

## **Incumbency Factor, Internal Party Democracy and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The objective of this paper is to interrogate the nexus between incumbency factor, internal party democracy and democratic consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Abundance evidence suggest that Incumbency factor and internal party democracy exercise monumental influence on the growth of democracy in Nigeria.*

*The paper adopts a conceptual and qualitative methodology. The researcher collected the data through the secondary sources. Thus, relevant materials including textbooks, journal articles, party constitutions and the 1999 constitution of Nigeria were consulted in the quest to establish the linkages. The assertion was substantiated and buttressed by the data. The research unveiled that abuse of incumbency advantage and lack of internal party democracy constitute major drawbacks to democratic consolidation in Nigeria.*

*Adducing convincing evidence, the paper established the relationship between incumbency factor, internal party democracy and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The paper is particularly imperative for stakeholders in Nigeria's democratic experience as it would make them to be conscious and refrain from abuse of incumbency and adhere to the doctrines of internal party democracy in order to fast track democratic growth and consolidation in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** *Incumbency, internal party democracy, election, democratic consolidation, Nigeria.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Several works started to examine the possible dynamics of incumbency dating back to the early 1970s. Such works include Erikson 1971, Ferejohn 197, Fiorina 1977. Since then, researchers began to delve into the study of factors responsible for this development. These explanations entails institutional characteristics like legislative case work, legislative activism, advertising, replacement among others (Carson, 2015). Others contend that behavioural explanations are more plausible (Carson 2015). Other works emphasized on the role of donations and money (Abramowitz 1989:1991).

The advantages of incumbency are inconsistent. Cox and Katz (1996) argued that the incumbency advantage is made up direct and indirect effects. The direct effect is simply the perquisites attached to being an incumbent such as resources and constituency projects. The indirect effects comprise the tendency and ability to deter high quality opponent or challenger in future elections. Cox and Katz (1996) posit that the phenomenal increase in incumbency advantages stem from the rise in the quality effects.

While the bulk of the study on the incumbency advantage centre on the period from 1960 onward, earlier studies indicate there is indeed evidence of incumbency advantage in the earlier periods (Gerald and Gross 1984). It has been observed in recent time that incumbency advantage could ebb and flow in the course of time (Carson 2015). Buttressing this stance, Jacobson (2015) aptly demonstrated that current members of congress are less disadvantaged than their counterparts between 1960 and 2010. He avers that incumbents in quest of office in contemporary epoch enjoy no more of an advantage than those contesting in the 1950s. This, he noted, is a function of the growing nationalization of politics.

In view of the above, it is evident that those who have been occupying political offices in Nigeria in the Fourth Republic, like their counterparts in the First, Second and the stillborn Third Republic have been abusing incumbency advantage in their style of governance. This has offered gross advantage over their opponents and challengers. This is evident in the way they hijack the affairs and structures of their parties which has led to abysmal lack of internal party democracy. However, lending credence to Jacobson's (2015) assertion, incumbency advantage has waxed and waned in Nigeria's political experience. It could not facilitate Obasanjo's Third Term bid and also failed to grant victory to President Goodluck Jonathan in the 2015 elections.

With increasing national and political consciousness among the electorates, governance, rather than incumbency advantage in going to be deciding variables in securing electoral victory in Nigeria's democratic experience (Alfa 2011). In view of this, the purpose and objective of the paper is to establish the interface between incumbency factor, internal party democracy and democratic consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In political lexicon, incumbency refers to holders of political office that enjoy certain perquisites which are not available to other competitors or challengers in the electoral struggle. These privileges, which includes but not restricted to such advantages like wider media coverage, security, use of state resources and instruments of coercion, provides some electoral edge for the occupants of such offices certain advantages on their counterparts. This is particularly when they seek re-election or intend to facilitate the election of their preferred successors (Kwasau 2013, Jaja and Alumona 2011).

Incumbency advantage typically refers to the electoral margin a candidate enjoys because of his/her status as an incumbent running for re-election (Carson 2015). A wide range of literature in American politics beginning in the 1960s and 1970s has documented the existence of such margin- first in congressional elections. These include (Erikson 1971, Mayhew 1974, and in the recent time Ansolabehere and Snyder 2002). Some scholars also look at the advantages of incumbency but they still tend to point at the same direction (Gordon and Landa 2009).

It has been observed that politicians who make policy choices more congruent with voters' preferences are likely to win their support (Ferejohn 1986, Bueno de Mesquita and Landa 2008). Some win as a result of signals of their underlying quality in adverse elections model. Others look at their policy efforts prior to the elections (Banks and Sundaram 1998, Herron and Shotts 2001, Besley 2006).

There are other factors such as the office holder advantage which results from their access to the power of the office and constituency service (Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina 1987, Goodliffe 2005). Another explanation is the pro-incumbent endorser which occurs because uninformed voters may simply rely on the endorsement from the powerful and influential elites or pressure groups when making decisions on who to vote for (McKelvey and Ordeshook 1985, Wittman 2007). The incumbents give assurance to the elites or build ties with them. As such, the elites work in their favour (Grossman and Helpman 1999).

The pro-incumbent district partisan perspective implies the ideological disposition of the incumbent's constituency. In this case, there seem to be a bond and the incumbent is likely to have an edge on his/her challenger if the same electorates are to choose from among the candidates who voted for his/her in the first instance (Hirano and Snyder 2009).

The candidate selection or nomination procedure also affect voting pattern (Bueno de Mesquita 2008). In the event that the voters choose to vote for higher quality candidate, there is the likelihood of voting for the incumbent who is known to them except if the challenger is well known as well (Ansolabehere, Hirano, Snyder and Ueda 2006). This kind of coincidence explains the Nigerians vote for the challenger to incumbent, that is President Buhari over the incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan in the 2015 elections since Buhari is not a strange person on the Nigeria's political landscape having earned himself a reputation for anti-corruption policies when he held sway as a military ruler between 1983-1985.

In legislative institution, there is a popular belief that seniority and experience enhance the electoral chances of the incumbents as voters prefer them to new entrants (McKelvey and Riezman 1992, Fiorina and Rivers 1989). Interestingly too, the electoral chances of the incumbent could scare some persons from venturing into the race for fear of being defeated by the incumbent who appear difficult to beat (Lazarus 2008). In some cases, however, some incumbents could also resign and refrain from participating in the race for fear of being defeated (Carson 2005). Given the presence of likely electoral consequences, the elites make a decision concerning their readiness to either support the incumbent or not (Hill 2003).

Internal party democracy means that a political party has impersonal rules and procedures to avoid the arbitrary control of internal elections and party functioning by individual leaders or cliques. Such rules must also be put into practice, otherwise a party is neither institutionalized nor truly democratic. It also implies that all components and functionaries follow due process and are accountable to the rank and file as well as the lawful organs established in the states (IMD 2004).

On consolidation of democracy, scholars vary in their postulations on what it is and on what it is not. A consolidated democracy is one in which no major groups want to overthrow it, the people want to keep it (even in times of crisis), and democratic rules have been institutionalized. Consequently, there is no consensus among scholars regarding the essential requirements but they all conclude with the general agreement that such a phenomenon abound and can be seen, even if it is difficult to describe them Linz and Stepan (1996).

O'Donnell (1996) contends that democracy is consolidated when there is an alternation of power between two rival parties, support for the system is continued during time of economic hardship, rebellious elements are defeated and sanctioned, there is stability of the regime even if the party system is restructured and there is no significant political anti-system. Schmitter (1992) asserts that a democracy is consolidated when social relations become a form of social value and patterns of interaction can become so regular in their occurrence, so imbued with meaning, so capable of motivating behaviour so much so that they become autonomous in their internal function and resists externally propelled change. The process of consolidation is said to be complete when there is conscious adoption of democratic institutions, processes and values by the political class and the entire citizens in a political system (Gunther, Diamondourous and Puhle 1995).

## **FINDINGS/ DISCUSSION**

In Nigeria, incumbency factor encourages the appointment of venal electoral officials used to rig elections, perversion of the electoral laws and institutional guidelines, manipulation of electoral tribunals, use of the security agents to silence opposition to manipulate elections, curtailing access to state-owned media outfits in their quest to stay beyond their constitutional term, thwart their party agreements or ensure the emergence of their favoured successor (Jaja and Alumona 2011, Tenuche 2011, Alfa and Momoh 2011).

The very conceptualization of politics by the Nigerian political elites is very ambiguous. Politics is not seen as an opportunity to serve the people but rather as a crude contest to attain state power and all its paraphernalia , a zero-sum game whereby if one wins, he wins everything and if he loses, he lost everything. It is a game that is seen as a matter “of life and death”. This is because of the patron-client relationship and the prebendal hallmark of the polity. As Joseph (1987) asserts, prebendal politics exemplifies the political environment whereby the state are exploited as benefits by the holders.

Like in most parts of Africa, politics in Nigeria is seen as a means of primitive capital accumulation (Adejumobi 1997). Such patrimonial states are the cheapest means of private accumulation of wealth and accounts for why elections for the control of the state as well as its apparatus are so crude and violent (Adejumobi 1997). The holders of public offices use them as avenues for the advancement of their status, power and wealth. They use such offices to accumulate wealth and resources for personal aggrandizement. The authoritarian and violent posture of the colonial state was transplanted in the post-colonial era. The state, as such, became an object of plunder for politicians and their loyalists (Diamond 1995).

In post-colonial Nigeria, politics was conceived as a crude struggle for the appropriation of the nation's wealth, a tendency that has made good governance and accountability very remote in the 1960s. Consequently, political competition between individual politicians as well as between political parties were fraught with thuggery, hooliganism and violence; government at every stratum lacked transparency and public accountability, rule of law and checks and balances. Fundamental liberty of the people were grossly impinged upon by incumbents of public offices who employed all forms of atavistic ploys to silence opposition and perpetuate their rule. There were electoral malpractices and government was ran against popular will. As matter of fact, the pursuit of power was to facilitate the appropriation of the 'national cake' by the politicians through the instrumentality of the state (Adejumobi 1997).

Since the state has been debased, electoral competition became characterised by antidemocratic tendencies and lack the ideals of democracy in choosing and removing governments from power. Those who took over power from the colonial masters remained autocratic and continued to employ the instruments of coercion to repress, oppress and weaken opposition parties and groups. This culminated in hollow and superficial democracy as the rules became fragile (Diamond, 1995).

The politics of the 1960s became inevitably characterised by intrigues, violence, intimidation, suspicion and politically related killings. Opposition was undermined by political gerrymandering. These were the high points of the Action Group and the crisis in the Western Region in 1962 (Kayode 2013). The creation of the Mid-West Region in 1963 was a ploy by the incumbent NPC government at the Federal level to neutralize the political influence of the Action Group and its leader, Chief Obafemi Awolowo in the West. Orchestrated by the federal centre, the Western Region became embroiled in the crisis that contributed to the collapse of the First Republic (Osaghe 2000).

After the military completed its transition programme and handed over power to the democratically elected government of President Shehu Shagari in the Second Republic ( 1979- 1983), the political parties manifested themselves to be the reincarnation of the First Republic political parties and the same political gladiators dominated the leadership of the political . The National Party of Nigeria (NPN) was famous in the North like the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC), the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) was the reincarnation of the Action Group (A. G) in the West while the Nigeria Peoples' Party (NPP) was an offshoot of the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) which was predominantly dominated by the Easterners (Dode 2012).

Among the parties in the First Republic, only the NPC, and to a little extent, the GNPP could be said to have demonstrated a measure of national outlook and spread in terms of their membership composition. The rest manifested gross primordial and ethnic characteristics. The politicians were mostly in the art of intrigues, deceit, lack of sincerity and they manipulated this to sustain themselves in power (Report of the Political Bureau, 1987: Chapter 2).

In the Second Republic, the NPN-led government engaged in gross accumulation and mismanagement of state resources between 1979-1983. In order to sustain its rule, the NPN-led government perpetrated a lot of electoral rigging and inflation of votes using the police to intimidate and silence the opposition camp. The then Inspector General of Police, Sunday Adewusi deployed massive number of police personnel to oppress opposition especially in the states with weak support the NPN. The NPN rigged the election to its advantage to win the 1983 general elections under controversial circumstances, a situation which created a fertile and tenable ground for the military to intervene and topple the government (Joseph 1987).

In Nigeria, it has been observed that elected officials have been demonstrating insensitivity to the plight of the electorates. This is due to the fact they offer financial inducement to the electorates to buy their votes. This makes them to be unaccountable to the electorates. The high rate of illiteracy and poverty also makes the populace to be enfeebled in demanding accountability from the public office holders (IDEA 2006).

In order to achieve the desired victory during electoral competition, politicians and political parties, especially the incumbents hijack the electoral body in order to mastermind the outcome. No matter the voting pattern, politicians and political parties in power use the electoral commission to pervert the popular will of the people (Birch 2011, Agbaje and Adejumbi 2006). The electoral agency and its officials are not politically neutral or impartial but vulnerable to the whims and caprices of the incumbent regime lacking every sense of autonomy. More often than not, incumbency factor remains an instrument of vote manipulation, rigging, and ballot stuffing for politicians in their quest to perpetuate their rule or succeed themselves. This has negated the credibility of elections in Nigeria (Ilfie 2011, Katsina 2013).

Even though the abuse of incumbency and the lack of internal party democracy are often discussed within the context of civil or democratic rule, the Nigerian experience reveal the military also undertake some activities that perpetrate these twin cankerworms (Diamond 1997, Katsina 2013).

## **Incumbency Factor, Internal party Democracy and Politics of the Aborted Third Republic**

When Ibrahim Babangida assumed power in 1985, he embarked on a series of activities with the claim of having the intention to return the country to civil rule (Diamond, 1991). He lifted the ban on politics in May 1989 but the regime claimed it was dissatisfied with the actions of politicians in party formation as he alleged that the parties could not be registered due to their inherent inability to exhibit national character. Babangida created two political parties, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC). The incumbent government provided the initial fund for the operations of these parties and even drafted their constitutions (Oyediran and Agbaje 1991).

The Babangida's regime acted autonomously in masterminding the transition programme with gross abuse of power. Capturing this development, (Keller 1991) contends that under Babangida "where state corporatism exists, the state attempts to co-opt corporate groups or eliminate them....it allows popular political expression, but only according to rules defined by the oligarchic state class...Rather than encouraging populist democracy to reign free, the state carefully limits and controls popular political and economic mobilization".

After a series of proscription of politicians due to alleged irregularities in the conduct of their party primaries, the presidential election took place on June 12, 1993 with Chief MKO Abiola and Alhaji Bashir Tofa as presidential flag bearers of the SDP and NRC respectively. But as Nigerians await the announcement of the election, Babangida announced its annulment.

During the Abacha era, of the eighteen political parties that applied for registration, only five were registered. These were the Congress for National Consensus (CNC), Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN), National Centre Party of Nigeria (NCPN), and the United Nigeria Congress Party (UNCP). Politicians were not given a level playing ground to aspire for political offices and politics was characterised by democratic deficits. The peak of this undemocratic display was the adoption of General Abacha, the incumbent Head of State and a serving military officer by the five political parties as their sole presidential candidate (Yaqub 2002). Abacha's death in 1998 ended that mockery of democracy.

During the regime of Olusegun Obasanjo who assumed power on May 29, 1999 after winning the presidential election of the Abdulsalami's transition programme on the platform of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), Obasanjo displayed gross abuse of incumbency and outright disregard for the

principles and practice of internal party democracy (TMG 2007, Ikpe 2013). The leadership structure of the party was tilted towards his interest and he manipulated the removal and replacement of party chairmen according to his whims and caprices. This is what led to the appointment of his age-long friend, Dr Ahmadu Ali as PDP's national chairman (Azeez 2009).

Obasanjo hijacked the PDP structure and practically manipulated the affairs of the party to suit his selfish interest. He ensured that only his favoured candidates were nominated to contest elections on the party's platform. In the cause of his third term agenda, he orchestrated the party's re-registration exercise during which those he perceived were opposed to his bid were de-registered and frustrated out of the party. A striking example was that of his Vice, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar who had to pitch tent with the defunct Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) (Mbah 2011). Though Obasanjo's third term agenda did not materialize, he orchestrated the emergence of late Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'adua first as the PDP' flag bearer and second as the president (Isumonah 2012 Adeniyi 2017).

The demise of President Yar'adua on May 5, 2010 led the emergence of his vice, Goodluck Jonathan as the president. Even though they was an internal arrangement concerning a zoning arrangement in the PDP that power shift back to the North when Jonathan ends the Yar'adua's tenure, he was able use his incumbency advantage to circumvent that arrangement. As such, despite opposition, particularly from the north, he used his incumbency advantage as well as the influence of some powerful elites to clinch his party's ticket. However, that was not without a commitment that he would not seek re-election in 2015 (Ojuogbo 2015, Adeniyi 2017).

When Jonathan assumed power, he devoted his time engaging members of his party in crisis, imposing candidates on other members, thus forcing aggrieved ones to defect. His action polarised the party. When the time for the 2015 election approached, Jonathan reneged on his promise not to seek re-election and began to seek PDP's mandate, closing the opportunity to all other aspirants and manipulated the party to adopt a consensus arrangement where he emerged as the sole candidate (Akinloye 2016, Adeniyi 2017).

At the state levels, the party primaries were characterized by rancour and disagreements arising from party primaries aimed at candidate selection. Jonathan schemed the removal of party chairmen and emergence of his preferred candidate. Commenting on this, Obasanjo asserted that "a political party and its leadership, that condones corruption and engages discredited people to abuse and insult genuine, authentic and objective critics is a political party on the path of ruin and destruction; the Peoples' Democratic Party must be rescued from the path , otherwise it will soon fade into history". The party

did not entertain constructive criticisms no matter how objective (Obasanjo, 2015).

Governors in the party were pitched against one another while supporters of the parties supported candidates of other political parties against PDP candidates. These instances could be seen in Lagos, Edo and Ondo states while credible candidates were disallowed in preference for candidates with questionable integrity (Okhaide 2012, Obasanjo 2015). The trend of abuse of incumbency factor and abysmal disregard for the tenets of internal party democracy continued in the Fourth Republic which ushered in with the handover of power to the democratically elected government on May 29, 1999.

## **CONCLUSION**

When Nigeria returned to democracy in 1999 after a series of military interregnum and a tortuous transition programme, Nigerians welcomed the successful installation of the democratic government with euphoria. However, events in the country ever since then have left much to be desired. Instead of embarking on actions that would unite the people and build a united, politically stable, and prosperous Nigeria, those who have been occupying positions of authority have been abusing their incumbency advantage to overheat the polity and cause division among the citizens.

More often than not, incumbents strive to perpetuate their rule beyond their constitutionally allowed tenure and derail from the internal agreements of their party. They devise a plethora of antidemocratic antics to actualize their selfish agenda. These include hijacking the party structure, masterminding the emergence and removal of party leadership and re-registration exercise to deregister opponents and consensus arrangements.

The Fourth Republic has witnessed increased and more entrenched antidemocratic operations of political parties, including the application of nondemocratic procedures in nominating party candidates. This has weakened party unity and institutionalization and negatively affects consolidation. It has led to fragmentation of parties and antiparty activities. The absence of internal party democracy reduces the commitment of party stalwarts and those of their supporters which negatively affect party cohesion, stability and performance

Furthermore, there is democracy deficit in the internal running of the parties as powerful interests and forces often control their internal mechanisms and processes culminating in defection, parallel primaries and

litigation struggle among members of the same political party. These are transferred into the larger society during elections and robs the society of capable, industrious and transparent leadership as products of unjust and undemocratic leaders can never contribute meaningfully to democratic consolidation.

In order to ensure a robust democratic consolidation in Nigeria, those who assume leadership positions in the country should refrain from abusing their incumbency advantage. They should be ready to vacate power at the expiration of their constitutionally allowed term; they should create a level playing ground for all contestants; they should not interfere in the affairs of political parties and the way and manner party positions are filled; they should honour their internal party arrangements and above all enforce the tenets of internal party democracy in order speed up genuine democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

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