

## **Indiscipline in Political Parties: Bane of Democratic Consolidation and Good Governance in Nigeria**

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*Indiscipline in political parties is antithetic to democratic consolidation and good governance in Nigeria. This article looks at the reasons and provides examples of actions of indiscipline in political parties in Nigeria and recommends that: the party must be superior to all its members, funding of the party should never be on individualistic principles, the party constitution must be strictly adhered to; the principles of democracy should be embraced by the parties and its elders; and above all, proper party education must be given to all the members of the party. The paper concludes that urgent and prompt steps must be taken to check the ugly trends of indiscipline in political parties in Nigeria in order to prevent the truncation of the democratic process by the military as before.*

### **Introduction**

*Without good governance – without the rule of Law, predictable administration, legitimate power, and responsive regulation, no amount of funding, no amount of charity will set us on the path of prosperity.*

*– Kofi Annan (cited in UNDP 1997:20)*

In the movement for Nigerian national independence, political parties led the way. Their origins lay in a multitude of

associations that were devoted to community improvement, political reforms and racial liberation. At the time of independence in 1960, four political parties were firmly established on a broad territorial basis. Each one incarnated a distinctive political idea (Sklar, 1963:xiii)

Political Party

Political party is an organized and registered interest group, the members of which have reconcilable ideas on how the state should be governed, who seek to capture the machineries of government by constitutional means and govern according to their ideas. (Azelama, 2002:99). According to Lapalombara (1974:509), a political party is a formal organization whose self-conscious, primary purpose is to place and maintain in public office persons who will control, alone or in coalition, the machinery of government. Political parties in the view of Ball (1986:73) are organized groups whose major objective is to gain control of and exercise state power either solely or in co-operation with others.

Indiscipline

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English "Indiscipline is a lack of control in the behaviour of a group of people" (Hornby, 2000:610). Therefore, party indiscipline refers to the violation of the entrenched fundamental principles, rules and regulations guiding the conduct or behaviour of every member of a political party at all times. And any deviation from these principles, rules and regulations ought to be punished accordingly, irrespective of whoever is involved.

### Party Control

The word "control" means power or authority to direct, order or restrain members of a collectivity, so that they can be, become, or cause to be under authority, restrain, in order, and work properly (Hornby 1974:188). Therefore, "party control" refers to the means of regulating, restraining, keeping in check and in order, members of a political party at all times, so that the goals of the party can be realized. Effective party control refers to a situation where the party has absolute control over its members, and members obey and adhere strictly to the party principles, rules and regulations. But unfortunately, this does not exist in political parties in Nigeria at least for now.

### Democratic Consolidation

Democracy which derives from the Greek word *demokratia* is defined by Collins Dictionary as government by the people or their elected representatives, control of any organization by its members, a political or social unit governed ultimately by all its members, the practice or spirit of social equality, the common people as a political force. Therefore, democratic consolidation refers to a situation where democracy strives and becomes enduring. It is a situation where democratic practice is able to stand the test of time, and it is being improved upon.

### Good Governance

Good Governance is a normative rather than descriptive judgment term, which indicates a preferred relation that should ideally govern relations between State and Society, and between a government and a people. Burke, an eighteenth Century British Parliamentarian once declared, to govern according to sense and agreeable to the interest of the people is a great and glorious element of governance. (Akpotor, 2003:177) It incorporates the following attributes: accountability based on the notion of popular sovereignty and public choice, a legal frame work that guarantees the rule of law and due process based on political and social pluralism, and on freedom of association based on impersonality of office, uniform application of rules, and rationality of organizational structure. Therefore, good government refers to a situation where the greatest number of persons living in a given political system is positively affected by government policies and programmes without leaving anybody worse-off.

### **Literature Review**

In the evolution of political parties in Nigeria, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) stood for political democracy in its classical and individualistic form from the Nigerian perspective. Democracy in the classical sense as Ake (2000:7) brilliantly argues is a concept that is uncharacteristically precise. It is not about delegated authority or representative governance, but about popular expression of power by the people. The Action Group of Nigeria (AG) stood for federalist democracy to safeguard the rights of cultural communities. The Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) exemplified the modernization of traditional political authority, its radical opponent. The Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) espoused egalitarian democracy. ( Sklar, 1963:xiii).

From 1951 to 1962, three of these parties – NPC in the North, NCNC in the East, and the Action Group in the West

controlled governmental regions. Given the presence of a predominant linguistic group in each region – Hausa in the North, Igbo (Ibo) in the East, and Yoruba in the West – the major political parties were commonly identified with ethnic group interests in a misleading manner.

In Northern Nigeria, the NPC endeavoured to reconcile traditional authority in all parts of the culturally diverse region with the requirements of modern government. NPC policies were generally true to the nonsectarian precept of the party's regionalist motto: "One North, One people irrespective of Religion, Rank or Tribe".

In Eastern Nigeria and the adjacent Midwest (which acquired regional status in 1963), the NCNC rarely lost an election in the Igbo-speaking constituencies. Yet this party was also supported by a decisive majority of the preponderant, Edo-speaking, linguistic group of the Midwest. Similarly, the Action Group, rooted in its Yoruba origins, emerged in 1956 as the foremost party of minority group interests in the Eastern and Northern Regions. Furthermore, NCNC retained sizeable pockets of electoral and parliamentary strength in the Yoruba-speaking Western Region until 1964 (Sklar, 1963:xiii). On the basis of ethnicity, one can rightly argue that party's commitment to "home rule" (that is, primordial society which refers to the traditional or communal state where Nigerians saw themselves as a united family in the various ethnic groups before the coming of the colonial masters) for all ethnic and linguistic groups superseded its earlier particularistic orientation (meaning civic society which refers to the era of contemporary public administration that started with the coming of colonial masters to Nigeria, specifically from 1897 to date). This political party's ethnic chauvinism was carried over to the Second Republic, to the aborted Third Republic, and to the contemporary Fourth Republic.

In the Second Republic, after the ban on politics was lifted in September 1978, the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) registered five political parties namely: National Party of Nigeria (NPN); Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP); Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP); Peoples Redemption Party (PRP); and Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN). A sixth party, the Nigeria Advanced Party was registered to contest the 1983 general elections, (Ikelegbe, 1995:16). The NPN was largely derived from the NPC of the first republic and its base was Hausa-Fulani with some middle belt and Southern minority support. The NPP re-incarnated from the old NCNC with its main support base in the Igbo land, and its membership largely made up of the old NCNC politicians and admirers of its leader, Nnamdi Azikiwe. The GNPP led by Waziri Ibrahim had its support base among the people of middle belt. The Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) led by Aminu Kano re-incarnated from NEPU (a Northern base minority party of the first republic). The Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) an offshoot of Action Group had its main support base among the Yorubas. The Nigeria Advanced Party (NAP) led by Tunji Braithwaite became the sixth party in the country when FEDECO registered it to contest the 1983 general election, (Oviasuyi & Aiya, 2003:369).

In the aborted Third Republic, the National Electoral Commission (NEC) could not find any of the political associations that were formed along ethnic cleavage, and had sought registration as political parties worthy after the Babangida regime blew the whistle for the Third Republic politics. Ironically, Babangida, wearing the garb of a philosopher-King, decreed two political parties, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC) into existence. By this action, Babangida attempted to chart a new course in the process of democratizing the Nigerian polity. The development of political parties with national outlook and representation as against the ethnic-based parties of the First and Second

Republics became a historic task for the Babangida administration. In doing this, the regime had the onerous task of weaving together the multi-farious political tendencies and varied ideological learning in the polity, with a view to accommodating these contending forces within the constricted political environment of Nigeria. Unfortunately, just as this paradigm shift was beginning to take shape and establish itself in the new Nigerian politics, Babangida, the man who brought this masterstroke destroyed his handiwork when on June 23, 1993, he annulled the June 12, 1993 presidential election won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola. While the June 12, 1993 election is internationally acclaimed as Nigeria's freest and fairest election ever, Babangida has not been able to give reasons for the annulment of the election, which of course, brought the attempt at the Third Republic in Nigeria to a very regrettable end (Oviasuyi & Aiya, 2003:370-371).

In the Fourth Republic, following the fortunate and sudden death of the maximum dictator Sani Abacha on June 8, 1998, General Abdulsalam Abubakar was appointed the Military Head of State and Commander-In-Chief of the Nigerian Armed Forces, a decision reached by the Provisional Ruling Council (PRC). Under General Abubakar, the established Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) gave provisional clearance to all the political groups seeking to contest the Local Government Council elections of December, 1998. At the conclusion of the Local Government elections on December 5, 1998, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the All Peoples Party (APP) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD) emerged as the parties that satisfied the conditions for registration, (Otoghagua, 1999:165). The Alliance for Democracy (AD) was purely for the South West Region, All Peoples Party (APP) for the North, while Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) was made up of moneybags and looters of our National, State and Local Government treasury both from the North and South. In fact,

PDP is NPN re-incarnated, because they represent the dominant and elitist class interest more comprehensively than any other political party in Nigeria, just the way NPN was in the Second Republic (Oviasuyi & Aiya, 2003:371).

In August, 2002, additional three political parties namely United Nigeria Peoples Party (UNPP), National Democratic Party (NDP) and All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) were registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission, thereby increasing the number of registered political parties in Nigeria to six. As at 17<sup>th</sup> day of December, 2002, the number of accredited political parties in Nigeria increased to 30 (thirty). Of these 30 (thirty) political parties, only the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) seems to have a national outlook because of the bourgeois and exploitative nature of its operations. The remaining 29 (twenty-nine) seem to be merely established on regional, ethnic, religious or class basis. (Oviasuyi & Aiya, 2003:372-373).

#### Functions of Political Parties

In every political system, the functions of political parties are: (1) political recruitment of potential candidates into the party membership; (2) interest articulation; (3) interest aggregation; (4) political socialization; (5) political education that involves the training of political leaders; and (6) political communication (Azelama, 2002:106-107). These are basic functions of every political party in all political systems the world over, and any party that is not involve or not performing these functions is not qualify to be called a political party.

#### Reasons and Examples of Indiscipline in Political Parties in Nigeria

Party discipline is expected to be a very potent instrument of party control, and an effective and efficient party control will ultimately lead to good governance and development in the country. Unfortunately, and regrettably too, party control of its members in Nigeria can be liken to a situation where party



power and authority have been lost to moneybags (this refers to corrupt and very rich politicians) who now usurp and exercise the power and authority of the political parties unilaterally or in collaboration with their cohorts.

In my personal view, party discipline does not exist in Nigerian political party system. In fact, political parties in Nigeria do not observe party discipline, and therefore, cannot exercise party control over their members who are deviating from party norms. In place of party discipline, party indiscipline reign supreme in the political parties in Nigeria for now, especially in the ruling party.

In Nigeria, moneybags (corrupt and rich politicians), looters of our treasury and economy are the sponsors or financiers of the political parties. Therefore, they are not only superior to the parties, but also dictates what happens in the party. One can rightly and safely say that these money bags and financiers are bigger, stronger, superior and have more power and authority than the political party they belong to. Examples of party indiscipline and lack of party control are pervasive throughout Nigeria. Let us look at only five recent examples of indiscipline in parties.

1. In an article titled: "I am cleaner than President Obasanjo" Governor Orji Uzor Kalu of Abia State told the President to remember that he donated ₦100 million to his campaign for presidency in 1999 and that his money made him (Obasanjo) win the election. How can the party control a man who gave his hard-earned money to make the party win election? The issue of threat to life between Chief Tony Anenih and Governor Orji Uzor Kalu which was finally settled by His Royal Majesty, Omo N'Oba N'Edo Uku Akpolokpolo, Oba Erediauwa, Oba of Benin, is a function of party indiscipline, because the party could not resolve and discipline its members.

2. The prolonged crises in the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) is traceable to party indiscipline and lack of party control. The leaders of the party have been in crises with themselves over finances and positions, and have therefore, lost their relevance as the only strong opposition party to the ruling party due to indiscipline and lack of party control of its members.
3. The very undemocratic activities of Chris Uba and Chris Nwabueze Ngige have led to the wanton destruction of lives and properties, especially public properties in Anambra State. Unfortunately, the two of them were moving freely because of party indiscipline and lack of party control over them, until they were recently expelled from the party, after much damage have been done to democratic norms, principles, lives, properties and good governance.
4. The disagreement between the National Chairman of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Chief Audu Ogbeh and the President, Commander-In-Chief of the Armed Forces, Federal Republic of Nigeria, President Olusegun Obasanjo led to the resignation of the former due to party indiscipline and lack of party control over the later.
5. Party indiscipline and lack of party control earned for Chief Tony Anenih a popular Nicknamed "MR. FIX IT". Chief Tony Anenih is the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party, and he believes absolutely on undemocratic and unconstitutional process of politics and administration in Nigeria. In fact, he is an epitomy of political prebendalities. Therefore, he can fix anything to suit his party's interests due to indiscipline and lack of party control over him.

All these are examples of party indiscipline that are inimical to Democratic Consolidation and Good Governance in Nigeria, and therefore, urgent and prompt steps must be taken to check the ugly trends if democracy is to survive in Nigeria.

#### Recommendations

In view of the pervasive nature of party indiscipline and lack of party control of its members in the Nigerian political party system, I honestly wish to offer the following recommendations:

1. *Party Superiority*: Political parties should be absolutely superior to any individual or group of individuals. In fact, there should be proper subordination of individuals' interest to party's interest.
2. *Funding*: The Federal Government should properly fund political parties. Funding of political parties should **not** be based on individualistic principles, irrespective of the wealth of any single member of the party. The corruption and undemocratic role of party elders should be annihilated from party activities. If there is a need for members to contribute financially to party activities, such contribution should be evenly shared/spread among all the members of the party.
3. *Party Constitution*: The developed party constitution, which is the embodiment of the fundamental principles, rules and regulations, that guides every member of the party, should be strictly adhered to at all times. Any person who violates the constitution should be properly sanctioned, so that justice can prevail at all times.
4. *Democracy*: Democracy which is the government of the people, supported by the will of the majority should be allowed to thrive in Nigeria. A situation where party elders select their children, relations and loyalists to occupy political positions or offices does not create

room for good governance and democratic consolidation.

5. *Education of Party Members:* The easiest person to lead is the educated mind, but very difficult to enslave. In Nigeria, most political office holders have not seen the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria; they do not know whether their party's Constitution exists; neither can they recite their party's manifesto. Therefore, every political party must endeavour to give proper education along this line to its members, so that they can understand the concept of *Espirit De Corps* and work in unison to achieve the goals of their parties and by extension enhance the welfare of Nigerians.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it must be emphasized that the various political parties that had existed in Nigeria, have failed Nigeria and Nigerians, because they embraced corruption wholesale through party indiscipline, and allowed corruption to reign supreme in the country. The consequences of their corrupt practices have resulted in the dehumanization of Nigerians, to the extent that the greatest number of Nigerians now lives far below poverty line of \$1 per day, despite all the mineral resources endowed on the nation by Divine Providence. Therefore, party discipline as instrument of party control is a *conditio sine qua non* for the success of any political party. A political party that has disciplined and well control members will be much focused and goal oriented, and therefore, will be able to implement its manifesto which will bring about improvement in the living standard of the citizens, and by extension good governance and development will be prevalent in the country. Finally, it is my submission that urgent and prompt steps must be taken by all the stakeholders in Nigerian politics and administration to check the ugly trends of indiscipline and corruption in political parties in Nigeria in order to prevent the truncation of the democratic process by the military as before.

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