



The Role of Non-State Actors in Shaping Democratic Development: A Case Study of the National Union of Road Transport Workers and Political Parties

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Abstract

Non-state actors such as influential civil society groups (transport unions and trade associations) are equally important as political party members in the mobilization towards achievement of the latter's objectives, which include contesting and winning elections, and controlling government. The centrality of political parties to democratic development in transition states like Nigeria remains the *grundnorm*; what is however unclear is the extent to which political parties shape the organisational culture of non-state actors. Relying on data from primarily qualitative and primary data involving key informants interview and focus group discussion, this study interrogates the processes of mobilisation and deployment of organisational political cultures of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), Oyo State, in the service of political parties in the state. While susceptible to the influence of political parties, evidence suggests that civil society groups significantly shape party politics and democratic culture as well. Based on findings, the study argues that groups such as road transport unions often play important role in the democratisation project in Nigeria because their actions and inactions overtime have contributed to defining the character and direction of the democratic project. Hence, their success or otherwise in their internal democratic trajectory portends serious implications for Nigeria's democratic space and project.

Keywords

Democratic Development, Non-state Actors, Transport Union (NURTW), Oyo State, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Political parties and civil society play key role in the entrenchment of democratic culture, but not always. Democracy signals the power of citizens to shape state policy in line with certain norms, centralising the means by which state and citizens make real claims on each other (Joseph 1987). How and where political parties and civil society fail to promote democratisation in Nigeria has received little sustained scholarly attention. The literature recognises political parties and civil society as veritable articulators and champions of the interests of their members. Evident in that literature is the subtle suggestion that party members are neutral individual actors to be mobilised, educated, and brought into the political space through membership of the political party. Civil society groups to which the target masses hold prior membership are considered no better than cultural groups to be mobilised behind the party. In effect, the political party is portrayed as the terrain from which flow democratic values and norms that water the valley of individuals and civil society groups in Nigeria (Akinrinde & Adebisi, 2021).

The top-down unidirectional relationship between parties and civil society prevents us from exploring the nexus between both actors once the individual or civil society group lines up behind the party. It is unclear the extent to which political parties shape the organisational culture of civil society groups, and vice versa. After the mobilisation of civil society groups into the political space there is little information about what happens to the latter and the party as a result

of the new forms of interactions. Contrary to suggestions, civil society groups are political entities with organisational culture. While political parties remain the bastion of democratisation, a top-down view that emphasises how parties shape civil societies creates a dichotomy between civil society groups, and the political party. Yet, while being susceptible to the influence of political parties, civil society groups significantly shape party politics and democratic culture as well.

Little in the literature engages with challenges that political parties encounter in the attempt to shape the organisational culture of civil society groups. Similarly, it is less visible how civil society groups' organisational culture interacts with and shapes the political culture of political parties. We argue that both cultures mutually shape each other. Moreover, the nature of the interaction between them shapes the nature of democratic practice in Nigeria. Contrary to suggestion that civil society groups are simply waiting to be mobilised into the political arena, the groups are powerful arenas of political culture and practice. Rather than wither and die in the process of mobilisation, such grassroots organisational political cultures are often drawn upon and deployed in the service of political parties. Events in Oyo and Osun states serve as cases for this study. This study further engages with the role of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) in the democratic process. The NURTW is an influential civil society group in society, even if notorious for intra-group violence. Often the union leadership mobilizes its membership in support of one political party or the other. The union has become largely undemocratic especially in terms of its internal processes of leadership succession and policy making. Indeed, the modus operandi of the Union in the various motor parks qualifies as "Snatching of Motor Parks", or forceful overthrow of leadership in motor parks. Undemocratic leadership succession practices and other dictatorial tendencies are usually undergirded by extreme violence, which manifest in unrests, arson, and wanton destruction of lives and properties.

Violence as modus operandi appears to have seized the NURTW at the same time that Nigeria returned to democracy in 1999 after several years of predatory military rule, characterized by high levels of violence, including electoral violence (Olaniyan & Amao, 2015). While Nigeria has made progress, deepening democratic practices manifest in peaceful and successful transition from one democratic regime, the same cannot be said about the NURTW as a civil society. There appears to be a parting of ways; while political party democratization moves in a positive direction, the NURTW seems to move in the opposite direction. Yet, political parties and the NURTW remain intimate partners in the democratic project.

It is worrisome that in spite of almost two decades of civilian rule, flowering democratic practices at the party level can hardly be adjudged to have influenced undemocratic practices within the NURTW as a civil society. How might we understand the seeming disconnect between democratic politics at the party level and undemocratic structures and practices of the NURTW? What explains the seeming imperviousness of the NURTW as a civil society to the democratic influences of political parties, and what are the implications for political parties' ability to promote democratization in Nigeria?

2. Conceptual Matters

2.1 Civil and Uncivil Societies

By civil society, we are referring to the aggregate of non-governmental organizations and institutions that manifest interests and will of the citizens (Keane, 1988). It is either an individual entity or an organization in a society that is independent of the government. Keane equally sees civil society as democratic agency whose aim is to safeguard and consolidate democratic ideals and principles by either acting as vanguards of democracy or domesticating the ideals of democracy in their internal arrangements (Keane, 1988).

Uncivil society basically refers to an environment that is predicated upon wide-range of disruptive, unwelcome, and threatening elements that apparently deemed to have emerged in the spaces between the individual and the state (Rumford, 2001). Characteristically, the most frequently discussed attributes of uncivil society are the use of violence, religious and ethnic exclusivism, primordial politics, social inequality, flagrant disobedience to laws and constituted authority, and primitivism in the administration of such an organization.

2.2 Democracy

Democracy can be taken to mean a government in which supreme power is invested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through representation (Webster New Encyclopedic Dictionary 1995). Larry Diamond and Platter (1996) see democracy as a composite of fundamental principles; a system of choosing and replacing the government through free and fair elections, active participation of the people, as citizens, in politics and civic life, protection of the human rights of all citizens; and a rule of law in which the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens. According to Lindell and Scott (1999), democracy was coined from a Greek word "Demokratia", which means the rule of the people. Directly or indirectly, all states have embraced democracy, though with differing degrees of acceptability and domestication.

2.3 Empirical Review

Democracy as a concept or a system is devoid of any generally acceptable definition among most scholars. Different authors have interpreted democracy to suit different situations and interests. This must have informed its conception by Omitola et al. (2021) that it is a concept with great variety and diversity of regimes and systems that pass for democracies.

Thus, it is not at all an easy matter to establish what the precise and objective meaning of democracy is, or can be (Omitola, Akinrinde & Omitola, 2021). However, there is a need to consider some definitions especially, in order to put the focus of this study in proper perspective. It might also be interpreted as a set of laws allowing the largest, most certain, direct and indirect involvement of the majority of citizens in political choices, such as those impacting the entire country. This description, to a large measure, fits to Abraham Lincoln's classical definition of democracy as "government of the people, by the people, and for the people." Thus, the involvement of the people in governance, in one form or another, is important to these definitions. It is within this context that Momoh (2006:63) concludes, "Democracy whether classical or social democratic, popular or socialist, talks about representative government and empowerment of the people". Given that direct democracy practiced in ancient Athens and Greek city-states has become impracticable in modern societies, the principle of representation has become central to the operations of modern democracy.

Many factors have been identified as preconditions for democratic experiment to succeed. Among these conditions are socio-economic and political factors. Democratic states must have viable and supportive political and democratic institutions, which include parliament, the presidency, judiciary, political parties, interest associations and the armed forces among others (Huntington, 1968; Gurr, 1980; Kaur, 2007; Ogundiya, 2010). Thus, Bratton, (1998) sees the process (of democratic consolidation) as where democracy becomes so broadly and profoundly legitimate among its citizens that it is unlikely to breakdown. Democratic consolidation implies the political process of making a nation's democratic practices succeed on a continuous basis, without midway breakdowns occasioned by undemocratic incidents like coup d'état (Dode, 2010:188).

While arguing that democratic consolidation is a function of the peculiarity of the country under study, Ogundiya (2010:7) maintains, "in transiting societies like (Nigeria) where the threat of coup persists, consolidation may be seen as the process of eliminating opposition to democracy on the part of powerful actors". Thus, the process of making democracy acceptable to the people overtime without considering a reverse to the undemocratic era is referred to as consolidation. However, Momoh (2006) reviewing the performance of democracy in Nigerian fourth republic argued that the continuation of democratic rule in a country does not necessarily lead to democratic consolidation. While adopting the term he referred to as de-democratization, Momoh (2006:70) further opined that "... the so-called Nigerian democratic rule actually works against true democracy, democratic institution and democratic practices".

While we do not disagree with Momoh's assessment of Nigeria's democracy which is also similar to Peter Anyang Nyang'o's parody of transformation of elected civilians into "presidential authoritarianism" (a situation best expressed in the eight years of Obasanjo's presidency in Nigeria and tagged "Kabiyesi Presidency": a president that is accountable to none), a general perception that democracy remains the preferred system of governance in the country persists (Lewis and Alemika, 2002). Political parties are indispensable tools of democracy. Democratic consolidation refers to "a political regime in which democracy as a complex system of institutions, rules and patterned incentives and disincentives has become", the norm, behaviourally, attitudinally and constitutionally (Linz and Stepan 1996: 15). It implies that no significant actors try to use non-democratic means to obtain their goal, the majority considers democratic procedures and institutions as the preferred way of organising politics, and governmental and non-governmental actors are equally subject to the laws and institutions of the democratic process.

Even if political parties are usually not included in the definition of democracy, the 'consolidation of democracy entails, above all, the institutionalisation of parties and party systems' (Sandbrook 1996: 76). Moreover, Democratic government is unlikely to exist or flourish where there is no competitive political parties' system. Similarly, orderly government cannot exist without some 'form of stabilised party representation' (Crotty 1993: 684). Political parties are expected to deepen democratisation through interests' representation, conflict resolution, promotion of downward accountability, institutionalisation of democracy, and conferment of legitimacy on the political regime (Randall & Svasand, 2002; Roniger, 2004). As such, political parties are spaces within which members become habituated to democratic norms and procedures. Linz and Stepan (1997) argue that parties are especially critical for behavioural consolidation in respect of eliminating non-democratic behaviour.

Unlike political parties, civil society groups are organised bodies seeking to influence public policy without trying to take over government itself. Civil society is usually defined in relation to the state. It is society in its relations to the state, so long as it is in contention with the state (Woods, 1992). Civil society consists of multiplicity of self-interest organisations, which are constitutionally protected from state's interference. The nurturing of civil society is an effective means of controlling repeated abuses of state power, demanding downward accountability and establishing the foundations of durable democracy (Chazan, 1992). For example, impetus for the late democratic transitions in Africa is traceable to the growth of civil society (Ndegwa, 1996:2).

Interest groups, both economic and socio-political, are mainly concerned with influencing public officials to accept or reject specific programmes and policies. Their methods of influence are both indirect and direct, the former involving grass-roots pressure, latter skilled lobbyists who personally contact important decision-makers in the executive and legislative branches of government (Elowitz, 1992: 61). Interest groups who may also be seen as lobbyist have members drawn often from the better-educated, wealthier strata of society.

Civil society groups may be supportive of democratisation when they articulate democratic values, pursue actions to challenge non-democratic regimes, and have opportunity to mobilise, agitate and bargain with the state from a position of strength (Ndegwa, 1996). However, the notion that civil society is invariably progressive especially in consolidating

democratisation is far-fetched. There 'is nothing in civil society organisations that makes them opponents of authoritarianism and proponents of democracy' (Ndegwa, 1996:6). In highly hierarchical and authoritarian Africa, civil society may be a reservoir of authoritarianism and anti-democratic values (Okuku, 2002). Thus, civil society could be an impediment to democratisation. The belief in civil society as a wellspring of democratisation leads to a distortion in the analysis of the relations of state and society and the possibilities of democracy (Kasfir, 1998).

The relationship between civil society groups and democracy poses challenges. Interest groups represent sectional, and sometimes selfish, interests. A small, well-organised minority may prevail over the poorly organised and/or indifferent majority. The tyranny of either minority or majority is a threat to functional democracy. Patronage-based political economies produce incentives for civil society actors to organise platforms for gaining political influence rather than promoting reform (Kasfir 1998). The expectation of NGOs and other civil society organisations as agents of democratisation remains contentious.

3. Methodology

This paper adopted a non-experimental research or qualitative design. Data for the study were gathered from archival sources, interviews, observations and Focus Group Discussions. The study utilises qualitative data based on both relevant primary and secondary sources. Relevant sources include original, authoritative, and verifiable sources. Such sources are original in the sense that they are close to the event they describe, and, thus, they were leveraged upon to give a more accurate historical description. We are concerned to ensure that our sources give authoritative, expert and eyewitnesses' accounts. Such accounts were confirmed by testing them against data from independent sources, archival materials, written texts and authors observations. On methods and sources of data collection, the study adopted both primary and secondary sources of data collection. The primary data included structured interview of key informants consisting of stakeholders in the transport sector in Oyo and Osun states. The study applied semi-structured interviews from selected respondents; the questions asked were based on the study stated objectives.

The study utilized narratives, in-depth interviews, primary texts, observation, and archival materials to elicit qualitative data. The idea is to gain insight into how NURTW members are mobilized into the political arena, to what end, and with what outcomes. The study deploys narratives to probe NURTW members' subjective ideas and perceptions about the NURTW and its leadership. Also, it utilizes observation, primary texts and archival materials to develop an understanding of the organisational structure or form of the NURTW. Moreover, through observation and in-depth interviews the authors peer behind the façade of appearance to understand power relations and decision-making processes in the everyday activities of the NURTW.

Also, the population of the study consisted of 40 members of NURTW in selected motor parks in the capital cities of Oyo and Osun States; Ibadan and Osogbo, including past leaders and close associates who were actors in the interactions of interest. It also included selected members of the Nigerian Police; selected members of the Civil Society Groups and selected members of the public, all in the two cities.

On Sampling techniques and sample size, the study adopted simple purposive sampling technique of forty members of NURTW, members of the Nigerian police, civil society groups and the public divided equally between the two cities.

The study adopted random purposive sampling method to conduct the interview on the various target population in the two states of Oyo and Osun. There was also Key Informants Interviews (KII) of stakeholders including members of political parties, Nigeria Police, and Civil Society groups.

Analytically, the qualitative data sourced from various relevant scholarly works were subjected to thematic analysis and complemented with descriptive and thematic analysis of transcribed qualitative primary data elicited from interview of NURTW members and other key Informants Interview (KII).

4. Discussion and Findings

4.1 Origin of the National Union of Road Transport Workers

This section examines the origin of the National Union of Road Transport Workers in Nigeria and the emergence of undemocratic practices in its affairs, and spill over to the democratic space.

The emergence of transport union and their interactions with government and political parties predated independence in 1960. The expansion of road networks across the country from the mid-1920s increased the number of people in the road transport business (Olubomehin, 2012 231).

The first road transport union, Nigeria Road Transport Union, was formed in 1934. The transport union was established to defend and further the collective interests of motor transporters within the colonial setting (Olubomehin, 2012: 231). Such interests included resisting the attempt at imposing higher duties on vehicle as a way of discouraging competition with the railway (Oshin, 1990). Most of the transporters that made up the union at that time were concentrated in the Southern part of Nigeria with few in the North. Leading names among them were T.A. Odutola, Obafemi Awolowo, Salami Agbaje, Messrs Ojukwu, Messrs Summers, Elijah Henshaw, among others (Olubomehin, 2012). Also, some Europeans, Syrians and Lebanese were involved in the transport business through such well known enterprises as Weeks later Beers Transport Company, Messrs John Holt and Miller Brothers, Messrs G.B. Ollivant, Paterson Zochonis, Messrs Macklver Limited, and Mac Neil Limited (Olubomehin, 2012: 232)

One notable feature in the activities of the transporters of this period and their union was the participation of Salami Agbaje Transport in the 1937 general motor strike Drummond-(Thompson, 1993:54-55); a development that indicated that transporters were not neutral in the anti-colonial struggle in the country. The transporters and their union were active in the decolonization struggle through their supports to the nationalists. In post-independence Nigeria, citizens have taken full control of the transport business with companies such as Ekene Dili Chukwu, The Young Shall Grow Motors, ABC Transport Service, GUO Okeke, and Dan Dollars among others, providing employment for millions of the population. In addition, the companies and their drivers contribute to the revenue base of the country through payment of various duties for hackney permits, drivers' licenses, vehicle licenses, and plate numbers.

There are two major associations in the Nigerian transport sector; the Road Transport Employers Association of Nigeria (RTEAN), and the National Union of Road Transport Workers, which was formed in 1978 as the umbrella union for all drivers in the country. The NURTW is an affiliate of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC). The main objective of the Union is to promote the economic welfare of its members and this has been demonstrated in the various engagements with governments and other developmental agencies to further the interests of its members.

However, beyond the core objectives of the NURTW, the union found itself operating as a pressure group along with other civil society groups during military rule especially in the period of 1983 to 1999. This is in line with the activities of its predecessor in the struggle against colonial rule. The NURTW has been part of the "fight for what they considered to be in the interest of the country" (Olubomahin, 2012: 336). The NURTW became more visible in the political space of the country after the cancellation of the presidential election held on June 12th 1993, which was presumably won by the late business mogul Chief M.K.O. Abiola. NURTW not only joined forces with other civil society groups in protesting annulment of the election and demanding declaration of Abiola as president of the country, the NURTW opposed the transmutation of the military ruler, Late General Sanni Abacha, to a civilian president.

4.2 The Role of NURTW in National Development

Igbuzo (2005) noted that the 1999 and 2003 elections saw the NURTW and other civil societies conducting voters' education programs amongst members. Citizens were mobilized to come out to vote for candidates of their choice. Ojo (2012) further stated that CSOs indeed trained some citizens and communities on the protection of mandate in preparation for the 2007 elections. This, according to him, involved a series of tools and strategies that citizens could use to engage political parties, security agents and electoral officers to prevent manipulation of electoral franchise. Furthermore, during preparations for the 2011 elections, CSOs embarked on voters' education. Ojo (2012) noted that some members of the NURTW also shed the toga of being armchair critics by joining the political fray to contest elections. Examples are, Governors Adams Oshiomhole of Edo state and Kayode Fayemi of Ekiti state.

When ex-President Obasanjo's administration had attempted to tinker with the Nigerian constitution in 2005/2006, to insert a tenure elongation clause, the plot was primarily shot down by parliamentarians with the help of the civil rights groups such as the NURTW, among others (Ojo 2012). In 2010, the NURTW and other civil societies demanded the recognition of the then Vice President, Goodluck Jonathan as the Acting President, following the illness of late President Musa Yar'Adua who had traveled abroad for medical attention. The NURTW and others, such as the Save Nigeria Group and Enough is Enough Group, actually seized the initiative and demanded for a resolution that will give due recognition to vice president as acting president. This led to the adoption of the now popular 'Doctrine of Necessity' by the National Assembly in March 2010 (Igbuzo, 2005).

Kunle (2012) observed that when the federal government unilaterally removed subsidy on petrol or Premium Motor Spirit (PMS), with its attendant increase in fuel prices and hardships on the citizens in January 2012, CSOs, led by the NLC, mobilized Nigerians from all walks of life for what they described as the "mother of all protests". The government reversed the policy in deference to citizens' demand, thereby forestalling unnecessary pressures that could jeopardize the democratic process.

Similarly, a study conducted by CSI (2007) indicates that civil society groups, including the NURTW, have been involved in concerted efforts geared towards resolving issues related to poverty, illiteracy, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, environmental degradation. For instance, 89% of respondents in the study show that civil societies were involved in the provision of micro-credit programs for women, building networks and coalitions of women at local level, to encourage participation in governance, provision of home care and support for people living with HIV/AIDS.

Similarly, the NURTW has made significant contributions towards reducing the rate of unemployment in the country. It is estimated that over 1.5 million people are engaged in the road transport sector (CSI, 2007). An important change in this regard is the increasing number of university and polytechnic graduates' members of the NURTW. Since the 1980s, austerity conditions and the difficulty of white-collar employment have driven many young people to seek employment in the road transport sector.

Since the First Republic in Nigeria, there has been no election conducted without the input of the NURTW. The NURTW makes available its commercial buses to the Electoral Commission for the transportation of not-too-sensitive electoral materials across the country. The Electoral Commission has its internal logistics for movement of sensitive electoral materials. However, transportation of ad-hoc members of the Commission to where they are to oversee voting processes is facilitated by the NURTW.

Apart from their involvement in politics, evidence suggests that the NURTW carry out other important activities in the society. The NURTW has partnered with public and private institutions in road safety campaigns, immunization programmes, family economic advancement programmes, and Road Accident Health Insurance Scheme (RHIS). In Ado-Ekiti, an officer of the NURTW explained that the union takes care of road accident victims for 48 hours before family members arrive to take over from union officers (Interview, 30th November, 2011). Also, the NURTW has been active in the campaign against the spread of HIV/AIDS. In various states of the federation, the union has collaborated with the Family Health International in Nigeria, Society for Family Health, and National Action Committee on AIDS (NACA) to create awareness and enlighten drivers about the dangers of HIV/AIDS.

The NURTW holds regular meetings with Vehicle Inspection Officers (VIOs), the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) and other government road traffic agencies. At such meetings drivers are told the importance of having valid vehicle particulars and keeping their vehicles in good and road worthy state. They also teach drivers to behave well to passengers. The height of such training workshops is usually from September of every year through to December when there is heavy vehicular traffic on the roads. The FRSC usually intensifies its activities in teaching drivers to avoid over-speeding and drinking alcohol while driving. These efforts have contributed to reducing accidents on the roads.

4.3 Partners in Democratisation? National Union of Road Transport Workers and Political Parties in Nigeria

Past and emerging studies on the role of civil societies in a democratic system have tended to focus more on the roles of conventional civil society groups such as interests' groups, NGOs, political parties, and others, in the consolidation processes of a state's democracy. Although, Ismail (2009), Lindell and Utas (2012), Momoh (2000) have, in their various studies, interrogated the microcosmic politics of civil societies' in the democratization process of Nigeria, scant attention has been devoted to the NURTW both as an agent and a threat to the democratization experience in Nigeria. As captured by Agbiboa (2018), the NURTW whose activities in its early years of formation from 1978 until the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme, as a professional association of transport workers, were critical to Nigeria's democratization process has unfortunately morphed into anti-democracy daredevil and a major inhibitor to the continuation and consolidation of Nigerian democracy.

Locating its emergence within the widespread crisis of the structural adjustment programme (SAP) of the 1980s in Nigeria, Agbiboa (2018: 2) explains the transformation of "Agberos" (from passenger callers) to violent extortionists in the light of their tacit incorporation into the NURTW as tax collectors and foot soldiers for the union's dirty political work. For Agbiboa (2018: 2), the unionization of "Agberos" (group of persons that help other commercial bus owners or drivers to call or look for passengers in exchange for a token) and the widespread crisis of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the 1980s in Nigeria accounted for the transition of the NURTW from a pure, civil and professional association of 'agberos' to a dreaded and daredevil anti-democracy force.

The Structural Adjustment Programme of the 1980s, according to Agbiboa (2018) and Momoh (2000), occasioned ridiculous increments in the prices of food items and transportation costs whilst education became the prerogative of the rich alone. Meantime, incomes of the working class and small-scale business owners became so devalued and financially impotent. With the battered socio-economic and disarticulated economic support base occasioned by the SAP years, youths across the country were pushed to the limits; and with their survival already on the fringes, they ended up being both the victims and agents (Momoh, 2000). This socio-economic condition became worsened when successive Nigerian governments tacitly began to shy away from their social responsibilities, in terms of social provisions. The disempowering economic and social conditions and the blurring of the putative boundaries between what is 'informal and what is not or illegal, regulation and irregularity, order and organized lawlessness, along with the official unionization of the agberos as the NURTW in 1978 as an officially recognized union combined to emplace the NURTW on the path of political incivility and antidemocratic enterprise.

Agbiboa (2018:12) demonstrated how these aforementioned conditions accounted for the transition and changing roles of the NURTW from a union of agberos, to a group of political thugs and instruments of political violence in the hands of unscrupulous political gladiators and political parties (Agbiboa, 2018). Amongst the ranks and file of the NURTW are two sets of groups; the "Erukus" (the daredevils or merchants of death) and those that occupy the executive positions within the union, or "Olori" (Agbiboa, 2018:12). The "Olori" (or leaders) group is closer to the government and political party chieftains.

The Oloris have access to overseas travels, secure investments, and they wine and dine with the powers-that-be amongst the political class. The Oloris are elites in their own right. This reflects in the humongous amount of money, which many Oloris receive as daily revenue. Such funds are pocketed with little or no accountability. Agbiboa (2018: 13) claims, for instance, that an Olori who was chairperson of the NURTW at a branch level (street or junction or terminus level within a state) earned close to \$190 (#60,000) daily. Depicting a clearer picture of the mind-boggling monies that go into the coffers of the NURTW Oloris, Agbiboa asserts:

While it is difficult to estimate the number of buses plying Lagos roads, one senior agbero in Oshodi claims that 'The union chair for Lagos State pockets up to 5 million naira [\$31,250] daily from the different units under him. Upon receiving this sum, the chairman is expected to 'declare surplus'—that is, to 'circulate' the returns among other higher union executives, police inspectors, local council chairmen, and party officials (Agbiboa, 2018: 15).

The huge revenue collected by the NURTW and the rapid and visible social mobility easy wealth facilitates, explains why the union remains the most politicized, factionalized, and violent in Nigeria (Agbibo, 2018). Buttressing Agbibo's position, Albert argues,

Every member of the union aspires to become a chairman—whether at branch, city, state, zonal or national level. This partly explains why the members regularly engage one another in bloody skirmishes. It explains why NURTW members and members of other transport unions kill each other in defense of their position in most Nigerian cities (Albert, 2007: 130).

The *erukus* (the foot soldiers and ordinary members within the union), on the other hand, are very loyal to those at the top who reward them handsomely for their loyalty. The *erukus* aspire to rise through the ranks one day and become, through what can be termed “class migration”, Oloris (leaders) and patrons to other *erukus* and other members of the union.

The *erukus* are, mainly recruited from a large and ready pool of unemployed area boys roaming the streets of Lagos, many of whom were born into poverty and live a life of desperation and street violence. Many *erukus* migrated to Lagos from neighbouring states, especially during the dire economic years of the SAP, to ‘become somebody in life.’ Most *erukus* are from ‘extended’ families, with a mother in one place and a father in another. It is not enough to be unwaged; you must also be feared in your area/street to stand a chance of being courted by the NURTW as an *eruku* in Lagos (Agbibo, 2018: 12).

While there is hardly any direct connection between the NURTW foot-soldiers (*Erukus*) and the political gladiators of political parties, the foot-soldiers occupy a central place in the chain of political violence usually sponsored by desperate political gladiators. Since its creation in the 1970s, for instance, the political party in power in Lagos has always tended to give the NURTW leadership, especially those that worked for, and supported, its candidatures, the freedom ‘to do and undo’ within motor-parks across Lagos (Agbibo, 2018).

The union engages in patronage politics and systematic voter mobilization to support the various parties and candidates with whom it forges political alliance over time in return for freedom to levy taxes in motor parks, junctions, and bus terminals in lucrative sites where “issues pertaining to social, cultural, economic and political domains fold together in exceptionally dense ways” (Stasik, 2017: Page?). During the 1980s, NURTW played a central role in the Second Republic elections, which earned them enormous power and impunity to run motor-parks across Lagos. NURTW members took the liberty to create more unauthorized motor-parks from where they violently extorted levies from operators through their battle-ready *agberos*. This gory experience was not limited to Lagos. It resonated with the bad memories of political conflagrations and violence that greeted past pre-election campaigns and actual elections in the past. Thus, Albert (2007) argues that the NURTW dubious autonomy and notoriety is protected by politics—most unionists remain very loyal to the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) party in Lagos, and others to the People's Democratic Party (PDP). In such a politically charged environment, violent clashes between rival unions and their *agberos* are the rule of the game, rather than the exception.

The NURTW has morphed into a dangerous harbinger and instrument of political violence in the hands of political parties, constituting credible threat to Nigeria's democratic experience. The NURTW-Political Parties' political romance and marriage of “rub-my-hand, I rub-your-back” has had the dual effect of weakening not only formal state capacity, but also the country's nascent democratization process. Emboldening the NURTW to gain a stronger foothold over the management and control of motor parks in exchange for political patronage, political parties in power have been indirectly complicit in the militarization of elections and weaponization of violence and thuggery as strategies to winning an election. The weaponization of the NURTW in series of violent political conflicts that ensued between Adedibu (late Political Godfather whose political patronage had determined to a large extent the choice of past Governors in Oyo State since 1999) and Ladoja (A former Oyo State Governor, 2003-2007) is instructive.

The fall-out between Rashidi Ladoja, and Chief Lamidu Adedibu pitted different factions of NURTW loyal to both political juggernauts in Oyo State against each other, leading to a state-wrecking political Armageddon and conflagration in Oyo state in 2007. During this period, motor-parks, bus-stops, junctions in the whole of Oyo state, most especially in Ibadan metropolis, became theaters of war and violence with several casualties and material destructions. The eventual fallout between the duo of Adedibu and Ladoja inhered in Ladoja's attempt to end godfatherism and Adedibu's overbearing influence on Oyo state's governance and treasury. In the 2003 general elections, Adedibu endorsed Ladoja as the ruling PDP (Peoples Democratic Party) gubernatorial candidate whilst deploying his ability to mobilize violence (the NURTW *Erukus* – those that do not have any purpose but cheaply available for negative activities including thuggery and violence hirelings from politicians) and money to rig the elections in Ladoja's favour.

Ladoja, having won and completed his first term in office as governor of Oyo state between 2003 and 2007, later attempted to decapitate and break away from Adedibu's godfatherism and influence by denying him access to the treasury and the opportunity to anoint members of the Oyo state executives in Ladoja's cabinet. The tensions between Adedibu and Ladoja caused the State House of Assembly to split into two and played out in motor parks, streets, and bus stops across the state (especially in Ibadan) through regular battles between proxy union gangs (Agbibo, 2020: 5). The political friction ended Ladoja's second term governorship bid and further exacerbated NURTW's political notoriety in the political lexicon of Nigeria.

The gory political experiences and untamed NURTW violence and thuggery in Lagos state have not been different. In both the 2003 and 2007 elections, for instance, the then ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) in Lagos

hired the services of members of the NURTW as political thugs to chase away would-be voters in order to stuff ballot boxes and rig elections in favour of their candidates (Agbibo, 2020).

However, the patron-client relationship between political parties and the NURTW is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria. Fourchard curated how the leadership of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) decided to enlist the support of members of the newly-founded NURTW under the leadership of Adebayo Ogundare with an alias “Bayo Success” for electoral victories through political violence, thuggery, vote-buying and when necessary, ballot snatching (Fourchard, 2010: 50). Bayo Success was ultimately given the task of winning all the motor parks in Lagos State for the NPN against the UPN in the 1979 general elections. “Bayo Success” ended up “mobilizing his large clientele of drivers during the 1979 electoral campaign and resorting to violence and killing of his potential opponents in most motor parks in Lagos” (Fourchard, 2010: 50). From this period onwards, political parties and gladiators have continued to use the NURTW as thugs to kill political opponents, settle political scores, intimidate voters, disrupt political rallies, rig elections, and spread terror throughout the state. And, the overarching implication of this unholy alliance and relationship in the context of Nigerian politics that has culminated into several unpalatable political pathologies is the systematic destruction and emasculation of Nigeria’s nascent democracy. Arising from this, the question is, as Agbonifo (2021) had raised, any place and logic for effective sanctions? Whilst past realities have proven otherwise especially against the backdrop of government to curtail the excesses of the union within the political and civic spaces, there is now a compelling need for collective and effective sanction system against acts such as political violence, thuggery and hooliganism that may threaten democratization project of the country.

4.4 Empirical Analysis of Findings against the backdrop of the Study’s Objectives

In order to investigate the role NURTW has played as a civil society in the democratization process, a total of 20 members of the Osun state NURTW were purposively selected and interviewed. The respondents established that they were bona fide member of NURTW and affirmed that the leadership of NURTW was decided by transparent elections. Although, majority (66.7 percent) think the government can do something to make NURTW more transparent and democratic, 33.3 percent of the participants thought otherwise. To the latter, there is nothing the government can do to make NURTW more transparent and democratic.

However, 33.3 percent of the respondents claimed that problems usually arose during the course of election. A majority of the respondents seem to have a contrary view as 66.7 percent claimed that problems do not usually arise during the cause of election. All the respondents affirmed that there is effective mechanism for resolving conflicts between members of the NURTW. Unjust idea and selfishness were alluded to as basic triggers of violent conflict within the NURTW. Introduction of new levy and unwillingness of the leaders to leave office after the expiration of their tenure were also singled out as causes of violent conflict within the civil society group. Other causes of violent conflicts submitted by the NURTW members in both Oyo and Osun states include cheating and insincerity on the part of the NURTW leaders, coupled with the untamable quests of new members with vaunted ambition to take over the leadership of the garages.

Slightly more than half of the respondents, i.e. 52.9 percent were of the opinion that government could play a role in promoting internal democracy and transparency within the NURTW. They emphasized that government should enact laws or policies that could guide the union’s internal operations, such as electoral process, and leadership succession. They held that such initiative would make the NURTW more transparent and democratic. The Appendix, however, gives more explicit representations of the NURTW members’ opinions on the role of the National Union of Roads Transport Workers (NURTW) in the democratization process in Nigeria.

The output of another set of 5 NURTW members from the OYO NURTW that participated in this study. Demographically, of the 5 respondents, 4 were between ages 20 to 40 whilst the remaining one respondent was between ages 41 to 50. Specifically, 4 (80.0 percent) affirmed that the leadership of NURTW is by election, while 1 respondent (20.0 percent) was of the view that members became leaders of NURTW by appointment. With regard to transparency, 2 respondents (40.0 percent) believed that the leaders of NURTW were not chosen democratically. 80 percent of the respondents affirmed that the undemocratic process of selection was the major cause of problems during election into leadership positions in the union. However, 1 respondent (20.0 percent) was of the view that the election process was transparent and democratic. NURTW members who participated in this study confirmed that they have effective conflict resolution mechanism and think government can do something to make NURTW more transparent and democratic.

Leaders are chosen by election as majority (80.0 percent) of the respondents affirmed that leaders of NURTW are elected while 4 respondents (20.0 percent) claimed leaders of NURTW may a-times be appointed. 13 (65.0 percent) of respondents established that there is a good relationship between leaders and ordinary members, 3 (15.0 percent) established that ordinary members only support their leaders if they lead by good examples, 2 (10.0 percent) stated that ordinary members cooperate with the leaders to finish their tenure while 2 (10.0 percent) stated that the executives may abuse power towards the ordinary members. However, all the respondents affirmed that both the Union leadership and its followership are always disciplined when the Union’s code of conducts or regulations are flouted. Any erring member or leader is compelled to pay fine, or, in some cases, risks being suspended or dismissed depending on the gravity of the offence. Majority (47.8 percent) of the respondents claimed that leaders alone make the decisions in the NURTW, whilst (26.1 percent) claimed that decisions made within the NURTW are guided by the NURTW constitution (rules and

regulation). Similarly, 17.4 percent of the respondents also acclaimed that leaders seek opinion of the ordinary members before decisions are made within the NURTW while 8.7 percent claimed that ordinary members are allowed to suggest to leaders. On democratic openness, 11 respondents (55.0 percent) asserted that ordinary members have a say in decision making, but 9 (45.0 percent) disagreed.

Participants alluded to the fact that the NURTW usually contribute to the welfare of its members through the provisions of cooperative loans, and financial assistance to needy members. Similarly, NURTW does educate its members on the ethics of transportation. On political partisanship of the Union, 11 respondents (55.0 percent) affirmed that members of NURTW usually belong to one political party or the other whilst 9 (45.0 percent) held that members of NURTW do not belong political parties. However, the 20 respondents (100 percent) agreed that most members of the NURTW always support the ruling party. 12 (52.2 percent) affirmed that there is a cordial relationship between NURTW and political parties since most members of the NURTW are equally members of political parties, while 11 (47.8 percent) claimed the relationship between NURTW and political parties was purely economic and business-oriented.

4.5 Link between Political Parties and the NURTW

Members of different political parties who participated in this study in Oyo state affirmed that NURTW play a critical role in the development of Nigeria's nascent democracy. Also, they affirmed that very often the rank and file of the NURTW lines behind the political party supported by the chairman of the NURTW. Majority (85.7 percent) of the respondents affirmed that ordinary members are always free to express their dissatisfactions on any activity or event within the Union. In addition to the afore-mentioned, members of the Union are believed to be at liberty to criticize their leadership in the event of social deviations. However, 14.3 percent of respondents hold that ordinary members are not free to criticize the leadership or the chairman of NURTW under any guise.

Respondents admitted that election into offices in the NURTW was always tense and violent. They claimed that as NURTW members, they could change their leaders and take over the leadership of the Union and the garage. Specifically, 71.4 percent claimed that there were no rules and guidelines guiding election. However, 28.6 percent claimed that although there were rules and guidelines guiding election, such rules were hardly respected by members of NURTW. Similarly, 85.7 percent believed the most important tool for getting things (elections inclusive) done within the NURTW is the use of force. The use of force is commonplace whenever a set of dissatisfied or ambitious members or factions of the NURTW decided to overthrow an elected or imposed leadership.

In Osun state, the politicians who participated in this study held that the leaders of NURTW are elected; 50.0 percent were of the opinion that leadership of NURTW is by election, but 25.0 percent held that the election of leaders was determined by both external influence and merit as presented Seventy-five percent (75.0%) of the respondents observed that the relationship between leaders and ordinary members is cordial and 25.0 percent claimed the relationship between leaders and ordinary members is that of a superior and subordinate. And 33.3 percent claimed that within the NURTW, decisions were arrived at through deliberations and agreement among officers from various branches of the union. To the contrary, 16.7 percent claimed that such decisions were shaped by both veto power and suggestion from members. Although, respondents affirmed that ordinary members have a voice in decision making, ordinary members are disciplined when they do wrong, and leaders disciplined when they do wrong, the discipline varies depending on the offence, some of leaders are disciplined by senior executives (in Abuja), sanction by general executive members, by asking them to apologize and ask them to take corrective measure and sometimes sanction from National executives.

Being a member of NURTW entitles the person to promotion, compensation (with a program like 'erin'-laughter) as observed by half of the participants of this study, 25.0 percent stated protection of the interest of drivers and provision of incentives as the contribution of NURTW to the welfare of members. Part of the benefit member enjoy from each other is support each other and compensation with appointment, loans, burrowing, vehicle(s) loading 75.0 percent affirmed that members of NURTW actually belong to political parties as individual not as a body while 25.0 percent stated that members of NURTW do not belong to political parties. As a union NURTW have cordial relationship with political parties as established by 50.0 percent of politicians that participated in this study, 25.0 percent are of the opinion that NURTW is loyal to the government in power because the union is peaceful during this regime and no frequent conflicts. Part of the support NURTW provide to the political parties are encouraging members to get their PVC and vote for their choice of candidate, electoral support and obedient to government but 25.0 percent claimed NURTW does not provide support to the political parties. All of the politicians that participated in this study believed NURTW only support ruling party.

4.6 Citizen's view of relationship between political parties and NURTW

The 33.3 percent of the citizen that participated in this study believed NURTW is an association of public transport operator whose members are violent (touts, thugs and reckless) and 16.7 percent believed the NURTW as a union is non-government organization and an association/union of idle few feeding on the working majority. Most (66.7 percent) citizens believed NURTW is not a peaceful civil organization while 33.3 percent claimed NURTW is a peaceful organization. 66.7 percent think the NURTW as a body is making contribution to the progress of the society as against the 33.3 percent of the citizen that participated in this study who think the NURTW as a body does not make contribution to the progress of the society.

All the citizen that participated in this study think the NURTW has no good features the larger society can emulate, 41.2 percent sees NURTW members as instrument for electoral violence, 23.5 percent mentioned smoking as part of the negative characteristics of the NURTW they know, lawlessness is another negative characteristic of the NURTW members noted by 11.8 percent of the citizen and 5.9 percent also listed robbery as part of the negative characteristics of the NURTW they know. Most (66.7 percent) of the citizens don't believe the government is making any attempt to change such negative characteristics while 33.3 percent affirmed that they are aware of attempt by the government to change such characteristics. However, the entire citizen that participated in this study think government can influence the NURTW to become a better organization.

Half of the citizen that participated in this study sees the relationship between the NURTW and political parties as partnership, 33.3 percent believe the politicians do equip NURTW members with weapons to fight against the opposition of the politician and 16.7 percent believed the relationship between the NURTW and political parties is determined by politicians. The entire citizen that participated in this study agreed that politicians use NURTW members as thugs and try to help politicians win election. 75.0 percent asserted that politicians use NURTW to gain political favor. However, the entire citizen that participated in this study agreed that the NURTW contributes to violent and fraudulent in electoral process in Nigeria and agree that the NURTW is a violent organization. 60.0 percent believed the NURTW is a democratic organization while 40.0 percent does not believe NURTW is democratic and advised that for NURTW democratic to be democratic; government should take full control of the garage with ability to hire and fire members, government should monitor, regulate the activities of the union and government should set education criterion for being NURTW leader.

4.7 Perceptions of members of Police Force on relationship between NURTW and political parties

The relationship between the Police and NURTW is cordial as attested to by the police officers that participated in this study in Oyo state as presented in Table 4.5. The police have different impression of NURTW members, some of which are the organization monitoring activities of vehicle, people who always assist police when hoodlums attack police during traffic control, set of illiterates and thugs. All the police that participated in this study affirmed that the NURTW members or its leaders usually support political parties and the NURTW as organization or individual member do take cases against other members to the police to settle for them when there is conflict between them, the police that participated in this study also affirmed that conflict mostly arise within the NURTW during removal or replacement of union leaders. The between members of NURTW and some other groups in the society is said to be cordial as stated by the police officers that participated in this study. 75.0 percent of the respondents believed that membership of NURTW is compulsion while 25.0 percent believed membership of NURTW is voluntary. Money and Power are what the police noted to be the major thing that causes violent conflict within the union, removal or replace of union leaders and lack of coordination are other things that cause violent conflict within.

The relationship between the Police and NURTW is also cordial in Osun state as attested by 85.7 percent of the Police officer that part took in this study as shown in Table 4.6, while 14.3 percent claimed that police serves as security to NURTW. The impression of majority (71.4 percent) of the police officer that part took in this study about the NURTW is that the NURTW members are not thugs, illiterate but radical and aggressive people that talk like thugs while 28.6 percent sees NURTW as association of transport workers. All the Police officer that part took in this study establish the fact that NURTW do involve in violence against some other groups in the society and the NURTW as a union and its members do bring cases against other members. 36.4 percent of the police officers believed that change of power is part of the factors that is responsible for conflict within the NURTW, 27.3 percent believed women related issues is usually responsible for conflict within the NURTW, and 18.2 percent believes money related issues and refusal to leave office are usually responsible for conflict within the NURTW respectively. Majority (85.7 percent) of the respondents acknowledged that NURTW or its leaders usually support political parties while 14.3 percent believed that NURTW or its leaders does not support political parties. The police officers believed all the NURTW members and leaders that usually support political parties do so with violence.

5. Conclusion

This study draws together findings, both qualitative and quantitative, to buttress the argument that political parties are hardly the democratic high ground from which democratic practices flow to civil society groups. Evidences suggest that the relationship between political parties and civil society groups is better captured as one wherein civil society groups actively engaged in influencing democratic political parties. The NURTW is not a cultural and civil society group waiting to be mobilized and socialized in democratic culture by political parties. Instead, the NURTW retains and actively propagate its undemocratic culture, shaping the political party in rather undemocratic courses. At the same time, there is little evidence that the political party attempts to, or is successful in, influencing the NURTW along democratic paths. Evidence suggests that the NURTW has become largely an uncivil society from what it used to be in its formative years when it had tremendous impact on both Nigeria's democratic space and economy.

Rather than supplement and fortify the democratic base of the nation, activities of the NURTW have further compounded the woes of the democratization project. The study finds that a consistent pattern of electoral violence, military-styled and dictatorial nature of leadership, lack of accountability and transparency has engulfed the internal

experience and project of the NURTW. For instance, an overwhelming 95.2 percent of respondents from the NURTW affirmed that the union's election process was usually not transparent and democratic. Moreover, there was no regular election of officials to run the affairs of the union, and elections were held only to fill in vacant positions at the state and national levels. Such elections, usually, were held at the national tier of leadership, and rarely at the state level. As a result, elections were high stake events that always led to large-scale violence. Thus, a respondent claimed that while elections were organized at the national level, it was survival of the fittest at the local level.

The NURTW should ordinarily be seen as one of the bastions of democracy in a presumably democratic society given its objective to secure, protect and advance the interest of its members. However, given that the NURTW hardly allows for democratic participation, transparency and accountability, its existence and activities have been adversarial to, and in some instances destructive of, Nigeria's democratization project. For instance, when union leaders decide to sit tight rather than relinquish power, it elicit grievances and resentment of others who may then resort to the usual ways of power-grabbing otherwise known as "Ja gaaraji gba" (let us go and hijack the garage or moto park). Problems and internal practices that have turned out to be undemocratic and antithetical to internal democracy of the Union have become largely endemic, institutionalized and widely embraced by most members of the Union.

The internal culture of the NURTW seems to have remained impervious to changes along democratic line as would be expected in a democratizing society. Instead, the relationship between the NURTW and political parties seems to be heavily shaped by the undemocratic features of the former. The NURTW often deploys its garage characteristics of unaccountability and violent modus operandi in the service of political parties, which seek to win elections by all means. In effect, the undemocratic internal practices of the NURTW find its way into the larger supposedly democratic political space. By making its violent tools available to political parties, the NURTW water down the democratic credentials of political parties, undermining the democratization project. Hence, the finding directs attention to the greater need to examine the nature of relationships between democratic institutions and civil society groups. It can no longer be assumed that democratic institutions make positive impacts on civil society groups or that the latter are neutral or incapable of influencing the former in undemocratic directions.

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