Leadership, Politics and Participation in Local Government Areas of Gombe State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Modern administrations have shown that it is increasingly difficult if not difficult to administer and manage the affairs of any organization, state, and country by one central government even in strictly unitary systems such as Great Briton. It is against this backdrop that in Nigeria, the position of local governments became so important, because they constitute the only semblance of governmental authority closer to the people and most vital level of government, primarily because of their proximity to the people at the lower level. As a result, such leaders exert influence through the use of power or control at the detriment of the larger majority members. Consequently, the leaders determine the variables of who wins what and when and thereby influences their unique goal accomplishment and interpersonal relationships because such behavior equally regulates resources. One of the objectives of this study is to investigate the extent of the monopoly of the selection processes exercised by political party leadership at local government levels as well as determine the extent of control, domination and effects of imposing candidates on the electorates. The elite theory of Pareto was adopted as frame-work of analysis. The data for this study were gathered from three sources, namely, primary, secondary sources as well as participant observation. The data were analyzed using simple data percentage and tables. At the end, the findings revealed that electoral malpractices and impositions of candidates which emanates as a result of this abuses contributed to challenges of democratic governance in Nigeria in fielding of unqualified, unpopular, and inefficient candidates thereby derailed the electorate’s ability to enjoy the freedom of exercising their civic rights as citizens.

Introduction

The success of Nigeria’s federal system for efficiency and effective governance depends on the appropriateness of the division of responsibilities and resources between federal, state and local authorities supported by a sufficient institutional capacity at each of these levels to carry out its assigned functions without out any hindrance. Consequently upon that studies on modern administration have shown that it is increasingly cumbersome if not difficult to administer and manage the affairs of any country by one central government. Evidence have shown that even in strictly unitary systems, such as the British type, increasing complexities of societies and differentiations have made it necessary to constantly devolved responsibilities to lower units of political and Administrative authority, such as the Local Government or, local authorities, as they are referred to in other countries. This became necessary since local governments constitute the most vital level of government, primarily because of their proximity to the people at the grassroots, as well as the level at which the momentum for sustained national development can be created.

In the third world countries and Nigeria in particular, the position of local governments has become even more important, simply because they constitute the only semblance of governmental authority closer to the people. In other words, local governments are often regarded as the level of government closest to the people at the grassroots levels, carrying out a number of vital functions and responsibilities that have very direct impact or bearing on the vast majority of the rural dwellers, most of whom are presumed poor.
The urgent need to improve the status of these people on the one hand, and the desire to enhance the capacity of the local governments to undertake such tasks effectively, on the other, have generally tended to explain the reason(s) most of the political and constitutional reforms focus on the local government. Perhaps nowhere has this been the case than in Nigeria, as the country has undertaken a variety of constitutional, political and administrative reforms in order to constantly respond to the changing environment since the 1950’s.

The establishment of British Colonial administration in Nigeria in the late 19th century met in existence in various parts of the country a variety of ‘local governments with formal political institutions. Nonetheless, the diversity masked the all-too-important circumstance that provided the laid down potentials for the foundation towards a system of national local government, as opposed to the principle of ‘a uniform local government.’ For, the principle of ‘indirect rule,’ the cornerstone of British colonial politico-administrative policy, was introduced in most of the colonies, including Nigeria. Indirect rule was, in reality, a euphemism for native administration system which was centered on the utilization of traditional structure and institutions to govern the citizens in the colonial territories with ease, little cost and in order to facilitate the processes of colonial exploitation. Gradually, incremental reforms of the native administrative structure was brought under the Native Authority which the Resident supervised using Native Treasury and Native Court.

Admittedly, Nigerian’s cultural diversity, which translated almost automatically to politico-administrative cleavages, constituted a problem for the uniform acceptance of indirect rule. However, aside from this operational obstacle, the system clearly lacked, or at least never envisaged, a definitive long-range policy towards democratization and development in the colonies. The participation of citizens in the decisions that affected them at the grass roots was never part of the colonial policy, until the pressures from the anti-colonial movements. Consequently, the Richards constitution of 1946 brought the whole structure of Native administration under critical review, leading to transition from Native administration to Local Government per se, with the main strategy being to proceed on a very gradual and at such a slowly incremental pace until the transition was quickened by both internal and external political pressures.

The idea of stimulating citizens’ to participate in the decision making process at the local government levels has long been acknowledged by both scholars and policy makers. For example, Benjamin (1995) has recognized the relevance of political parties, suggesting that ‘for the people at the grassroots to actively participate in the management of their own affairs, it has to start from the parties that produce the representatives that formulate policies on behalf of the majority.

He went further and concluded that local governments are perceived as serving the purpose of being effective and breeding ground for political leaders that would ultimately transform from the local to the national. The tier had moved from the narrow confines of traditional elite to that of mass concern. Today in Nigeria, it is now generally agreed that the local government is the primary government because its decisions both at party and management levels touches the lives of most of more people than those of any other level of government.

It is against this backdrop, Dunn (1993) suggested that autonomy to choose does not only end with choosing a candidate for a political office, but it has to do with the freedoms to elect those who would lead the party not only at the local government level, but all the levels of government. Given the restoration of party politics and civil rule in 1999, after prolonged military rule over the last decade, it is only pertinent to expect that the manner in which the political party chooses its leadership on the hand, and its prominent role in providing contestants to political office have affected the perceptions of the party supporters as well as the quality and performance of the party leadership in the state.

Statement of Problem
The purpose of this study is to explore the problem of the absence of internal democracy, manifested in the monopoly exercised by the party officials in the selection of party leaders and contestants into various political offices at the local government level, in collaboration with state and national party leaderships, to the exclusion of rank and file party members in Gombe state since the restoration of democracy in 1999. Secondly, the study builds on this theme to examine how such controls resulted in the election of incompetent, unpopular and ineffective party and governmental leaders in state. According to Atiku (2009) that the amount of control, and monopoly, of the selection processes has been exercised by party officials at all the three levels in Nigeria, as well as its effects on politics, performance of the party leaders and elected representatives. The ultimate consequences on the polity have come under intense scrutiny in recent years from a broad spectrum of the areas in the country. He further put it that;

Personally I know the dangers of the absence of internal democracy in political parties. My struggles in the past to entrenched internal democracy in my party, the PDP for which I was harassed, intimidated and humiliated are all too familiar. I believed that as the ruling party, PDP should set the standard for the culture of internal democracy. (2011:1)

It is clear, therefore, that these problems have the potential to undermine the selection and election of credible leader as well as popular participation. Ultimately, the adversely affect the performance of local governments as third tier, retard democracy and political development at the local levels.

**Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of the study is to investigate the extent of the leadership monopoly as exercised by political party leadership at local government and determine the extent of control or domination of political parties at the local level by the few elites from the federal down to the local levels; explain the nature of influence the party elite on the process of election, selection of leadership. determine the level of influence on the electorates and assess the impact of this process on the performance of the elected leaders.

**Review of Related Literatures**

The strong, almost inseparable, connection between democracy and participation has long been acknowledged by scholars. Indeed, scholars from the classical period, such as Plato, Aristotle, down to those of the middle ages, such as Oliver Cromwell (1642), etc., have found the connection to be almost meaningless to attempt to separate. Thus, modern conception of democracy has come a long way from the classical period, and its practice is historically traceable to ancient Greece. Democracy is generally believed to have emanated from the attempts in the Greek city-state of Athens to reform, organize and manage the political community (Polis).

Democracy to Dunn (1993), became the means of organizing the political community in Athens during the time of Kleisthenes (508/507BC). As a powerful and appealing idea, it derives its importance from the promise to render the life of a political community something willed and chosen – to turn the social and political existence that human beings share into a texture of consciously intended common action. In a democracy, the people (the demos), its human members, decide what is to be done and, in so doing, they take their destiny firmly into their own hands. The power and appeal of democracy came from the idea of autonomy – of choosing freely for oneself.

Consequently upon this, Kleisthenes initiated an orderly and amazingly rapid sequence of reforms, which gave rise to a system of participatory democracy in which the demos participated actively in conducting the affairs of the Polis. This type of participatory democracy involved all legally defined citizenry was possible given the context of a small, self regulating city-state of Athens and the
surrounding territory. With the restricted definition of demos, the classical notion of democracy in Athens was that of a political system which offered the citizens in the city-states the freedom to collective participation in the management of their common affairs. They could all meet together, deliberate, vote in regular assembly meetings and determined their affairs, which were then given practical effect by paid officials and small council in which they were adequately represented.

However, modern notion of democracy, attempts to address the question of absolutism and the assumptions of sovereign power of monarch over their people and societies. The 17th century popular rebellion against the monarchy in England, led by Oliver Gromwell (1642), gave birth to a political movement which questioned absolutist monarchical rule and created the atmosphere within which the nation of popular sovereignty and representative government flourished. A political movement, called the levelers, undoubtedly, helped to nurture the modern notion of democracy based on popular sovereignty and representative government in the context of the English Civil War in the mid 17th century. To this end, Wotton (1993:71) for example, noted that;

The Political system which followed in the wake of the civil war, and the success of the forces led by Cromwell against the monarchy made the evolving British political system, especially the British parliament, a model of representative legislatures and elected governments in Europe, as well as Africa and, in particular, Nigeria which came into contact with modern democracy through colonialism.

Reviewing the historical origin and philosophical foundation of democracy, is much easier than attempting to provide a more precise definition of the term. As democracy evolved and spread worldwide, it has become too amorphous and imprecise, with the result that democracy is now a heavily contested concept but often contradictory. The concept means different things to different people as put forward by Jega and Wakili; (2002) ‘If there is any consensus on what democracy means, it is perhaps in relation to the understanding that it is not personal rule, and that it is different from authoritarian/dictatorial rule. Also it can be said that democracy is based on some form of participation and/or representation.

It is therefore interesting to assume that in a democratic political system, government derives legitimacy from the people, regardless of the level of government where citizens should have equal political rights to vote and be voted for. Thus, at the heart of democracy is the very idea of the citizens’ ability to participate in their governance. Democracy to some scholars means different things to different scholars. For example, while some focus their definitions on voting, others see participation in terms of campaigning for a candidate on door-to-door basis while others conceive of participation from the viewpoint of voluntary and involuntary part taken by citizens to demonstrate their anger against the government. Thus, participation refers to many different kinds of activity such as voting for political party officials and political public officers, campaign contributions, marching to protect or to demand governmental policy action, etc. Nonetheless, according to Huntington and Nelson, participation means; Activities by private citizens designed to influence government decision making. Participation may be individual or collective, organized or spontaneous, sustained or sporadic, peaceful or violent, legal or illegal, effective or in effective (1976:32’).

It is significant to note that most democratic political systems are, in principle, equalitarian, where participation is based on universal suffrage such that each eligible voter has equal chance to influence the decision that affect him/her as is being practice in United States of America and other Western democracies. In a similar vein, Verba, Nie and Kim echo similar position, (1978). Within the context of the above conceptualization, therefore, political participation is a term having many meanings. It is applied to the activities of ordinary citizens, as well as to those of political leaders. Political participation, whether seen at the level of national politics, or at regional and local government level, generally carries same meaning. Participation in policy making, believed to be necessary condition for
the nourishment of democracy, led to the distinction of the latter into Liberal/Representative and Direct Democracy.

Representative Democracy:

This dominant model is predicated on the principles that individuals have freedom, equality before the law, voting right, election and representation. According to Mainwaring, (1992:50), democracy within this context means the ……. institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of competitive struggle for the People’s vote. Similarly, Dahl (1971:31) has suggested that democracy clearly involves a Political system in which the whole people positively or negatively make and are entitled to make the basic determining decision on important matters of public policy. In between the position of the scholars quoted above, there exists what has been dubbed as middle of the range definition of democracy. Karl (1990:2) position, democracy is; A set of Institutions that permits the entire adult population to act as citizens by choosing their leading decision-makers in competitive, fair and regularly scheduled elections which are held in the context of the rule of guarantees for political freedom, and limited military prerogatives.

Democracy in this context can best be understood as a balance of rules and outcomes. Local democracy in Nigeria going by the experience so far can hardly be referred to any of these categories because of procedural deficiencies. In its representative form, democracy makes the argument that individuals have the right to participation in the political process. But according to Kuna, (2002:7) posits that in contemporary times however, this participation is restricted by expansion in populations and in the increasing complexity of social relations. Both issues, it is argued, make imperative the election of representatives who are now conferred with the right to act for, and on behalf of those that elected them. Representation, it is argued, is designed to choose the best, streamline the political system, ensure the coordination of interests, wide consultation, and reduce bottlenecks which direct participation may be prone to by overloading the system with inputs. Theoretically, representation has perhaps worked, and may be workable. The social contexts that supported the functioning of representative democracy have, however, been changing over the years. In the words of Przeworski, (1991:9), these changing contexts include the expansion of mass education, the decline of the mobilizing state, the increasing de-nationalization of national economies and societies, the collapse of the ideological frameworks within which contestation and claims on the political system are channeled, the rise of ethno-religious nationalism and the increasing intermeshing of global cultural, economic and financial phenomena.

At this point, it is pertinent to draw attention to the inherent exclusionary tendencies of democracy, of how capitalist property relation’s disenfranchise a large segment of the population, and how representation is inherently a representation of the most powerful and propertied individuals in the society. In addition, the professionalization of politics has increasingly made it a preserve of the wealthy. More so, the organization of representation is itself an exclusionary process, for not only are opinions of people sought during elections alone, the sharp practices that are in many cases inherent part of elections further erode the degree and quality of representation.

Direct Democracy

This appears to be the first model to be developed, as practiced during the classical Greek period, and now popularized by Libyans since the publication of the Libyan leader’s Green Book. It is essentially based on the notion that there is a way of organizing politics and political systems. According to Jega and Wakili (ibid) ‘Direct democracy presents to citizens, in addition to the choice of representatives, the chance to institutionalize through referenda or other direct instruments, voters right to actively participate in decisions affecting their lives’. (2002:18)
The modification in operations of the concept was necessitated because the old Greek notion of direct democracy is clearly untenable, given the difficulty of large population getting together at any moment to decide. Contemporary forms of direct democracy require governments to hold referenda as a regular, normal part of the democratic process. Such direct actions are designed to empower citizens to demand referenda on any matter once enough signatures could be obtained.

Contemporary forms of direct democracy appear to lay much emphasis on fine major ideas, which have to do with popular initiative when some agreed percentage of the electorate sign a petition demanding government action on some new matter not yet before parliament/council, then a binding referendum must be held on the matter. Popular veto applies when an agreed percentage of the electorates sign a petition challenging any legislation currently under discussion. On the other hand, parliamentary/council initiative obtains when simple majority of members call for a referendum. Local initiatives have equivalent procedures that should be initiated. The elements of direct democracy listed above will, no doubt, expand the range of political participation, empower a mass section of society and put in place concrete mechanism for holding political establishments to account. This is something which none of the dormant political parties in Nigeria is ready or willing to accept.

Thus, politicians and the political establishment argue, de-professionalizes politics, thus opening up the political arena to an uninformed and malleable mass. As such, it not only reduces the quality of decisions, but in addition overloads the political system with inputs that could eventually result in regime instability. While scholars have, thus, clearly established the primacy of political participation as the backbone of democracy, it is, perhaps, important to try to distinguish between the forms of participation in a polity or political process; such an effort is relevant, given the fact that democracy operates on several levels or arenas. For instance, the emphasis laid on citizens’ participation in decision making has created the impression that only at the arena of public office may the electorate demonstrate their involvement. In this connection, therefore, an attempt has been made in the following paragraphs to examine political participation both as at the level of government policy – making and participation to elect public officers.

**Democracy and Participation**

The other aspect of political participation often neglected in the scholarly literature in Nigerian politics concerns the involvement of citizens in the election of leaderships of political parties. In the advanced democracies, for example, the commonest form of participation is, invariably, understood in two principal contexts, namely that of political party primaries in the United States, where such activities that involve selection of contestants to public offices are rather routine, as well as in the rather narrower sense of citizens partaking in the election of political office holders. In other European countries, direct party primaries have not been routine though, nonetheless, political party supporters have the responsibility to participate in selection of political party leadership.

Against this backdrop, it is important to recall the process of constituting party leadership, as discussed in the scholarly literature. The election of party leadership generally takes place at party conventions. In this regard, Mclean and McMillan have described a party convention as “the periodic conference of a political party, used for deciding policy, electing party officials and/or for nominating candidates” (2000:47). Periodic conventions held by political parties provide ample opportunity to the supporters to interact in order to exchange ideas and notes, appraise the performance of the party, map out strategies for election victory, and afford the supporters the avenue to gauge office seekers in order to understand their predispositions, intentions and plans for the party.

In Nigerian context, party conventions are held in four stages, namely the ward, local government, state and national levels, with the ward, state and local government gatherings called congresses. The modalities are that Delegates are drawn from national, state and local government party officials, as well as all political office holders. These conventions are held every four years to elect leaders who are
perceived to be able to unite the party and lead it to election victory. Each party prints its own ballot on paper, listing only the names of candidates of that party, voters supplied ballot papers at the polls by party workers, and the ballots deposited in plain sight. But all these processes notwithstanding, recent developments have shown serious shadow on the fairness and credibility of party congresses and conventions in the country. In particular, two concepts have been introduced to make a mockery of the principle of internal democracy.

First, the obnoxious idea of ‘a consensus candidate’ has, since the restoration of civil rule in 1999, assumed a centre-stage in Nigerian politics. Simply put, a consensus candidate is a pre-arranged or pre-determined method in which other contestants for a post are ‘asked’ – a euphemism for application of strong pressure - to step down for a particular candidate. Such a candidate is then fielded by the party, mostly as the party’s sole candidate, in either election into the party post or as its flag bearer in elections into public office. Usually, the elite group in the national, state and local government levels of the party has been responsible for this arrangement. Some of them influence decision making by virtue of their official positions, others do so by cajoling those in official positions to manipulate the process.

The second threat to internal democracy, closely related to the first, is the ‘political god-father’ syndrome. ‘God-fatherism,’ also variously known as ‘money bags,’ is, in the words of Adetula and Adeyi (2009:2), simply “described it as the fraudulent electoral behavior of politicians, political parties and voters. A recent invention in the lexicon of Nigerian politics, the concept is employed to refer to those politicians known to ‘sponsor’ candidates, whether for party or public office, by way footing the entire costs to be incurred by the candidate. In the end, the ‘god-father’ uses the party to determine who contests a particular post, as well as monopolizes appointments or postings to be made by the party. In effect, this development marginalizes a large number of party members and supporters, with the result that the political parties are effectively controlled by, and their future mortgaged in, the hands of a few at the detriment of the majority, invariably undermining popular political participation.

Theoretical frame-work for analysis

The elite theory of Pareto (1848-1923) is contained in his principal affirmation that ‘history is a graveyard of aristocracies’. According to him, in every society there is an increasing movement of individuals and elites from higher to lower levels and from lower to higher levels, resulting in a considerable increase of the degenerate elements in the classes which still hold power and, on the other hand, in an increase of elements of superior quality in the subject classes. Psychological changes in the characteristics of the elites according to him occur from time to time that lead to the changes in the composition and operation of different elites so much so that some elites are replaced by others that sometimes causes political instability.

Pareto finds that elites make both logical or rational and illogical or irrational actions for the attainment of their ends. The central theme of Pareto’s theory was in the nature of the governing elite. According to him, top leaders of political parties constitute the governing elite. Their power is based partly on force and partly on consent. However, the element of force is more important because the governing elite use bribery, deceit and cunningness to secure the consent of the subject classes. The rulers can secure obedience by the use of money, but they must use force to keep the masses under their control as showed in the table below.

What is of special attention in Pareto’s theory of two classes is that one class counts on the co-operation of another. While the ruling class needs the support of the ruled class, the latter provides protection to the former. The theme of the theory is that society is divided into classes; the class which rule and the class which is ruled. The key to the elite power is one’s ability for organization. A small group is more easily organized than an unorganized purposeless majority. Its channels of communication and information are better and quicker. The principles of minority control work best in political parties which are controlled by leaders of such party.
Methodology

The data for this study leadership, politics and participation were gathered from three sources, namely, primary, secondary sources and participant observation and were analyzed using simple data percentage and tables. The primary data comprise of responses from interviews conducted with a variety of state and local government officials, such as officials and in the state, founders of the parties, political office holders such deputy chairmen, councilors, etc. In addition to this, data were also collected from supporters of the main political parties, using structured questionnaires namely the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), Action Congress (AC) – now Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) - and the Democratic Peoples’ Party (DPP). In all, the study randomly selected a sample of three hundred (300) respondents, proportionately distributed across five local governments based on population, in the following order: Kaltungo (60), Shongom (50), Kwami (50), Gombe (70) and Yamaltu-Deba (70). However, out of the total of three hundred (300) questionnaires distributed, two hundred and forty (240) were retrieved and analyzed. This distribution was based on the three senatorial districts.

Discussion of Results and Findings

The table below explains five patterns of voting system used during election of party leaders in the local government areas of Gombe state. Each of these parties may adopt any of these methods found best to their constitution. The patterns were as follows;

Table (1) Methods of election/selection of leaders in congresses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method of voting</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voice voting</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>18.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secret balloting</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>34.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open balloting</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>12.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensus</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>22.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11.70</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>100</td>
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Accordingly, forty-four (44) respondents, representing 18.30%, indicated that voice vote was employed while eighty-three (83) respondents representing about 34.60% indicated the use of secret balloting. In the same vein, thirty-one (31) respondents, representing 12.90%, said open balloting were employed, while fifty-four (54), or 22.50%, asserted that consensus voting was used. Also, the remaining twenty-eight (28) respondents, representing 11.70% abstained. This shows majority of the respondents supported that secret balloting was the most frequently method adopted during congresses. However, one of the shortcomings of the secret balloting method is the accusation that it is subjected to manipulation. This is so because the delegates are ‘guided’ as to whom. In this situation, the delegates lack the freedom to choose and only fulfill the command of the patron, thereby defeating the goal of secret balloting.

Consensus method forms the second largest option of voting as explained by the close relationship it shares with secret balloting. However, delegates supposed to cast their votes, to demonstrate the ‘popularity’ or the acceptability of the candidate, and even where a consensus candidate is arrived at, such a consensus always ‘work out’ in the ‘interest of party unity’. Therefore, at this juncture, it is hard to conclude whether other contestants arrive at this position willingly, or they were coerced to. To this end, secret balloting and consensus are used to manipulate the democratic processes in the selection of party leaders is further evident in the responses of the sample to the question as to “whether or not they are satisfied with the methods employed during the elections. It is interesting to note, from the research
data, that one hundred and seventy-three (173) respondents, or 72.08%, expressed dissatisfaction with the methods and modalities of the election, while sixty-seven (67), or 27.92%, showed their satisfaction.

In conclusion, it is evident to suggest that Congresses there were congresses to elect party in Gombe state, however, whether such election of leaders were fair and free, and as to whether members were allowed to act independently, and with air of freedom to take position. Where the members perceive any attempt to conduct the processes with the intent to manipulate the outcome in favor of unpopular candidates, or to impose ‘lackeys’ of the so-called ‘party elders,’ it is only natural that they show this kind of reaction. Indeed, the extent of dissatisfaction with the congresses can be further understood from the outcome of the respondents regarding number of congresses held in the state during the period under review.

The idea of party congress is to conduct party leadership election and develop strategies on how to win elections. However, sometimes such elections hardly hold due to some personal and organizational interest.

Table 2 No of Party Congresses Held: 1999 to 2009 (All Parties in the Study)

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<tr>
<th>No. of Congresses Held</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tr>
<td>3 Congresses</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>33.30</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Congresses</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>26.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 5</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>23.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>17.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table shows the total number of congresses held for all the parties from 1999=2009. The outcome shows as follows; eighty 80 respondents in the sample, representing about (33.30%) have indicated that only three (3) congresses of meeting of political parties in the state were held throughout the period under study. While sixty-three 63 respondents, representing 26.20%, stated that four (4) congresses were held. On the other hand, fifty-six 56 respondents, representing (23.30%), confirmed that there were five congresses meeting of political parties. Lastly only forty-one (41) respondents representing (17.1%) shows that they were not aware of any congresses of political party meeting.

From the above analysis we can observed that there are several points to be made at this juncture. First, the differences observed in the table, pertaining to the knowledge of, and attendance in, party congresses are explained by the fact that the respondents represented different party affiliations, and the fact that the dominant parties held dissimilar numbers of congresses. Secondly, the relatively high number of respondents that indicated “don’t know” comprise mostly, if not entirely, of those totally unconcerned with, and disenchanted with, the party electoral processes. This can simply be interprets as a waste of time. This is because some if not all the contestant faiths had already determined even before getting to the venues. For example, one of the respondents, in the interview held with researcher, said “why waste my time to attend congresses, the results of what I definitely know to be manipulated to favor the candidates of the top guns of the party.

Even though, all the political parties were supposed to conduct congresses regularly as contained in the party constitutions at the ward, local government and state levels as a basis for selecting contestants to public office during general elections. yet, from the table above only five congresses of political meetings were the highest number of congresses held, which a violation of the party rules across all the political parties during the ten-year period under study (1999 to 2001). Similarly, all the four political parties, namely the ANPP, ACN, DPP and PDP had convened two successful leadership elections from 1999 to 2009. In an interview, with former national publicity secretary of Alliance for Democracy in 2009 before decamped to ACN, observed that ”since the introduction of AD in Gombe state in 1998, it held only one congress at the state, the local and the ward each any vacant positions are replaced
without election.” For example, The All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) had two congresses between 1999 and 2002; People Democratic Party (PDP) and the Action Congress (AC) had only one congress each. This is because most of the major decision concerning the organizing and the affairs of the congress at the state and local government are taken by the executive committees of the parties. What was seemingly evident was that the congresses are held only when general elections approach. This means that discussions on policy matters and important issues are not attended to by the parties, a reason that led some people to conclude that the parties represent no more than ‘political machines, oiled only to serve general election purposes, especially at the local government level.

Table 4 Opinion on whether or not elected officials were imposed or selected

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<td></td>
<td>Freq</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Freq</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Councilor</td>
<td>Imposed</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>39.60</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not impose</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>44.20</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No response</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>16.20</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freq</td>
<td>%</td>
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<tr>
<td>chairman</td>
<td>Imposed</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13.80</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not impose</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>39.60</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No response</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>46.60</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>240</td>
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The views of the respondents as whether or not those declared winners of chairmen and councilor seats respectively were the ‘right’ choices. The responses were as follows; one hundred and seventy-four (174) respondents, representing 72.50%, stated that the ‘elected’ candidates were the right ones. While seventeen (17), representing about 7.10%, of the total population objected that they were not. Furthermore, Forty-nine (49) representing 20.40% of the respondents declined. However, the picture quickly changed in the two subsequent elections of 2004 and 2007, respectively. This is because, in the 2004 polls, only thirty-four (34) respondents, representing 14.20%, agreed while fifty-two (52) respondents, representing 21.70%, took the position that the candidates are not the right persons. One hundred and fifty-four (154), the greatest majority, representing 64.20%, declined to answer the question. Furthermore, during the 2007 elections, the responses appeared to be consistent with 2004’s, where ninety-five (95), representing thirty-nine percent 39.60%, of the respondents, believed the declared candidates were the right persons, but majority, made up of one hundred and six (106), forty-four percent 44.20%, on the other hand, asserted the candidates were not the persons. Thirty-nine (39), representing 16.20% of the sample, declined to accept either of the two opinions therefore, based from the above analysis, it is only logical to suggest that the majority of the respondents that indicated the declared winners in the first round of elections were the appropriate choices, despite a few anomalies in the election processes, did so out of simple conviction. This arises from the fact that the period coincided with the transition to civil rule period of the military government. The expectation was that the polls, conducted by the seemingly non-partisan INEC, were transparent, at least at the local government level, and so was much less likely to be the subject of the manipulation of the governing political party. It is not a surprise because the 1998 elections were very critical in the sense that they were intended to provide a litmus test for the registration of the political associations as political parties by INEC.

One interesting thing to note is that the composition of the local councils resulting from the elections was politically encouraging, as they comprised of a mixture of members from different parties. However, looking at the responses above with regards to the chairmanship elections, the outcomes of
the 1998 polls tended to reflect the opposite of those of the councillorship seats. Thus, ninety-four (94) respondents, representing 39.20%, agreed that those who won were the right candidates, while one hundred and four (104) representing 43.30%, asserted they were not. On the other hand, forty-two (42) respondents, representing 17.50%, declined. However, from 2004, the story reflected a pattern similar to those of the councilor seats during the same period. It shows that ninety-two (92), representing 38.30% respondents, asserted that the chairmen were the right persons, and a slight margin, ninety-seven (97), or 40.40% of the respondents, believed they were not the right persons, and fifty-one (51), representing 21.20%, declined to voice opinion. During the 2007 polls, eighty-eight (88) respondents, representing 38.30%, believed the persons announced as chairmen of the local government councils were the right choices, fifty-seven (57), or 23.80%, asserted that they were not. Ninety-five (95), representing 39.30%, would not respond either way.

What we can conclude from the outcome of this result is that; first, the sincerity of the military to leave the political scene through the transition program led the competent politicians to shy away from venturing into public offices. So the result was that those elected to the offices turned out to be the wrong choices. Secondly, subsequently in 2004 and 2007 the realization of the seriousness of the transition program to entrench civilian rule, if not democracy, as well as the unexpected defeat of the governing ANPP by the PDP, gave the latter, as the governing party Therefore, citizen’s participation in the election was virtually absent, and the state was turn into a one party state with PDP being the only party that fixed its members in all elective public offices. Given that the respondents overwhelmingly perceived the ‘choices’ of the chairmen and councilors to be wrong the ones, there is the need to raise the other fundamental questions as to whether or not, in the views of the respondents, such officials were imposed on the generality of the populace.

Conclusion

The local government in Nigeria being the third tier in the federal arrangement of the country equally provides the citizens at the grassroots with the same opportunities. The first is that the process of electing/selecting candidates in the four political parties understudy in the state is a party affair, generally limited to the top leaders and financier, to the detriment of the members at the grassroots. It was evident from this position that contestants for party leadership and elective public offices, the winner are determining by the few party leaders against the interest of the larger members. This was clearly confirmed as Contestants are compelled to step down for consensus candidates. This resulted in officials being imposed by the state but not elected, and a sizeable number of contestants are denied the opportunity to test their popularity, and at the same time the members are equally denied the civic opportunity of choosing among alternative candidates based on their assessment of them. Furthermore, participation in party congresses at the ward level and local government level happens to be the most attended by the respondents with thirty seven percent who said they have attended congressed. But as earlier mentioned this is not enough to accept that there was democracy, because it is not only limited to elections or being informed of resolutions reached in some places and assumed that members are carried along. Even the elections held to endorse officials or elect new ones are not conducted in fair and free atmosphere. Another tactic use to maintain control on process is through the activities of money bags who took over financing the activities of the party, and in return assume absolute ownership of the party so much so that whoever they chose as contestant, nobody can challenge them.

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