free will of the people. The word 'Democracy' is originated from two Greek Words 'demos-people and Kratos meaning 'power' or 'rule' (Nwaigwu, 2014). It is a political system in which the powers of government derive from the consent of the governed and which regular constitutional avenues exist for changing government officials (Nwaigwu, 2014). This means

that in a democracy the powers in government derive their powers and authority from the people. Democracy is a means for the common masses to choose their leaders and hold the leaders accountable for their policies and conduct in office. It is said that the real sovereignty in a democratic government belongs to the people and leaders in such government derive the powers and authority from the people (Nwaigwu, 2019). Such a government must exist to serve the interest of the active participation of the citizens of the state for it to be meaningful.

The concept was popularized in the United States of America during the “Age of Enlightenment (17th and 18th centuries). This was during the declaration of independence of America (1776). The declaration was a follow-up to the England experience of 1215 when Magna Carta which sounded the first seed of democratic ideology (Nwaigwe, 2019). The study of Democracy is not complete without reference to the impact of the former president of America Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865), who postulated the basis and ideas of democracy at the funeral oration for the fallen soldiers who had laid their lives during the American civil war at Gettysburg in November 19th 1863, he stated that democracy is the government of the people by the people and for the people (Nwaigwu, 2014, p.134), this definition has remained the most generally accepted definition.

In that case, democracy is a form of government rooted in the direct or indirect involvement of the citizens in the governance and politics of their state. It is a system of government arrived at by the will of the people in a very competitive political struggle through elections in the bid to ensure proper formulation of policies while meeting the interest of the general populace. The formulated policies or principles as the rule of law, popular participation and termly change of government, separation of powers, press freedom, fundamental human rights, and independence of the judiciary among other such principles (Nawigwe, 2019). When principles are missing in any acclaimed democratic government, it becomes absurd to refer to it as a democratic government.

Political Party

Political parties are fundamental to modern political processes. To this end, their significance cannot be overemphasised. In other words, the political party is the major organising principle of modern politics (Heywood, 1997). It is a group of persons bound in policy and opinion in support of a general political cause which essentially is the pursuit, capture and retention for as long as democratically feasible, of government and its officials (Agbaje, 1999). To have a government in place in any society there is bound to be political parties that are to contest vigorously to form such a government. The understanding is that complex modern societies would be ungovernable in the absence of political parties. Parties help with the formation of governments to the extent that it is possible to talk of party government; it also gives governments a degree of stability and coherence especially if most of the members of the government are drawn from a single party and therefore, united by common sympathies and attachment (Ojukwu & Olaifa, 2011).

Political parties are one of the institutions that are carriers of democratic principles in any organised society. Thus, there are several ‘institutional guarantees’ that parties have to fulfil if they were to effectively meet what is expected of them in a democracy. One of such institutional requirements is internal (intra-party) democracy (Ojukwu & Olaifa, 2011). A political party is ‘a social group’ characterised by a high degree of the rational direction of behaviour towards ends that are objects of common acknowledgement and expectation.

Political parties is quite different from other social groups such as Labour Unions and other associations because of the unique functions they perform for the system such as: organizing for public opinion, communicating demands to the centre of governmental decision-making and political recruitment. In essence, political parties are institutional representations of the struggle for power between aggregations of the prevalent political interests in society. They provide a forum for active involvement in a country's political process as well as the articulation of demands by various interest groups in the society. Perhaps, it is the reason one should be able to know what happens between political parties and within members of a party, and how party functionaries and activists relate among themselves within their respective political parties (Tyoden, 1994).

Internal Party Democracy

Internal party democracy is described as an arrangement that accommodates a fair or level playing ground in the internal management and administration of political parties in any democratic polity (Nwaigwe, 2019). It shows the existence of democratic principles and values in the affairs of the party as well as intra-party politics of the political parties in a democratic state. Democracy is all about inclusiveness. If there is no provision for people's inclusion in the party, there may be little participation since one begets the other. Inclusiveness stresses how wide the circle of party decision-makers is. Scarrow (2005) opined that in the most inclusive parties, all party members, or even all party supporters, are allowed to decide on important issues, such as the choice of party leader or the selection of party candidates. Due to the fact that inclusiveness is a matter of process and formal rule, more inclusive parties will offer more opportunities for open deliberation before the decision stage. As it were, this particular variable (inclusiveness) is seriously and visibly lacking in the Peoples Democratic Party (Ojukwu & Olaifa, 2011).

Internal Party Democracy implies that political parties as political organisations are structured to reflect the basic principles and values of democracy which they want to sell externally to the larger polity in their pursuit and competition for political powers within any given political system. Popular political participation and strong voices of the party members in the activities of the parties are the main things to it. Internal party democracy encompasses two instruments of intra-party democracy; organization of free and fair elections and periodic elections of party members and its representatives and popular participation of its members and equal representation of interests (Odigwe, 2015). This definition re-echos that internal party democracy is an exhibition and upholding of the internal practices and organizational procedures of political parties in their intra-party politics. It depicts the willingness and consistent desires of political parties to adhere to their party's constitution s which must be in tender and a reflection of the democratic constitution of the larger polity of the political system where such parties exist and operate. It is the upholding of the democratic cultures and principles by the political parties in their internal affairs and internal politics so as to accommodate the active participation and interest of all the party members across the board.

Zoning System

Zoning is a system that Parties adopt to ensure Power balancing as well as project liberal democracy, where all are allowed to represent or lead the party or society. Awopeju (2012) posited that political parties encourage stability of the governing process because once elected for a fixed term, the government knows its life span at the corridor of Power and the opposition parties too are aware of this. Zoning as a policy implies a power shift seen as important as the

political parties in a primordial democratic state like Nigeria. For the People's Democratic Party to enshrine it in her constitution, is to promote true federalism and equitable revenue sharing. Part of the Peoples Democratic Party objectives set to pursue in the 'C' part is to "Adhering to the policy of rotation and zoning of the party and public elective offices in pursuance of the principle of equity, justice and fairness.' In the Peoples Democratic Party code of conduct, it is aimed that, 'a party member shall oppose ethnicity, religious and political intolerance or any other form of discrimination.' The party also aimed to 'promote national integration and peaceful co-existence.' in the dispensation of democratic rule, the People's Democratic Party opted for Zoning as a solution to ethnic complaints.

The concept of zoning is used to represent a system, or rotation to depict political party arrangement for accommodating the interest of party members in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state or nation as Nigeria. According to Ogu et al. (2023), it is a 'Political arrangement that tends to make sure that no region of the nation is excluded from any party's programme' (p.4). It was further observed that in Nigeria, the concept serves as "a protest against power abuse" (p.4). zoning is an unofficial policy by the political parties aimed at ensuring ethnic and religious as well as regional balancing of power-sharing to create a sense of 'we feeling' among party members from different segments of Nigerian society.

Zoning is majorly a party arrangement. It was majorly a formula adopted by the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in 1999. It was an elite consensus. It was an arrangement reached by the party elites. It was majorly adopted by Parties to tackle the major problem of integration that was ravaging the country (Nigeria) at the period (Olamide, 2021). Hence the concept is usually used interchangeably with rotational presidency to mean the same. (Olamide, 2021). It is also a power shift among various geopolitical zones to diffuse the feeling of marginalization among party members. Invariably this is to say that the internal party arrangement is geared to ensure fairness within the party politics of political parties in Nigeria. Apparently, the zoning system is a political term adopted by the elite members of Nigeria political parties to refer to their internal policy or constitutional arrangement to ensure fairness in the sharing of political offices and the assigning process of the party before the general elections as well as after the elections for winning or ruling parties. The origin is traced to the 2nd Republic in Nigeria where political parties of that era welcomed it to promote internal democracy and unity in diversity (Nwaigwe, 2022).

Primary Election

Elections are the process put in place for people to elect their leaders both at the party and public levels. The concept of Primary election is used to describe elections conducted by the political parties in any political system within themselves to select candidates to represent them at the general elections. Smith (2011) saw it as the process by which votes/delegates can indicate their preferences for the party's candidate or flag bearer in oncoming general elections or local elections. According to Ugorji (2022), 'party primary elections are "those elections conducted by the political parties in which voters of those parties choose among contending party members for political position to be the party's candidate in a general election' (p.3). It is worth noting here that party primaries are conducted within the party to select a representative or standard bearer for the general election in any democratic government. Therefore, it is part of the process of parties to enhance their chances of winning the elections.

This is a type of internal party arrangement required by the Electoral Commission of elections in a country for parties to select their standard flag bearers in a presidential election of a democratic government (Maclean & Wood, 2010). This happens in a polity that practices presidential democracy. According to Anekwe (2018), representative presidential democracy is where “the president is directly elected by the people or electorate through free and fair election’ (p.100). It is in such a system of government that the presidential primary election in such a state. This can be through an open primary election or a closed primary election (Ugorji, 2022).

People’s Democratic Party (PDP)

People’s Democratic Party was formed by members of different groups and organizations known as the G-18 and G-34; it was a mobilization of the like-minded to build a nation after over 30 years of military rule. The members agreed to the Motto and slogan of “Justice, Unity and Progress ‘PDP: Power to the People. The PDP as one of the political parties in the 4th Republic of Nigeria came into being on 19th August 1998 (Ojukwu & Olaifa, 2011). It was headed by the former vice president of Nigeria late Dr, Alex Ekwueme. It is believed that the pioneer members were old politicians who resisted the late General Sani Abacha self - succession plan and followers of late General Shehu Musa Yar’Adua who were former members of the defunct People’s Democratic Movement (PDM) (Ojukwu & Olaifa, 2011).

In 1999, PDP won the presidential election and the majority of the seats in the National Assembly. Chief Olusegun Obasanjo who was the party’s standard bearer was elected president of Nigeria in the 1999 elected president of Nigeria in the 1999 presidential election. He was re-elected in 2003. PDP also retained the majority seats at the National Assembly. The dominance of PDP was contained in the 4th Republic till 2015 when the party was defeated by the All Progressives Congress as the ruling party (Godwin 2016). Thereafter, the party assumed the role of the main opposition party at the national level.

On the introduction of the zoning system by political parties in Nigeria, opinions of scholars are divided at the time of its introduction. Some scholars opined that it was first introduced in the 2nd Republic, while others hold that it began with the first Republic (Ogu et al, 2023). According to them to a reasonable degree zoning has been present right from the first Republic influences the formation of government (both military and civilian), and has been a subject of debate among scholars (p.1). Olamide (2021) believed its inception in traceable to the 2nd Republic where political Parties like NPN (National Party of Nigeria) had as its informal rule for sharing strategic positions among its members. Its introduction by PDP began in 1999. Accordingly, the PDP proposed Zoning as a strategy in 1999 to address the issue of presidential elections among Nigeria’s dominant ethnic group. Following the North’s rapid succession of producing the nation’s president and Head of State, this clause gives the Southerners a sense of belonging. As compensation for the southwest’s loss in the 1993 June 12 presidential elections, the PDP chose to zone the presidency to the south (Ogu et al, 2023).

The principle was incorporated in the 1999 constitution of PDP, precisely in Article 7 subsection 2 (c). This was meant to be applicable in the recruitment process of the party election offices as well as in the sharing of political offices (appoint-ion position) as the ruling party. The policy was reinstated in the 2012 amended Constitution of PDP Article 7 section 3 (c) (Ogu et al 2023). It was part of the party’s policies to deepen internal party democracy in PDP and to catch up with the federal character principles as contained in the 1999 Constitution of

Nigeria as amended (Olamide, 2021), The clause on zoning system operated as an informal rule in PDP until 2003 when it was officially inserted in the PDP Constitution (Ogu et al, 2023). It was on the basis of this principle that Obasanjo was elected and he served for eight years and was replaced by late president Yar'adua from the North.

However, following the death of President Yar'adua in May 2010 and the subsequent assumption of power by his Vice Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, the PDP Zoning system was modified giving way for Dr. Goodluck Jonathan to contest the election in 2011. This did not go down well with PDP members from the Northern extraction (Ogu et al. 2023). In the 2015 general elections, PDP lost to the opposition party; APC whose standard bearer was from the Northern extraction who worked against the party due to the perceived violation of the PDP Zoning formula (Nwaigwe, 2019). It was not surprising that zoning was a serious issue at the PDP 2022 presidential primary. The party members from the south were vocal in saying that it was their turn to produce the party's standard bearer in the 2023 presidential election. The debate has centred around a number of issues including on whether zoning is constitutionally adopted by PDP, its backing by the 1999 constitutional as amended and the necessity of it as an internal party arrangement to promote unity among party members and deepen internal party democracy of the party.

Theoretical Framework

This study employed the theory of Neoinstitutionalism as advocated by Douglas North in 1990. Neoinstitutionalism, in the context of political science, represents a broader theoretical framework rather than a specific theory associated with a single proponent. It has evolved over time, with contributions from various scholars. One of the prominent figures associated with institutionalism is Douglas North, who laid the foundation for understanding institutions and their impact on political and economic systems. However, neo-institutionalism has grown to encompass a wide range of scholars and works. It assumes that institutions play a crucial role in shaping political behaviour, decision-making processes, and outcomes. These institutions can include formal rules, regulations, and structures within political parties and government bodies. It further acknowledges the concept of path dependence, suggesting that historical decisions and the development of institutions can have a lasting impact on current political practices. Past decisions can constrain or guide the choices made in the present. It equally incorporates elements of rational choice theory, assuming that political actors, including parties, act in their self-interest and make decisions based on the expected utility of their choices.

Neoinstitutionalism is highly relevant and applicable to the topic of internal party democracy and the zoning system in the People's Democratic Party (PDP) 2022 Presidential Primaries. The theory allows for a systematic analysis of how the institutional framework of the PDP, including its internal party rules, traditions, and decision-making processes, shapes the behaviour of party members and leaders. It can be used to assess how these institutional factors influenced the deviation from the zoning system during the primaries. It is particularly relevant to understanding the PDP's historical decisions related to the zoning system. Thus, helping to understand how past choices made by the PDP regarding zoning have had enduring effects, possibly influencing the party's behavior in the 2022 primaries. Neoinstitutionalism's focus on rational choice theory helps in analyzing the motivations and calculations of key political actors within the PDP, such as aspirants, delegates, and party leadership. It helps in exploring why these actors chose to deviate from the zoning system in pursuit of their interests. The theory

therefore highlights how institutional arrangements create constraints and opportunities for political parties focusing on the PDP and helps in understanding how the party's internal institutions facilitated or hindered the adherence to the zoning principle.

Research Methodology

The study adopted historical and descriptive research designs. This is in line with Špiláčková (2012) who argued that the purpose of historical research is to verify and explain the history of any area of human activities, subjects or events using scientific processes. The study relied on documentary materials as the type of data for the study. The research relied on secondary sources of data generation thereby selecting majorly the most relevant academic literatures and theories as the foundation. The study adopted a thematic and content analysis. The data collected were, therefore, thoroughly subjected to content analysis. This is vital to this research based on the nature of the phenomena under investigation.

Data Analysis

This chapter analysed the data generated on the subject matter of internal party democracy and zoning system in Nigeria with a focus on the case of the 2022 Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) presidential primary election.

Challenges of Internal Democracy in the Peoples Democratic Party

There are several challenges confronting the internal democracy in the Peoples Democratic Party. As posited by Ojukwu and Olaifa (2011), there is no doubt that internal democracy has some challenges. These include poverty of party ideology, candidate selection, party funding, zoning formula, primaries and party unity and party executive arrogance. Ideology is one ingredient that consolidates and stultifies any political party. It is like a superstructure upon which every other thing is built. Party ideology precedes party structure, manifesto, and organisation. By party ideology, it is meant a set or body of ideas, representations and beliefs common to a specific social group. It consists of ethical interpretations and principles that set forth the purposes, organisations and boundaries of political life. Ideology is a very crucial aspect of politics because it arises from the people's understanding, emotional identification with, and evaluation of reality. In other words, it guides, supports, retrains and rationalises political actions (Mbah & Nwangwu, 2014).

Recruiting and selecting candidates is a crucial task for parties because parties' profiles during elections and while in office, are largely determined by which candidates are chosen and where their loyalties lie (Scarrow, 2005). Whichever procedure is adopted, it is the responsibility of the party to decide who is eligible to contest or participate in the election. The assumption is that selection should be based on the good standing of members. In other words, the selection of candidates should be devoid of prejudice, class and ethnic chauvinism. This is a serious problem in PDP. To ascribe undue influence, especially self-serving influence to the parliamentary group of the party in the selection of candidates would seriously undermine the democratic process. Several examples abound with particular reference to the recent chairmanship tussle before and after the PDP's 2022 primary election.

The issue of zoning the office of the presidency in PDP has increasingly bifurcated members of the party particularly between the North and South. While some members of the party from the North argue that it is still the turn of the geo-political zone to produce the president of the

country under the PDP platform, other members from the same North and virtually all members from the South hold that it the turn of the South in the zoning formula. Some also claim that the issue of zoning was never discussed in any PDP fora, hence the party should support any PDP credible candidate from any part of the geopolitical zones. This factor featured prominently in the 2022 PDP's primary election (Ojukwu & Olaifa, 2011).

There is no gain in saying that the fact the problems of internal democracy in PDP have taken root in party executives since 1999. This affirms the common saying that when the head of the fish is bad, the entire body becomes bad as well. The assumption is that some PDP executives, especially at the National level, feel that they have the latitude to turn things around as they wish in the party (Ojukwu & Olaifa, 2011). The hindrances of internal democracy in Nigeria's political parties especially in the Peoples Democratic Party. These include non-observance of the code of conduct document which all the political parties assented to and endorsed to guide their conduit and performance, particularly during elections, the non-transparent system of choosing candidates in primary elections as well as in party leadership executive positions, and the executive arrogance within the parties which have not only torn many parties apart but also occasioned the decampment of many party stalwarts.

Deviation from the Zoning System and its Influence on PDP's Internal Democracy

Prior to the conduct of the PDP presidential primary on the 28th of May 2022, the party was deeply polarized due to the controversy of zoning (Ogu et al., 2023). Nigerian polity was equally heated up as usual because of interests and a clash of interests. The argument on zoning was first stirred up by PDP members from the south (Abdulummin, 2022). This group was led by the immediate former governor of Rivers State, Bar Nyesom Wike. It was the position of some segments of the party especially the South to zone the presidency to the south since the standard bearer of the party in the 2019 presidential election was from the Northern extraction (Abidoeye & Iroansi 2022). The North opposed the idea of zoning the PDP Presidential candidate to any other zone.

In the report of Abdulummin (2022), the zoning issue was raised again and Northerners made it vividly clear that anything less than a Northern successor would not have their support.' Their argument was finally supported by a 37-member committee set up by the Party to look into the matter. The committee which was headed by Samuel Orton, the immediate past governor of Benue State and a member of the fallout group called G-5, in the end threw it open to the whole party members, and Alh. Abubakar Atiku was elected the presidential standard flag bearer in the primary defeating Bar. Nysom Wike of the south-south region. Wike's defeat polarized the party further as he and other aggrieved governor members of the party from the south refused to acknowledge nor rally behind Atiku. According to Abidoeye and Iroanski (2022), 'the zoning of the presidency under a principle of rotation between North and South is the most contentious issue in the PDP going into the 2023 elections' (p.1).

It was noted that the issue of zoning principle in the party's internal democracy created a serious pothole in the presidential primary, as a divide that cracked the internal democracy of the party. The aggrieved members from the south were vocal condemning the northern members' stand and actions while calling for cancellation or disqualification on the basis that it was the south's turn to bear the flag, as well as the removal of the party's chairman. In the end, the party faced several hiccups that affected not its performance in the 2023 presidential election but also impeded the health of the internal democracy of the party, leaving it more fractured than united,

with some fallout members pitching tents with the opposition parties. The outcome of the internal democratic incoherence has cost the party unity and progress. As it is the 2023 general elections have dented the progressive efforts of the party endangering its future health and unity.

The principle of zoning has been a tool to unite and promote fairness among the various ethnic and religious groups that make up the political polity of PDP members in the Nation. This as contained in the Party's Constitution also implied in the Nation's amended Constitution. This was confirmed by Abati (2022) that zoning has often been argued but not contained in the 1999 constitution or the electoral act but a convenient measure PDP adopted in 1999 within the return to civil rule. This adoption was to ensure equity, justice and a sense of ownership in the process of political representation. Abati (2022) also confirmed that it was not contained in the amended constitution but implied by the federal character ideals of sections 14 (3) and 171(5). Zoning was adopted for inclusiveness and equity in party politics and in Nigeria's partisan politics as a whole (Ogu et al, 2023, Ugorji, 2022). The importance of internal party democracy in any genuine democracy cannot be overrated. The promotion of religious and ethnic balancing in any plural society is part of the strategy of promoting internal party democracy (Angerbrandt, 2020; Ignazi 2018; Nwaigwe, 2022).

The deviation from the zoning system in the 2022 People's Democratic Party (PDP) Presidential Primaries had a substantial impact on the internal party democracy of the PDP. In a nutshell, the deviation from the zoning system in the 2022 PDP Presidential Primaries significantly influenced the internal party democracy of the PDP. It eroded trust, created divisions, weakened party identity, influenced decision-making processes, reduced inclusivity, diminished transparency and accountability, and potentially discouraged grassroots participation. These factors collectively impacted the party's ability to maintain a robust and democratic internal environment, with potential implications for its performance in the 2023 general election.

PDP's Disregard to Zoning Principle in the 2022 Presidential Primaries and its Implications

The PDP's decision to disregard the zoning principle in the 2022 Presidential Primaries had far-reaching implications for the party and the broader political landscape in Nigeria. Here is an assessment of the implications:

Internal Party Unity and Cohesion: Disregarding the zoning principle created internal divisions within the PDP. The party became fragmented along regional lines, with Northern and Southern members in disagreement. This internal discord weakened party unity and cohesion.

Loss of Credibility: The PDP's decision to deviate from the zoning principle eroded its credibility and trustworthiness. The party had long championed the zoning system as a means to address regional imbalances and promote inclusivity. By disregarding this principle, it called into question its commitment to its core values.

Impact on Party Identity: The PDP's identity as a party that aimed to address ethnic and regional disparities was compromised. It risked being perceived as a party that prioritized personal ambitions and factional interests over its stated principles.

Ethnic Marginalization and Perceptions of Bias: The decision had the potential to reinforce perceptions of ethnic bias within the PDP. Members who expected the Southern region to receive the presidential nomination felt marginalized and discriminated against. This could alienate a significant portion of the party's support base.

Reduced Electoral Appeal: The PDP's electoral appeal may have been weakened as a result of the deviation from the zoning principle. The party's ability to attract voters from regions that felt disregarded or marginalized could be compromised in the 2023 general election.

Loss of Grassroots Support: The decision could have led to a loss of grassroots support. Party members at the local level may become disenchanted and disengaged from the PDP, resulting in reduced party activism and mobilization.

Factionalism and Infighting: The PDP may have experienced increased factionalism and internal infighting as a result of the decision. Different factions within the party could vie for dominance, leading to conflicts and a lack of cohesion.

Impact on the 2023 General Election: The deviation from the zoning principle could have implications for the PDP's performance in the 2023 general election. A divided party with internal discord may struggle to present a unified front and face challenges in winning over voters.

Diminished Trust in Political Parties: The PDP's decision could contribute to a broader loss of trust in political parties in Nigeria. When a major party fails to uphold its principles, it may lead to scepticism and cynicism regarding the political process.

Reevaluation of Party Policies: The PDP's decision may prompt a reevaluation of its policies and principles. The party may choose to revisit its commitment to regional inclusivity and consider reforms to strengthen its internal democratic processes.

In sum, the PDP's decision to disregard the zoning principle in the 2022 Presidential Primaries had primarily negative implications, including internal party divisions, a loss of credibility and identity, perceived bias, weakened electoral appeal, and potential challenges in the 2023 general election. It also risks diminishing trust in political parties in Nigeria. While there may be opportunities for the PDP to reevaluate its policies and practices, the immediate consequences of the decision were largely detrimental to the party's internal dynamics and its broader political influence.

Discussion of Findings

Internal democracy in the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)

The study found that party ideology is one of the challenges of internal democracy noting that the PDP has faced challenges in articulating and maintaining a consistent party ideology. This finding aligns with the idea that a clear and well-defined ideology is fundamental for the functioning of a political party (Mbah & Nwangwu, 2014). The study further established that the process of candidate selection has been partial and not without prejudice. This aligns with the assertion that candidate selection based on factors such as class, ethnicity, or self-serving influence can undermine the democratic process.

The issue of zoning, particularly regarding the office of the presidency was established as a major source of internal division within the PDP, mainly between the North and South (Ojukwu & Olaifa, 2011). This aligns with previous findings that have highlighted how the question of zoning can lead to significant factionalism and disagreements within a political party (Ojukwu & Olaifa, 2011). Again, the role of party executives, particularly at the national level, influenced and distorted the internal democratic processes. This aligns with the common observation that the behaviour and decisions of party executives can significantly impact the overall democratic health of a political party (Ojukwu & Olaifa, 2011).

Zoning Principles and Internal Party Democracy in PDP

The study found that the deviation from the zoning system in the 2022 People's Democratic Party (PDP) Presidential Primaries had a substantial impact on the internal democracy of the party. Thus, eroding trust, created divisions, weakened party identity, influenced decision-making processes, reduced inclusivity, diminished transparency and accountability, and potentially discouraged grassroots participation. These findings align with the report by Ogu et al. (2023) that, the controversy surrounding the deviation from the zoning system resulted in a significant erosion of trust within the PDP. Also, the findings align with Nwaigwe (2022) who found that a lack of internal party democracy can discourage grassroots participation.

Implications of PDP's Disregard to Zoning Principle

The study found that the implications of the PDP's decision to disregard the zoning principle in the 2022 Presidential Primaries are substantial and far-reaching, affecting not only the internal dynamics of the party but also the broader political landscape in Nigeria. The findings indicated that the PDP experienced internal divisions and fragmentation along zonal lines. This aligns with earlier research highlighting the erosion of party unity due to the controversy over zoning (Abdulmumin, 2022). The findings also suggest that the deviation had the potential to reinforce perceptions of ethnic bias within the PDP. This aligns with the idea that members who expected the Southern region to receive the presidential nomination felt marginalized and discriminated against. Such perceptions could alienate a significant portion of the party's support base, as discussed by Ojukwu and Olaifa (2011).

Conclusion

The 2022 Presidential Primaries of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) marked a critical turning point in the party's history. The decision to deviate from the zoning principle, which had been a cornerstone of the party's internal democracy, had profound implications for both the PDP and the broader political landscape in Nigeria. The study has revealed that the deviation from the zoning system significantly influenced the internal party democracy of the PDP. It eroded trust, created internal divisions, weakened party unity, and compromised the party's identity. The decision reinforced perceptions of ethnic bias and marginalization, reducing the party's electoral appeal. Moreover, it led to a loss of grassroots support, increased factionalism, and diminished trust in political parties, not only within the PDP but also in the broader Nigerian political context. These consequences jeopardized the party's performance in the 2023 general election and necessitated a reevaluation of its policies and principles. It is evident therefore that, the PDP must take strategic actions to rebuild and strengthen its internal party democracy.

Recommendations

The following recommendations offer a roadmap for the PDP's resurgence and recovery:

- i. The PDP should publicly reaffirm its commitment to democratic principles, including the zoning system. Reestablishing its dedication to these principles will help restore credibility and trust among party members and the electorate.
- ii. The party must prioritize reconciliation efforts, particularly between Northern and Southern members. A genuine commitment to inclusivity and balanced representation can help heal internal divisions.
- iii. The PDP should consider revising its party constitution to reinforce democratic ideals and principles, including the zoning system. Clear guidelines and checks and balances are essential to prevent deviations from party policies.
- iv. To regain grassroots support, the PDP should intensify its outreach and mobilization efforts at the local level. Engaging with local communities and addressing their concerns will help revitalize party activism.
- v. The PDP should implement a transparent and merit-based candidate selection process. This ensures that candidates chosen from any zone will be based on their qualifications, not solely on zonal or factional biases.
- vi. People's Democratic Party should desist from money politics and be integrity conscious to avoid compromises that mar competence, qualification and capacity. Members should be screened and documented both at entry into the party and at interest in any political office. A standard measure be put in place to penalize defaulters to integrity and fraud.

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