

## THE PEOPLES DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PDP) AND NIGERIA'S 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS: WHY WAS IT DEFEATED?

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### **Abstract**

*The essence of this paper is to evaluate the factors that led to the defeat of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Nigeria's 2015 general elections after ruling the country since the return to democracy in 1999. The paper used secondary data 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 unveiled the circumstances that were accountable for the defeat of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) by the All Progressives Congress (APC) in the 2015 general elections. The research asserts that some factors were accountable for the defeat of the PDP in the 2015 general elections, principal among them is the monumental lack of internal party democracy in the party. The paper, therefore contends that though political parties are indispensable elements in a democratic setting, for them to make critical contributions to democratic governance, they must, among other things, stick to the principles of internal party democracy in order to sustain their electoral victory and make a profound input to democratic growth, stability and consolidation.*

**Key words:** Political parties, People's Democratic Party, Internal party democracy, Elections, democratic stability.

### **Introduction**

Nigeria returned to democracy on May 29, 1999 after a long period of military rule. From 1999 to 2015, the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), which is one of the political parties registered in 1998, became the dominant party in Nigeria. It won all the presidential elections and most states and national assembly elections up to 2015. These were in 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011.

While it would be untenable to contend that the PDP did not record any achievement when it was in power, it is pertinent to note that several contradictions characterized its operations. The party became engrossed in intra party crisis. This led to frequent change of the party's leadership through presidential manipulation, mass defection, lack of internal party democracy, especially in its candidate selection processes, Obasanjo's Third Term ambition, failure to tackle corruption, insecurity, poverty, failure to obey the internal zoning arrangement, abuse of incumbency among others.

Consequently, the party's unity was eroded as members were entangled in disagreement and legal tussles. It could not surmount the inherent contradictions and eventually lost the 2015 presidential elections. Even after the defeat it, the party remains largely factionalized, having two national chairmen until it was resolved at the Supreme Court.

It therefore implies that, for political parties to sustain their electoral strength, they must be internally democratic. It is also instructive to note that the problems that are being faced by the PDP are features of 'catch all' parties with its accompanying membership composition and different ideological leanings.

The paper discusses the ideal hallmarks of political parties, functions of political parties, the formation of PDP, its objectives and electoral vicissitudes as well as some explanations for its defeat in the 2015 elections. The recommendations would help in repositioning Nigeria's political parties in order to be able to make enviable contributions to democratic growth and stability in the country.

### **Literature Review**

Political parties are important institutions in contemporary democratic systems. There is an agreement of opinion in comparative politics and among policy makers that political parties perform vital role in promoting and strengthening democracy whether hatchling and established ones. This is vindicated by the assertion that political parties result to democracy and modern democracies are inconceivable if divorced from political parties. The significance of political parties in the operation of modern politics and governance dates back to the origin of the nation states (Schattschneider, 1941).

Edmund Burke avers that a political party means "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 firstly, political parties are now more organised and centralised bodies characterised by bureaucratic structures, offices and paid staff. Secondly, not all modern political parties work in line with national interest as some have objectives which could be regional, ethnic, racial, religious or economic interests. Thirdly, the rationale for political parties is to compete for power in order to capture political office and control the allocation of resources (Hague and Harrot, 2007). The quality, pattern and functions of political parties have continued to change in line with 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 drastically changed with time (Maiyo, 2008).

The tendency to engage in competition as well as the quest to attain power and be in government is a major hallmark of contemporary political parties. It is in view of this 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 pertinent 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 defined as a group of like-minded people who join together to achieve political office. Even though the capturing of power is a primary intention of political parties, not all of them can aspire to attain that goal; some only struggle to have representatives in government (Holmes, 2008).

Most political parties possess certain common characteristics. Firstly, a political party should have a recognisable political ideology. However, ideologies could also be divisive and such, experience of democratization in the contemporary epoch indicate that parties no longer look for people of the same ideological background in their membership drive. As such, they have become "catch all parties", enlisting people of varied ideological wave length to join as members (Holmes, 2008).

Secondly, a political party adopts programmes which are policy commitments that differentiate it from other political parties. In some cases, some less popular parties tend to focus on one or a few issues. Moreover, of late, evidence abounds on the possibility of different political parties agreeing on some matters of common interests.

The third quality of a political party is the existence of the party's constitution, that is, its rules and defines its organizational structure. It also has a leadership with clear responsibilities (Ball, 1993).

Political parties play democratic roles in liberal democracy. Political parties also exist even in authoritarian societies but more often than not, only one political party exists in such a political

arrangement as against the liberal political environment where the number range from two and more. According to Ball (1994) and Holmes (2008) the functions of political parties include the following:

Political parties unite, simplify and make the political process simple. Parties harmonise sectional interests, overcome the challenges posed by geographical distances and makes the divisive structures of the government to be more articulate. The bridging role of political parties is an indispensable tool for political stability. As they pursue power, political parties bring orderliness to a disorderly situation. They broaden the interests they represent and get them aggregated. This brings a wide range interests into the political process and attempts to meet the various demands.

Political parties act as a bridge between the government and the citizens. Through the mass media and local organizations, they inform the people about government policies and programmes. This occur during elections and afterwards when the need arises to mobilize the population to support them either to win elections or to make government policies succeed.

Political parties facilitate the recruitment of political leaders. The parties select the candidates for election to enable the electorates exercise their franchise. Through this, the diverse segments of the population would be represented.

Political parties also perform electoral roles by contesting elections. This is their most crucial activity in a democratic society. They make their programmes known to the electorates to offer the choice to choose from.

Political parties perform participation roles. They strife to sway people to join them as members, source funds from them, select or elect their candidates for the general elections and campaign for their candidates to ensure their victory at elections.

Political parties also carry out other roles which include fund raising, ideological and policy, educational and communication roles.

### **Research Methodology**

The paper is a qualitative research study. The data were collected through the secondary data such as textbooks, relevant journal articles and the internet. The collected data were analysed using thematic method of analysis.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **The Formation of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP)**

The formation of the party could be traced to the bold initiative of a group of 18 Nigerians popularly referred to as the G18. The immediate aspiration of the group was to mount pressure on Abacha's regime to liberalise the political process and at a time Abacha was bent on actualizing his self succession 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).

After Abacha's demise, General Abdulsalami Abubakar who succeeded him opened up the political landscape. Consequently, many political associations that were denied registration under Abacha aligned with the G34 and formed the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and was formally granted registration on July, 1998 (PDP, 2011) (Odukoya, 2013).

#### **Objectives of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP)**

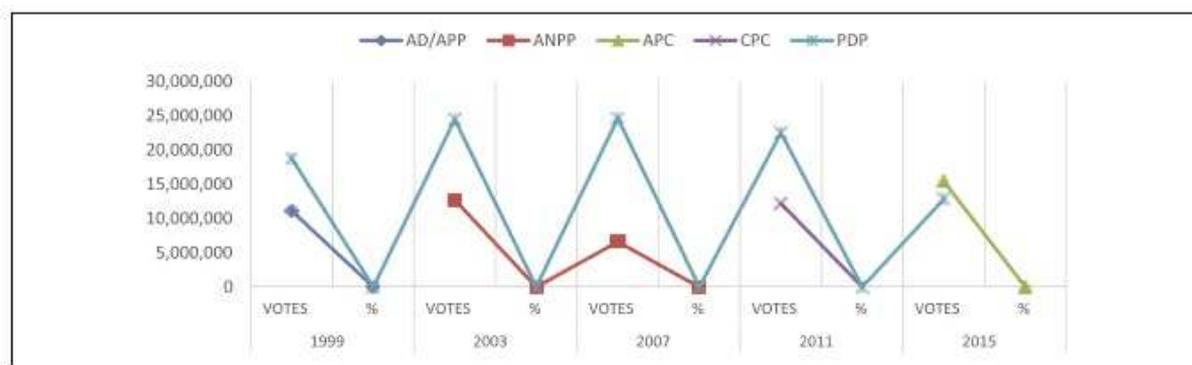
Among the objectives includes but not restricted to democratization, national reconciliation, to build a genuine political and fiscal federalism, ensuring a just and equitable distribution of wealth, creating opportunity to implement power shift arrangement, rotation of the key political positions, observance of

the rule of law, social justice and egalitarian society, ensure independence of the judiciary and eradication of illiteracy among others (PDP 1999) (Kura, 2009).

### The Electoral Vicissitudes of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP)

From 1999 to 2015, Nigeria had witnessed five (5) general elections. Those elections comprise of 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 overbearing dominance of the PDP and this was manifested in the subsequent elections. However, after 2007, the influence of the PDP began to wane until it was overwhelmingly defeated in the 2015 general elections by the opposition All Progressive Party (APC) (Katsina, 2016).

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



### Some explanations for the defeat of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP)

A plethora of factors were responsible for the dwindling influence of the PDP between 1999 and the time of its defeat in 2015 general elections. Chief among them is the absence of internal party democracy especially the way and manner it nominates candidates for general elections. This led to grievances and intra party squabbles some of which became subjects of legal tussles in quest to seek justice (Kura, 2009).

The party also disregarded the rule of law in handling its internal dissent. This was manifested in the way it handled the crisis that emanated from its re-registration exercise which harassed the former vice president, Atiku Abubakar out of the party (Adeniyi, 2017). The high rate of mistrust among the major stakeholders, due to developments such as the 'third term' agenda of President Olusegun Obasanjo which made him to manipulate party leadership at will and replacing them with his preferred candidates created serious division among members (Akindele, 2011, Akubo and Yakubu, 2014).

Another critical factor which negatively affected the electoral strength of the PDP was its failure to execute campaign promises. The abduction of the Chibok school girls and President Jonathan's absence of practical measures to locate them and secure their release from the Boko Haram insurgents undermined his popularity and that of the PDP government (Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2016).

There was a high rate of corruption, misappropriation and embezzlement of public fund under the watch of Jonathan. This was compounded by his claim that stealing could not be equated with corruption! He was not firmly in charge of his regime. Hence, Obasanjo alleged that there were five presidents in his regime and he was the weaker than the rest (Obasanjo 2015, Nwanegbo et al, 2016).

President Goodluck Jonathan failure to honour the zoning arrangement of the PDP constituted a major blow to the party's internal unity (Ojougbah, 2015). As a result of the significant role former President Obasanjo played in Jonathan's emergence as the president after President Yar'adua's demise and his subsequent election in 2011 on the basis that he would be committed to the PDP zoning arrangement not to seek re-election in 2015, a decisive factor that led to the defeat of the PDP was the opposition of the

president by the former president, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. Obasanjo was opposed to Jonathan's second term aspiration.

The aforementioned Obasanjo's opposition gave courage to the opposition and many Nigerians. As such, they were convinced that defeating an incumbent president was possible. Obasanjo helped to undermine Jonathan's popularity both within the PDP and among the generality of Nigerians in close to the elections. Obasanjo's opposition reinforced the feeling of the United States and British government in their believe that Jonathan's second term could plunge the country into anarchy. Obasanjo, by his actions encouraged the corporate Nigeria who were in the habit of supporting those seeking re-election with massive financial support to the neglect of the opposition to build confidence in the opposition candidate, Buhari. With that, Buhari had the opportunity of getting enough resources to embark on campaign across the country making the defeat of the incumbent president Goodluck Jonathan in the 2015 elections a realistic mission (Adeniyi, 2017).

The emergence of a jumbo opposition party, the All Progressives Congress (APC) was another factor that made the PDP to become susceptible to defeat. Before the formation of the APC, other opposition political parties in the Fourth Republic were too small 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 forum for an effective opposition that succeeded in defeating the PDP. Consequently, the PDP was forced of power and became opposition party after the 2015 elections and even remained greatly engrossed in leadership crisis after the election (Katsina, 2016).

## **Conclusion**

Political parties are indispensable organizations in a democratic society. Nigeria's political experience has revealed that political parties have not been able to make expected contributions to democratic consolidation. The Fourth Republic political parties have not been able to make meaningful contributions to democratic consolidation. The Peoples Democratic Party's operations have been characterised by abysmal lack of internal party democracy resulting in internal party crisis, corruption , failure to redeem of campaign promises, lack of political will to tackle the seemingly intractable security issues, failure of president Jonathan to honour the party's zoning arrangement, effective opposition by the All Progressives Congress among others. These contradictions negated its electoral strength and ultimately caused its defeat.

For a political party to be able to win the confidence of the electorates and sustain its electoral strength, its elected representatives should be faithful to campaign promises, the stakeholders should adhere to the doctrines of internal party democracy as well as honour internal party arrangements such as the zoning formula. As shown by PDP's defeat any political party that jettison these realities is vulnerable to defeat.

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