

From Ruling Party to Opposition Party: The People's Democratic Party in Nigeria's 2015 General Elections

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to examine the factors that led to the defeat of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Nigeria's 2015 general elections after dominating Nigeria's political landscape since the return to democracy in 1999.

The methodology of the paper is qualitative and conceptual. The issues were analysed under various themes. The data were gathered through the secondary method of data collection such as textbooks, journal articles, reports of election observer teams, party constitutions, workshop papers, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) documents, the Electoral Acts and the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The analysis of the information gathered helped to dissect the circumstances that were responsible for the electoral defeat of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) by the current ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) in the 2015 general elections.

The research discovered that some factors were responsible for the defeat of the PDP in the 2015 general elections, chief among them is the abysmal lack of internal party democracy in the party. The paper asserts that though political parties are indispensable institutions in a democracy, for them to make fundamental contributions to democracy, they must, among other things, adhere to the tenets of internal party democracy in order to sustain their electoral strength and make a profound contribution to democratic growth.

Keywords: *Political parties, Peoples' Democratic Party, Internal party democracy, Elections, democratic consolidation.*

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INTRODUCTION

After about two decades of military rule and convoluted transition programmes, Nigeria returned to democracy on May 29, 1999. From that period up to 2015, the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), which is one of the political parties registered in 1998, dominated the political landscape, winning all the presidential elections and most states and national assembly elections. These were in 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011.

While it would be unfair to assert that the PDP did not record any achievement in its operations in country when it was in power, it is instructive to note that a lot of contradictions characterized its operations. Not sooner than later, the party became embroiled in internal crisis. This resulted in frequent change of the party's leadership through presidential interference, mass defection including those of the founding founders, lack of internal party democracy, especially in its candidate nomination procedure, Obasanjo's Third Term bid, the infamous re-registration exercise, failure to tackle corruption, insecurity, poverty, failure to adhere to the internal zoning arrangement among others'

As a result of the above, the party's level of cohesion was negated as members were embroiled in disagreement and litigation struggles. It became an instance of "things fall apart" and the centre could no longer hold as the party which one boasted it would rule for at least one hundred years uninterrupted was defeated after just fifteen years by the opposition All Progressives Congress in the 2015 presidential elections. Even after the defeat it suffered, the party remains largely factionalized, having two national chairmen engrossed in litigation and the state chapters remain highly polarised.

The purpose of the study is to unveil the significant role that internal party democracy plays in party cohesion and electoral victory with the objective of promoting the adherence to the its doctrine by the stakeholders in the Nigerian democratic project. The implication is that, for political parties to sustain their electoral strength, they must not stubbornly derail from the doctrines of internal party democracy which was the major stroke that broke the back of the PDP. It is also pertinent to note that the problems that are being encountered by the PDP are characteristic of 'catch all' parties with its concomitant membership composition of different ideological disposition.

For in depth understanding of the issue at stake, the paper analysed the ideal characteristics of political parties, functions of political parties, historical development of political parties in Nigeria, the formation of PDP, its objectives and electoral strength as well as the factors that led to

its defeat in the 2015 elections. The recommendations fashioned out would help in repositioning Nigeria's political parties in order to be able to make fundamental contributions to democratic stability in the country.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Political parties are pre-eminent institutions in contemporary democratic governance. There is a widespread believe in comparative politics and among policy makers that political parties perform critical roles in promoting and strengthening democracy whether fledgling and established ones. This is lent credence to by the assertion that political parties led to democracy and modern democracies are inconceivable if divorced from political parties. The significance of political parties in the running of contemporary politics and governance dates back to the origin of the nation states (Schattschneider, 1941).

Edmund Burke contends that a political party refers to “a body of men united for promoting their joint endeavours, the national interest upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed (Churchill, 1963). Modern political parties manifest three distinct hallmarks which were absent in Burke's definition; in the first instance, political parties are now more organised and centralised bodies characterised by bureaucratic structures, offices and paid staff. Secondly, not all contemporary parties work in line with national interest as some have objectives which could be regional, ethnic, racial, religious or economic goals. Thirdly, the essence of political parties is to compete for power in order to capture political office and control the allocation of resources (Hague and Harrot, 2007). The character, pattern and roles of political parties have continued to evolve in response to the socio-economic and political dynamics in the society. As a matter of fact, the way and manner in which political parties are viewed have fundamentally changed in the course of time (Maiyo, 2008).

The tendency to compete as well as the quest to attain power and govern is a major feature of modern political parties. It is against this backdrop that Sartori (1976 : 63) defined a political party as “any group identified by an official label that present at elections and is capable of placing through elections, candidates for public office”. However, it is instructive to point out that this definition failed to make reference to the crucial role political parties play in respect of organization, interest aggregation and articulation (Maiyo, 2008).

A political party can also be referred to as a group of like-minded people who join together to achieve political office. In as much as the

capturing of power is a crucial intention of political parties, not all of them can aspire to realize that objective; some only strive to have representatives in government (Holmes, 2008).

Political parties, though not all, exhibit certain characteristics. In the first instance, a political party is often characterised by recognisable political ideology- a set of political beliefs which influence members who share similar views to join. However, ideologies could also be divisive and such , experience of democratization in the contemporary era show that parties no longer religiously scout for people of the same ideological disposition in their membership drive. Hence, they have become “catch all parties”, making appeals to people of varied ideological leanings to join as members (Holmes, 2008).

Secondly, a political party has a programme which implies a variety of policy commitments which make it distinct from other political parties. In some cases, some minor parties tend to place emphasis on a single or a few issues. More so, nowadays, evidence about the possibility of different political parties building consensus on some matters of common interests.

The third hallmark of a political party is the existence of the party’s constitution stipulating its rules and defines its organizational structure. It also has a leadership with explicit responsibilities. However, this is not a peculiar attribute as other organizations such as clubs and pressure groups possess this feature as well (Ball, 1993).

Functions of Political Parties

In liberal democratic setting, political parties play democratic functions. Political parties also exist even in authoritarian societies but more often than not, only one political party exists in such a political arrangement whereas in liberal political environment, the number range from two and above. Ball (1994) and Holmes (2008) stressed that among the ideal functions of political parties are the following:

Political parties unite, simplify and stabilizes the political process. Parties harmonise sectional interests, surmount the challenges posed by geographical distances and makes the divisive structures of the government to be more coherent. The bridging roles of political parties is an essential ingredient for political stability. In their pursuit of power, political parties bring orderliness to a hitherto anarchic situation. They widen the scope of the interests they represent and get them aggregated. This brings diverse

interests into the political process and strives to satisfy the various demands. Regardless of the type of political system, political parties do not only struggle for power through competitive elections but they also ensure that the societal divisions are curtailed.

Political parties provide a link between the government and the governed. Through the instrumentalities of the mass media and local organizations, they create awareness among those who are not informed concerning government policies and programmes. This happens during elections and beyond when the need arises to mobilize the population and garner support either to win elections or for government policies.

Political parties perform the essential role of recruitment of political leaders. The parties nominate the candidates for election to enable the electorates exercise their political rights. In this way, the diverse segments of the society would be represented.

Political parties also perform electoral functions by contesting elections. This is the most fundamental activity in a democratic society. They unveil their manifestoes to the electorates to offer them choices to select from.

Political parties perform the role of participation. They strive to influence people to join them as members, source funds from their supporters, select or elect those that would fly their flags at general elections and make frantic efforts to campaign for their candidates to enable them win elections.

Other functions performed by political parties include fund raising, ideological and policy, educational and communication functions.

Historical Development of Political Parties in Nigeria

The history of political parties in Nigeria dates back to the colonial era when the elective principle was introduced. The first political party in Nigeria, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) was founded by Herbert Macaulay in 1923. The major pre-occupation of the political parties in the colonial era was to press for the attainment of self rule (Osumah and Ikelegbe, 2009).

The First Republic political parties were regionally-based and manifested a great deal of ethnic sentiment and other forms of primordial cleavages. The Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) was a reincarnation of the northern socio-cultural organisation known as the Jamiyar Mutenan

Arewa and it, as such, manifested bias towards northern agenda and lacked national outlook. The Action Group (AG) was an offshoot of the Yoruba cultural organization, the Egbe Omo Oduduwa and was dominated by the West especially the Yorubas. The National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) was dominated the people of Eastern Nigeria particularly the Igbos. The above parties displayed anti-democratic inclination and that contributed largely to the collapse of the First Republic through the bloody coup d'état of January 15, 1966 (Dode, 2010).

As a result of the weaknesses of the First Republic political parties, General Murtala Muhammed initiated a transition programme aimed at repositioning the political parties in the Second Republic to ensure they have a national outlook. Five political parties were registered. These were the Great Nigeria Peoples' Party (GNPP), the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), the Peoples' Redemption Party (PRP) and the National Peoples' Party (NPP) (Ibodje and Dode, 2005). From all indication, all the political parties, with the exception of the GNPP, were the reincarnation of the defunct First Republic political parties and as such they failed to contribute meaningfully to democratic growth. The political leaders used their positions to accumulate wealth to the detriment of national development. The military, once again, deemed it plausible to intervene and terminated the regime of Alhaji Shehu Shagari on December 31, 1983 (Yaqub, 2002).

When General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida overthrew the Buhari regime on August 27, 1985, he later put in place the Political Bureau with the aim of repositioning the Nigeria's political system (Dode, 2010). Dissatisfied with the composition of the political parties, Babangida established two political parties, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC). After a protracted and controversial transition programme, Babangida annulled the June 12, 1993 presidential elections widely believed to be free and fair and presumed to have been won by the candidate of the Social Democratic Party, Chief M.K.O Abiola. The political stalemate and imbroglio generated by the annulment forced Babangida to 'step aside' and handed over power to the Interim National Government (ING). Thus, Babangida's transition could be aptly described as 'transition without end' (Diamond, 1997).

General Sani Abacha overthrew the ING on November 17, 1993. Abacha's regime registered five political parties out of the eighteen that applied for registration. These were the Congress for National Consensus (CNC), the Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN), the Grassroots Democratic Movement (GDM), the United Nigeria Congress Party (UNCP) and the National Conscience Party of Nigeria (NCPN) (Yaqub, 2002).

It later turned out that General Abacha himself was nursing a self-succession agenda and masterminded the activities of the political parties to suit that ulterior using his incumbency advantage and the instruments of coercion. Among the aforementioned political parties, the UNCP was more notorious as a tool in this plot and in the National Assembly elections conducted, it won more than 80%. The anti-democratic political manipulation reached a shameful dimension when all the five political parties were ostensibly orchestrated to adopt General Abacha as their presidential candidate, vindicating Chief Bola Ige's description of the parties as the 'five fingers of a leprous hand' (Dode, 2010). Incidentally, Abacha died in office before the completion of the transition programme (Yaqub, 2002; Alfa 2012).

Formation of The Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP)

The successful completion of the Abdulsalami's transition program and handover of power to the democratically elected government in 1999 marked the beginning of the Nigeria's Fourth Republic. However, the formation of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) could be traced to the bold and courageous step taken by a group of eminent but disenchanted Nigerians known as the G18 in 1997. The group was aggrieved by the militarization of the country's political landscape during the Abacha's regime which was skewed to facilitate Abacha's transmutation bid. The group later broadened its membership to thirty four (34). The fundamental aspiration of the group was the unconditional opening of the political landscape. The group went ahead to even give a deadline to Abacha to handover to a democratically elected government. However, Abacha had not responded to the demand of the group before he died in office in 1998 (Osumah and Ikelegbe, 2009).

Following Abacha's death, General Abdulsalami Abubakar who succeeded him liberalized the political landscape. Consequently, many political associations that could not secure registration under Abacha collaborated with the G34 and formed the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and was formally registered on July, 1998 (PDP 2011), with Chief Solomon Lar as the inaugural National chairman (Odukoya, 2013).

Objectives of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP)

Like other political parties in democratic settings, the PDP has certain objectives which it seeks to achieve (Kura 2009). Among such objectives are democratization, national reconciliation, to build a genuine political

and fiscal federalism, ensuring a just and equitable distribution of wealth, creating opportunity to implement power shift arrangement, rotation of the key political positions, observance of the rule of law, social justice and egalitarian society, ensure independence of the judiciary and eradication of illiteracy among others (PDP, 1999).

The Electoral Fortunes of The Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP)

From 1999 when the first presidential election in the Fourth Republic took place to 2015, Nigeria had witnessed five (5) general elections. Those elections encompass the presidential, governorship, national assembly and state assembly elections. The 1999 elections marked a watershed for the Peoples’ Democratic Party The results of the election proved the dominance of the PDP and this was consolidated in the subsequent elections. However, after 2007, the influence of the PDP began to decline until it was eventually defeated in the 2015 general elections by the opposition All Progressive Party (APC) (Katsina, 2016).

The following tables show the various elections and PDP’s electoral fortunes:

Table 1. Presidential Elections Results, 1999-2011.

S. No.	Party	1999		2003		2007		2011		2014	
		Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes	%
1.	AD/APP	11,110,287	37	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2.	ANPP	—	—	12,710,022	32	6,605,299	18	—	—	—	—
3.	APC	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	12,853,162	44
4.	CPC	—	—	—	—	—	—	12,214,853	31	—	—
5.	PDP	18,738,154	62	24,456,140	61	24,638,063	69	22,495,187	58	15,424,683	53

Source: Katsina (2016). Note: AD=Alliance for Democracy, APP=All Peoples’ Party, All Nigeria Peoples’ Party, APC=All Progressives Congress ,CPC=Congress for Change, PDP=Peoples’ Democratic Party.

Presidential Election Results 1999-2015 (Adopted from Katsina 2016)

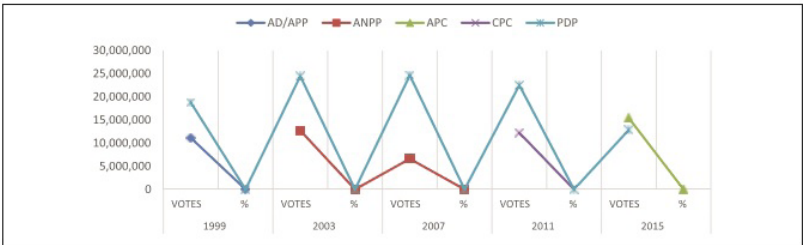


Table 2. NASS Elections Results, 1999-2015.

S. No.	Party	1999		2003		2007		2011		2015	
		Senate	HoR	Senate	HoR	Senate	HoR	Senate	HoR	Senate	HoR
1.	ACN	—	—	—	—	6	32	18	66	—	—
2.	AD	19	68	6	34	—	—	—	—	—	—
3.	ANPP	23	80	27	96	16	62	7	25	—	—
4.	APC	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	60	225
5.	CPC	—	—	—	—	—	—	7	35	—	—
6.	PDP	67	212	76	223	85	262	72	201	49	125

Source: Katsina 2016.

Table 3. Formation of State Government by Parties 1999-2015.

S. No.	Party	No. of states (1999)	No. of states (2003)	No. of states (2007)	No. of states (2011)	No. of states (2015)
1.	ACN	—	—	1	6	—
2.	AD	6	1	—	—	—
3.	ANPP	9	7	5	3	—
4.	APC	—	—	—	—	23
5.	APGA	—	1	—	2	—
6.	CPC	—	—	—	1	—
7.	LP	—	—	—	1	—
8.	PDP	21	27	28	23	13
9.	PPA	—	—	2	—	—

Source: “Nigeria Elections Coalitions” <http://nigeriaelections.org.gubernatorial.php>.

Note: ACN=All Congress of Nigeria, AD=Alliance for Democracy, ANPP=All Nigeria Peoples’ Party, APC=All Progressives Congress, APGA=All Progressives Grand Alliance, CPC= Congress for Progressive Change, LP=Labour Party, PDP=Peoples’ Democratic Party, Progressive Peoples’ Alliance.

Factors responsible for the defeat of the Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP).

Several factors were responsible for the electoral vicissitudes of the PDP since its establishment in 1998 and the time it was defeated in 2015. The first and foremost with far-reaching implication is the absence of internal party democracy especially with regards to the procedure of nominating candidates for general elections. This led to grievances and bitter rivalries some of which became subjects of litigation in quest to seek redress (Kura, 2009).

The party also had no regards for the rule of law in managing its internal squabbles. This was evident in the way and manner it handled the crisis that emanated from its re-registration exercise which frustrated the former vice president, Atiku Abubakar out of the party (Adeniyi, 2017). The high rate of mistrust among the major stakeholders, occasioned by developments such as the ‘third term’ ambition of President Olusegun Obasanjo which made him to be removing party leadership at will and replacing them with those he wanted created a great deal of division among members (Akindele, 2011; Akubo and Yakubu, 2014).

Another fundamental and critical factor which dwindled the electoral strength of the PDP was failure to fulfil campaign promises. Jonathan's popular campaign slogan of "I went to school without shoes and a school bag; vote for me and I would never let you down" really inspired the masses who voted massively for him in 2011. However, four years later, not much had improved in terms of the living conditions of the citizens and the rate of insecurity became monumental. The abduction of the Chibok school girls and President Jonathan's concomitant lack of proactive measures to locate them and secure their release from the custody of the dreaded Boko Haram insurgents greatly eroded his popularity (Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2016).

Jonathan's regime was characterized by widespread corruption, misappropriation and embezzlement of public fund. To make matters worse, he claimed the corrupt practices were mere stealing and not up to the level to be tagged corruption! He was not in firm control of his regime. Hence, it was humorously said that there were five presidents in his regime and he was the weakest of the five (Obasanjo, 2015; Nwanegbo et al, 2016).

The failure of President Goodluck Jonathan to honour the zoning arrangement of the PDP constituted a major cankerworm that dealt a big blow to the party's internal unity and cohesiveness (Ojougbob, 2015). Given the role former President Obasanjo played in Jonathan's emergence as the president following President Yar'adua's demise on May 5, 2010 and his subsequent election in 2011 on the grounds that he would adhere to the PDP zoning arrangement not to seek re-election in 2015, a crucial factor that led to the defeat of the PDP was the criticism of the president by the former president, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. Obasanjo was opposed to Jonathan's second term aspiration.

The Obasanjo's opposition mentioned above emboldened the opposition and for those still in dilemma, they were persuaded to believe defeating an incumbent president was a realistic mission. Obasanjo helped to weaken Jonathan's fame and popularity both within the PDP and among the generality of Nigerians in the weeks before the elections. Obasanjo's opposition gave an added impetus to the disposition of the United States and British government in their premonition that Jonathan's second term could plunge into chaos. Obasanjo, through his body language encouraged the corporate Nigeria who were characteristically in the habit of supporting the incumbents with huge finance to the exclusion of the opposition to build confidence in Buhari. Buhari then had enormous resources to embark on campaign across the nooks and crannies of Nigeria and in the end defeated the incumbent president Goodluck Jonathan in the 2015 elections (Adeniyi, 2017).

The presence of a mega opposition party, the All Progressives Congress (APC) was another factor that made the PDP to become vulnerable to defeat. Before the emergence of the APC, other opposition political parties had fewer followership and could not garner enough votes to match the PDP. But the merger of Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), All Nigeria Peoples' Party (ANPP), Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) and a faction of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) into one big party provided the platform for an effective opposition that succeeded in wrestling power from the PDP. As such, the PDP was forced to put on the toga of opposition after the 2015 elections and even remained highly factionalized after the election (Katsina 2016; Adeniyi, 2017).

CONCLUSION

Political parties, whether ruling or in the opposition, are indispensable institutions in a democratic society. Nigeria's political history has shown that political parties have not been able to make fundamental contributions to democratic growth. The political parties in the colonial period had a common goal of attainment of self rule. After independence, the First Republic (1960-1966) political parties manifested regional and ethnic cleavages, leading to military intervention in 1966. The Second Republic (1979-1983) political parties were the reincarnation of the First Republic political parties and could not deepen democracy. The political parties in the aborted Third Republic also failed to perform the roles expected of them as Babangida and Abacha masterminded the transition programme aimed at perpetuating their rule.

The Fourth Republic political parties have not been able to make meaningful contributions to democratic consolidation. In the case of the Peoples Democratic Party, its operations have been characterised by lack of internal party democracy leading to internal party wrangling, corruption, non redemption of campaign promises, inability to tackle insecurity, failure of president Jonathan to adhere to the party's zoning formula, effective opposition by the All Progressives Congress among others.

It could be asserted that for a political party to be able to win the confidence of the electorates and sustain its electoral strength, it should be ideologically-based, its elected representatives should be faithful to campaign promises, the stakeholders should observe internal party democracy and follow arrangements within the party such as the zoning arrangement. As exemplified by PDP's defeat any political party that derails from these prescriptions risks the possibility of being voted out of power.

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