

## **Political Parties and the Nature of Opposition Politics in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Opposition political parties in Nigeria have been battling with the politics of zero sum game where the winner takes all and the loser loses all in a democratic setting since political independence in 1960. The ruling party uses powers of incumbency, state treasury, state apparatus and all advantages of power to emasculate and dominate the political arena. This paper examines the role that All Progressive Congress (APC) and the People Democratic Party (PDP) played as the major opposition political parties in the Fourth Republic. The role of opposition is sacrosanct as it is essential to the smooth running of any representative democracy, the paper recommends that government should, therefore, at all levels strive to do away with any policy that will thwart the effort of opposition because in Nigeria most of the weaknesses of the opposition parties emanate from the incumbents' hostile policies, which are mostly aimed at fragmenting and weakening the opposition groups.

**Keywords:** Democracy, Opposition, Politics, Political Parties and Republic

### **Introduction**

The central role played by political parties in the development and nurturing of a virile democracy and its consolidation cannot be overstated. Where democracy survives for a long period of time, it is because political parties, among other vital institutions, are well established, and have played the role expected of them party politics were introduced in Nigeria in 1922 via the Clifford Constitution, however, its major impediment was the restriction on political participation and representation. The political parties were limited in terms of number, only two of them: the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) and the Lagos Youth Movement (LYM) that emerged in 1934. Their activities were limited to the coastal towns, especially Lagos for the LYM and Lagos and Calabar for the NNDP. This was coupled with the fact that only four people were elected in the polls (Omodia, 2010). Nigeria has come a long way since 1922 in terms of the number and spread of political parties. The number of political parties and their spread seem to give the impression that representation has become an important requirement for the existence of political parties. For example, one of the requirements stipulated for the registration of political parties in the political transition to the Nigerian Fourth Republic was that aspiring political

associations needed to garner at least ten percent of the votes in twenty four out of the thirty six states to qualify for permanent registration (Aina, 2002).

The foregoing requirement seems to suggest that political parties were expected to really show capacity to represent the people. However, in the preparation for the 1999 elections, this requirement had to be watered down to avoid the emergence of a two party system. This was why the Alliance for Democracy was registered as the third party in 1999 (Aina, 2002). Since that time, there has been an exponential growth in the number of political parties, and this has given the impression that the grounds of representation have increased. The number of political parties has grown from three in 1999 to thirty in 2002, fifty in 2007 and about ninety-one today. However, instead of this meaning more representation, it has not. As the number of parties increased their relevance in terms of being channels of representation has diminished (Egwemi, 2009). In fact, the existence of political parties seems to have major threat to political representation in Nigeria today.

This paper examines the activities of political parties and opposition politics in Nigeria with the aim of understanding the development of party politics in Nigeria. It argues that the existence of political parties has not meant political representation in Nigeria. Before going into the discussion, however, a clarification of the key concepts of Political Parties and Opposition Parties is attempted in the next section.

## **Conceptual Clarifications**

### **Democracy**

Democracy is essentially a system of government in which the people control decision making. It is a system of government that ensures that power actually belongs to the people (Omotola, 2006). According to Schumpeter, democracy entails “institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions, which realizes the common good by making the people decide issues through the election of individuals, who are two assemblies in order to carry out its will” (cited in Omotola, 2006, p.27). It is an “institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote” (Omotola, 2006, p.27). Democracy, therefore, from the perspective of this paper is viewed as a governmental process which encompasses the competition for power in order to control political decisions in an atmosphere where civil liberties are exercised.

### **Political Parties**

Political parties are indispensable links between the people and the representative machinery of government. They serve as the motive force in the crystallizing public opinion and as the unifying government agency which make democracy work. A political party is conceptualized as a group of individuals united in principles and decision making with a common goal which is pursued through a democratic process of election.

Liberal view of political parties denotes that they are agencies of an organized public opinion, which operate within a political system just like a machine or a platform for taking part in the struggle for power democratically. The Marxist views political parties as instruments for power, domination and oppression of the proletariat which must lead to struggles where the mass party will emerge to overthrow the existing elite capitalist parties for an egalitarian society.

Political parties may be defined by their common aim. They seek political power either singly or in cooperation with other political parties. In this wise, Schumpeter has opined; the first and foremost aim of each political party is to prevail over the others in order to get into power or to stay in it” (Schumpeter, 1961, p. 279). The distinguishing factor from other groups in a political system is this goal of attaining and/or maintaining political power.

Adigun Agbaje has identified three characteristics that distinguish political parties from other seemingly similarly constituted organizations. These are;

- i. It is a label in the minds of its members and the wider public, especially the elect.
- ii. It is an organization that recruits and campaigns for candidates seeking election and selection into public political office.
- iii. It is a set of leaders who try to organize and control the legislative and executive branches of government (Agbaje, 1999, p.195).

Political parties as one of the most important democratic institutions perform many functions in a democracy as identified by many scholars. Some of these functions include: unite and stabilize the political process; struggling for capturing of power; providing a link between the government and the people; recruitment of political leaders; setting values for the society; brokers of ideas; political modernization most especially in developing democracies; social welfare functions and the role of societal watchdog or opposition. The conception of this paper therefore is that political parties are the political structures and organizations through which people seek political offices, especially in a democratic setting.

### **Development of Party Politics in Nigeria**

The development of political parties in Nigeria must be understood against the wider context of how the political system has developed since independence, as well as in relation to the sense of deterioration of the institutions of governance since the return to democracy in 1999. Nigeria is governed by a presidential system. Over the decades, and following the experience of military rule, the country has seen a centralization of power in the hands of the executive and a progressive weakening of the federal pact upon which Nigeria was founded. However, as political power has been concentrated in the center and in the hands of the executive branch, an intricate body of informal rules of political interaction has also evolved, including through the experience of civil war (the Biafra war) and military rule, by which power is brokered in a way that achieves a sense of stability-at least among elites (Domingo and Nwankwo, 2010, p.3).

At the inception of party politics in 1923, precisely on 24<sup>th</sup> June, 1923, following the introduction of the elective principle of the Clifford constitution, Nigerian political parties had very limited and self-serving objectives. The main objective was, perhaps, that of buying legitimacy for the colonial government through very limited franchise restricted to Lagos and Calabar. Richard Sklar, in his seminal work, *Nigerian Political Parties*, clearly demonstrates how the emergence of political associations, such as the Peoples Union, was only in response to the prevailing realities of colonial administration (Sklar, 1963; Coleman, 1958 cited in Omotola, 2009, p.620). Little wonder, when the first political party in Nigeria, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) emerged in 1923, under the leadership of Herbert Macaulay, its activities were restricted to contesting elections into the Lagos City Council. For years, the UNDP was hegemonic

in its dominance in electoral politics? In the country. This was to be challenged by the Lagos Youth Movement - later the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) which was formed in 1934 and which defeated the NNDP in the elections for the three seats allocated to Lagos that year.

By 1944, the increasing tempo of nationalist agitation had resulted in the formation of another political party – the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC), under the leadership of Herbert Macaulay and later Nnamdi Azikwe (Sklar, 1968, pp.46-50 cited in Omotola, 2009, p.620). This was followed, in quick succession, by the transformation of the Egbe Omo Oduduwa, a Yoruba socio-cultural organization, into a political party, the Action Group (AG) in 1950 under the leadership of Chief Obafemi Awolowo and the Northern People Congress (NPC) in 1959 with dominance in the northern region. By 1951, a breakaway faction of the NPC consisting mainly of radical youths based in Kano formed the Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU). These parties dominated the political landscape of the country, particularly in their respective regions in the march towards independence, and in the First Republic.

Historically, Nigeria's political party formations have been characterized by mobilization leaders, who as founder-leaders, exercised a tremendous influence. Notable examples of such leaders were Obafemi Awolowo of the AG and Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), and Nnamdi Azikwe of the NCNC and National Peoples Party (NPP) in the First and Second Republics (1960–1966, and 1979–1983), respectively. In addition, Sir Ahmadu Bello and Tafawa Balewa were the icons of the NPC in the First Republic, who, though not alive by the Second Republic, nonetheless commanded a mythical presence and inspiration within the NPN in the Second Republic. Such leaders influenced party nominations and other internal party processes to the extent of compromising internal party democracy (Agbaje and Adejumbi, 2006, p.39).

After the second interregnum of military rule (1983–1999), the nature and texture of party politics changed. Political parties were no longer guided by an ideology or specific focus; they were not led by a mobilization leader who could drive and guide their actions and policies, and inspire internal cohesion and discipline. Political parties assumed the character of electoral machines, whose sole aim was to win political power through the ballot. Aspirants were mostly individual actors sponsored by some powerful individuals; because the cost of electioneering had now become astronomical.

Over three decades of military rule, distorted social values and undermined democratic institutions in Nigeria, political parties and civil society inclusive, it was worse for the development of the country's party system. The political parties were in complete limbo, and almost near extinction, courtesy of the numerous military coups and counter-coups that punctuated Nigeria's political history. The rise and fall of the Nigerian military are well documented in the literature on politics and development in Nigeria. Suffice to say, however, that the military held all democratic institutions captive between 1966 (when they first struck) and 1999 (when they retreated in humiliation), except for their occasional ceremonious “stepping aside.”

Weak structures and ineffective operations of political parties made things worse for the electoral environment in the country. Well-functioning political parties are essential for the success of democracy. However, in the particular case of Nigeria, there are limited opportunities for the development of political parties.

## **Nature of Nigerian Political Parties**

Most of the African political parties, including that of Nigeria, emerged from the decolonization process through nationalist movement which mobilized citizens for independence. Thus, African political parties and African democracies at large suffered from traumatic experiences such as revolution, decolonization, independence or severe repression during authoritarian or military regimes. The above denotes that political parties in most African countries and Nigeria in particular by their nature are devoid of ideological or nationalistic values but rather decolonization and later serving other purposes. Such has been the nature of political parties in Nigeria since political independence.

The first set of political parties that emerged in Nigeria were during colonial rule the dominant three were Action Group (AG) for Yoruba West, Northern People's Congress for Northern Hausa/Fulani Muslims and National Council for Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC). They looked ethnic and regional in nature and set the foundation for such outlook in future Nigerian political parties. In the Second Republic, five political parties emerged, namely, NPN, UPN, GNPP, PRP and NPP with the replica of the First Republic party characteristics and orientation. The party system also indicated a multi-party arrangement in both the First and the Second Republic's. In the Aborted Third Republic, only two parties were registered which were the National Republican Convention (NRC) and Social Democratic Party (SDP).

In the Fourth Republic, multi-party system was reintroduced again where from 1999 to date more than fifty political parties were registered, but the PDP dominated power control from 1999 until 2015 when it was defeated by APC. One major characteristic of Nigerian political parties, apart from being ethnic and regional in outlook, is the unofficial domination of one party without allowing the opposition to play any significant role. This has been the trend since the First Republic, Second Republic and the Fourth Republic.

## **Opposition in a Democracy**

The liberal democracy, as it is known today, is a result of protracted struggles and revolutions in Europe between 17 - 19th centuries as led by social forces whose interests and roles were internally linked with the use of capitals (Mmegi, 2009). The Network of Ethiopian Scholars (NES) Scandinavian Chapter, in her June 30, 2005, release, "puts the opposition in a democracy in perspective" argued that in a democracy, there are many types of people who ordinarily wish to stand for election, some may even be people who do not share the same world view. And once an election is held, which is regarded as free and fair, and a set of the people succeeded in persuading the majority public who got more votes than their competitors, it is a fact that those that lost the election have to live with the victorious ones within the period of the rule, as guaranteed by the constitution, and the losers must be ready to wait till the next election.

The operative and operational position, hence, is "free and fair election". This appears to be utopian, especially in the less developed economies of the world. There cannot be any perfect election anywhere in the world because it is a human endeavor. There can, however, be an election that can be regarded as generally representative of the views of the majority of the electorate. Where an election is characterized by rigging, manipulation, violence, thuggery, inadequacy or

insufficiency of electoral materials, substantial noncompliance with electoral rules, it may be difficult to conceptualize the position of the opposition to such regimes.

It must be emphasized that irrespective of how a government emerged, the way to get such government replaced can only be through the instrumentality of the law. By parity of reasoning, the Supreme Court, in the case of *ACB versus Rossek* (1993), in deciding on what could be done where a court has given a decision that is patently wrong, or apparently perverse, has expressed that the only option available to the aggrieved is to obey the order and take appropriate legitimate and legal steps to redress the wrong. He cannot unilaterally refuse to obey the lawful order of the court. The alternative is anarchy. In the same vein, where an electoral body has decided on the winner of an electoral contest, the loser must abide by that decision until same is changed by the election petition tribunal usually put in place by the constitution.

The term “leader of opposition” dates back to 1807 in the United Kingdom, where it emerged initially through the practice in terms of which the leader of a political party not in government with the largest representation in parliament was designated as leader of opposition. This practice later crystallized into a constitutional custom and convention. This convention was eventually given statutory recognition in the passing of the Ministers of the Crown Act 1937 wherein section 10 (1) provides. “The leader of the opposition means a member of the House of Commons who is for the time being the leader of the House of the party in opposition to His Majesty’s Government which has the greatest numerical strength in the house.” Section 10 (3) provides further that if any doubt arises as to which is or was at the material time of the party in opposition to His Majesty’s Government having the greatest numerical strength in the House of Commons or as who is or was at the material time of the leader in that house of such party, the question shall be decided for purposes of this Act by the Speaker of the House of Commons and his decision shall be final and conclusive. Since 1937, when this Act was put in place in the United Kingdom, the leader of opposition has enjoyed certain rights and privileges which include getting paid the same salary as government ministers, an official car, and official residence. The same situation prevails in Commonwealth countries like Australia, Canada and New Zealand. In Botswana, the salaries and allowances act gives the Speaker's authority to designate the leader of opposition without any mechanism provided by the act for designating such a leader. However, in the workings of the state, the speaker usually consults the opposition members of Parliament to determine who they want as a leader.

In the United States of America, there is no designation of opposition in the sense that we have it in the United Kingdom. There exists two party system where a party receives the support of a majority of all voters and thus, is given a clear title to govern the country. Because of the peculiarities of the electoral system in the United States, it is technically possible for one party to win control of one or both Houses of Congress. It was reported that in the 1956 election, the Republicans elected a President and Democrats won control of Congress for the first time since 1848 (Carr, 1951). This state of affairs has repeated itself many times thereafter. What usually happens is that the minority party is usually given the opportunity of choosing a minority leader that usually has some rights and privileges, as any other leader in the Congress.

In Nigeria, the leader of opposition arrangement was put in place in the First Republic in line with what operated in the United Kingdom. Chief Obafemi Awolowo became leader of opposition in the First Republic while it lasted. When the First Republic collapsed, the American

Presidential system was introduced and the Unity Party of Nigeria produced the Minority Leader. The present dispensation has also put in place the position of Minority together with that of Majority Leader. A new scenario was created in Ekiti State where both the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the Action Congress (AC) has an equal number of members in the Ekiti State House of Assembly. The question of which party is the majority party and which is the minority party was in issue. This logjam affected the proclamation of the House for a while until a political solution was put in place where the People's Democratic Party (PDP) nominated the Speaker and the Action Congress (AC) nominated the Deputy Speaker. With the sacking of the Governor of the State by the Court of Appeal sitting in Ilorin and a re-run ordered in a few polling units, the PDP Speaker was appointed the Acting Governor while the AC Deputy Speaker took over as the Acting Speaker.

The Ekiti scenario has properly brought to the fore the need for a harmonious relationship between government and opposition at some point in time. This is because where there is a free and fair election, the pendulum can change at any time as it is witnessed in the United States of America where the Republicans and Democrats are elected into government and voted out at any time or the other. It is not that there are no other parties in the USA. Third parties have in the past won enough support among voters to threaten the majority parties with the possibility that they might gain a balance of power in the political scene (Carr, 1951). This situation has forced the majority parties to pay constant attention to the pressures exerted by third parties and that is the beauty of democracy.

### **Role of Opposition**

Alabi (2009) argues that the opposition is muffled in many parts of Africa because of colonial legacies and cultural factors. Democracy in Nigeria will develop if the opposition appropriately appreciates its role and adequately carries out same with the expected altruistic motives. In the parliamentary system of government as practiced in the United Kingdom, the tasks and responsibilities of the leader of opposition are clearly spelt out and are challenging, especially if the parliamentary duties are considered. Apart from the assigned roles in the Parliament, he is expected to co-ordinate the activities of his party outside Parliament, especially at the level of mass struggle if the opposition must effectively challenge the ruling party

There is usually what is called a shadow cabinet which oversees all segments of the government, provides alternative ideas, and articulates the policies of the party on every policy decision of the ruling party. The Network of Ethiopian Scholars (NES) articulates the position that a key component of democracy is the toleration of dissent, and that the only condition is that dissenters do not engage in violating the rights of others and use of force, deception or fraud to pursue their interests and goals. The group argues further that as long as they express their dissenting voices within the bounds of democratic ethos, there is no reason to bar them from playing an active role in public life.

The foregoing is an area that has to be given a more pragmatic consideration in Nigeria. Opposition must not be for opposition sake, and it must be devoid of violence and must be within the globally accepted standard or best practice. The people in government are not angels; they are human and indeed Nigerians. They are liable to make mistakes and in the same way as the party in opposition. The only duty an opposition party need's is to provide an alternative view and this

must be properly dissected, articulated and effectively communicated to the general public. NES ask the question (as if it is directed at the political class in Nigeria): “Why was it not possible to use debate, dialogue and democratic forum to those whom it thinks have not acknowledged the regime’s self-validated and justified role as having contributed positive good.”

It must be realized by both government and opposition that the aspiration to be in government is for one common goal-service to the people. From the dynamics of the happenings in Nigeria, it is clear that apart from a very few individuals in and out of government, it appears that the majority of the political class are “crass opportunists”. It has nothing to do with any political party and neither does it have any coloration of ruling or opposition party.

The result of the various local government elections betrayed the political class. Where the People’s Democratic Party is the ruling party, all the seats must necessarily be won by that party. Where the controlling party is the Action Congress, all the Local Government Chairmen invariably are members of the Action Congress. Equally, where the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) is the dominant party, then, the seats at the local governments are in the ANPP’s firm control. This trend portends a grave danger and engenders the possibility of muffling the opposition party and that is likely to serve as a negative commentary on democratic rule and ideals. This is what the leadership of the various political parties and those in government swore to uphold.

The oppression and victimization of the opposing elements throughout Nigeria were identified by Awolowo (1966) as one of the factors which led to the collapse of the First Republic. Awolowo also argued that dissent is a hallmark of representative democracy (Awolowo, 1981). The sage argued further: “Surely, Nigeria is big enough under a democratic form of government to accommodate those in government, on the one hand, and that's not in government, on the other hand. Besides, there is always more than one side to any issue. It is the congenital intolerance of the voice of dissent on their part that makes those in government desirous of bringing all articulate elements within their circle of decisive influence in order to silence and stifle such elements”. The principle behind this position is unassailable, but the fundamental of its postulation appears faulty. The position of Awolowo was that, there should not be any arrangement like national or unity government as it is an attempt to stifle the opposition voice. If the essence of national government is to ensure that every segment of the society is given a say in government then there should not be any problem. However, the practice in Nigeria appears to justify the fears expressed by Awolowo. In principle, the muffling, stifling and compromise of the opposition through the instrumentality of the national government is a failure of the opposition parties and not that of the government.

The arrangement of involving all political parties in government is not peculiar to Nigeria. Such a scheme, according to Carr, makes it often seems a party, especially the one in government, is more concerned about advancing the desires of its leaders for personal power, prestige and gain or promoting the interest of a limited few among its followers than in electing its candidates to office who will carry out the promises that have won it the support of the majority of the voters.

For a party in opposition, it is its function to engage in constant criticisms of the governmental policies which are formulated by the majority, to scrutinize carefully the manner in which these policies are administered, and to keep the possibility of alternative legislative policies



and administrative practices constantly in the view of the electorate. The major functions of a political party as identified by Carr are in the main:

- (i) Stimulating the citizenry to take a greater interest in the election and activities of government.
- (ii) Defining political issues of the day and sharpen the choice between alternative paths.
- (iii) Presenting candidates who are committed to announcing position with respect to the issues.
- (iv) Majority party provides the basis upon which government can be operated.
- (v) Accepting the responsibility to govern upon winning the election

It was, then, added that a party must at all times, either in or out of power, constantly ensure that it gauges the mood of the society on all issues and provides appropriate responsible succor to the needs of the society at intellectual and applied levels.

### **Opposition Political Parties in Nigeria**

Opposition politics in developing democracies is not a vibrant activity as compared to their Western counterparts. Most often times, opposition in Nigerian politics is perceived as a threat, an enemy, distraction and an immoral activity that should not be tolerated. Right from the emergence of active politics under the British colonialist's, opposition was never taken lightly by the ruling party. For instance, in Northern Nigeria, the late Mallam Aminu Kano broke away from Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) and formed an opposition party in the North; the Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU). Such development was perceived and threatened with sharp hostility from the ruling NPC in the North. There were reports of persecution, intimidation, coercion and the emasculation of the opposition. In the West, the Action Group crisis in mid 1960s led to a faction of the party between Obafemi Awolowo and Samuel Akintola leading to persecution of the opposition within the intra - party crisis.

The above feat of opposition in Nigerian politics in the First Republic was similarly repeated in the Second Republic between 1979-1984 where the parties were ethnic in orientation and outlook with NPN representing the majority North; UPN stands for the West; NPP established in the East and GNPP as an opposition minority party in the North. The NPN won the Presidency and many states, especially in the North. Opposition parties were suppressed, dominated while the 1983 re-election was allegedly bedeviled with massive rigging by the ruling NPN which rendered the opposition less relevant in the process.

With the return to democratic rule in the Fourth Republic from 1999 to date, the scenario which was obtained in the First and Second Republics emerged most forcefully and consolidated with the ruling PDP dominating almost 80 percent of the total Governorship seats and National Assembly seats while asserting control of national politics at the Presidency. The ruling PDP dominated continuously for straight sixteen years, which was the first time as the longest ruling party in the most stable democracy in the country. The 2003, 2007 and 2011 elections, further witnessed increase consolidation into power at all levels by the PDP. This domination has not been without explanation. There were allegations of massive riggings during elections, violence, corruption, political thuggery, vote buying, divide and rule on opposition parties, intimidation and

subjugation of opposition and their stronghold as well as plotting moles in the opposition parties to scatter the parties and deny them any relevance in challenging the ruling PDP.

However, the above trend was surprisingly and miraculously overturned in the 2015 General Elections where, against all odds, the opposition APC succeeded in overthrowing the ruling PDP with a landslide victory in an unprecedented history making. This feat that took place is not without many obvious factors such as the improvement in the electoral body (INEC), the use of electronic card readers, a strong merger of opposition parties in forming one formidable party; APC with wire withal for challenging the ruling PDP conveniently, serious national issues that made the public to detest PDP and have determination for a change such as corruption; poverty; unemployment; insurgency; illiteracy, etc. Thus, it can be inferred from the above that, but, for the emergence of stronger APC opposition PDP would have continued beyond 2015.

### **Loss of steam**

To be sure, the PDP started strongly by always “checking” on the APC administration. Mr. Metuh would issue a statement or address a press conference on policy matters almost on daily basis. Apart from Mr. Metuh, other outspoken members of the PDP, including a former Minister of Aviation, Femi Fani-Kayode, a former presidential aide, Doyin Okupe, and the Governor of Ekiti state, Ayodele Fayose, variously voiced opposition to the policies and programs of the Buhari administration.

However, along the line, the opposition party lost steam, no thanks to the alleged involvement of some of its leaders in corrupt practices, which the Buhari administration vowed to tackle. Mr. Metuh, who should be the arrowhead of the opposition, became one of the accused. He was alleged to have received, from the office of the National Security Adviser, N400 million from the \$2.1 billion originally meant for arms procurement to fight Boko Haram. The money was allegedly diverted and used to prosecute the 2015 presidential campaign for President Goodluck Jonathan and the PDP. The scandal has since been referred to as #Dasukigate by Nigerians.

Metuh’s arrest and subsequent arraignment over the allegation has dealt a serious blow to the PDP’s ability to check the government of the day and make its positions on national matters known. Unlike the then ACN, which criticized the Goodluck Jonathan administration when it increased fuel price in 2010, the PDP, as Nigeria’s main opposition party, virtually kept mum when the Buhari-led APC government increased the pump price of petrol to N145 from N86.

The opposition party, perhaps, dazed by the corruption allegations against its leaders, and internal wrangling, could not even issue a statement either in condemnation or support. The only notable voice from the PDP that kicked against the fuel price was Governor Ayo Fayose of Ekiti State. Even so, he did not speak officially for the party because it was not his job to do so.

Mr. Fani-Kayode, another outspoken member of the party, who could have kicked against the increase, was in detention and battling to save himself from the allegation that he, as spokesperson of the Jonathan Campaign Organization, benefitted from the Dasukigate scandal. It is therefore safe to assume that many PDP members are unable to voice opposition to the APC government because of the fear that the ongoing corruption probe will soon get to them

## **Opposition Politics in Nigeria**

Opposition politics are an ideological stance taken by groups of politician whose party fail to win a convincing majority in an election. An ideology can be described as a comprehensive vision, as a way of looking at things, as in common sense or a set of ideas proposed by the dominant class of a society to all members of that society (Bello 2000). Ideology in its elementary form is an organized collection of ideas. It can be seen as a comprehensive vision, a perspective of reality, or a way of understanding, seeing things and events or actions. An ideology serves as a mirror for the people, expressing how the people view themselves, and even more importantly, how they want to be seen by outsiders. Ideology embodies a system of goals and beliefs, or widely held ideas by members of a society or group.

Ideology, well-articulated signposts the pattern of transition of each society and the roadmap to change. The utility of ideology is more apparent and alive in its application to the political realm. Political ideology is a certain ethical set of ideals, principles, doctrines, myths or symbols of a social movement, institution class or large group that explains how society should work, and offers some political or cultural blueprint for a social order. Political ideology is concerned with how to allocate power and to what ends it should be used.

In societies where democracy has taken root and become firmly consolidated, parties are delineated by their ideologies. Regrettably, the situation is totally different in Nigeria. Because, political parties are not delineated ideologically. This may seem to be a product of ideological confusion, or a total lack of ideology in the development or formation of these parties. There is not much to differentiate the parties in terms of national posture, it is just a marriage of strange bedfellows masquerading as political parties. The only fair exception is that of the western part of Nigeria, where political parties are gaining prominence because of some portrayal of a tinge of ideological seriousness inherited from their ancestry, the late sage Obafemi Awolowo who was popularly known as the leader of opposition in the history of Nigeria.

Opposition politics are inevitable in a democratic society. Genuine political opposition is a necessary attribute of democracy. How can a country be democratic without Opposition parties? How do you ensure a proper check and balance of a government under the democratic process without an Opposition? The existence of an opposition, without which politics ceases and administration takes over, is indispensable to the functioning of democratic political systems.

The division between government and opposition is as old as political democracy itself. In Aristotle's Athenian polity, the essence of self-government was that citizens were, in turn, both the rulers and the ruled. The government could alternate among different groups of citizens, and the minority could seek to persuade a majority of its point of view by peaceful or political means. The age of direct democracy has been replaced, with representative systems, providing for periodic elections. In turn, these electoral contests are usually dominated by political parties that select their own candidates and leaders. What has not changed, however, in our modern liberal-democratic society is the principle that government must rest on the consent of the governed: which means that the minority accepts the right of the majority to make decisions, provided that there is reciprocal respect for the minority's right to dissent from these decisions and to promote alternative policies.

## **Conclusion**

Party politics in Nigeria, right from the return of democracy in 1999 to 2015, has been bedeviled by rampant conflicts with debilitating effects in its democratic consolidation. Inter-party relations have also retrogressed to autocracy partly due to perceived elimination of competitors through state sponsored assassinations, incumbency factor, thereby turning election contests as a matter of life and death. The consequences have produced fierce political struggle and violence which have continued to pose serious challenges to Nigeria's democratic survival and its consolidation.

Party politics encourage regional political leadership, religious divides, lack of clear cut party ideologies, party indiscipline and intolerance, among others. Also, lacks of mutual inter-party democracy encourages a politics of irrationality and intolerance, which abhors maturity of debate, negotiations, dialogue, and mutual compromises based on win-win scenario. These factors, no doubt, persistently threatened current survival of Nigeria's emerging democracy which must be addressed.

Opposition must not be for opposition sake, and it must be devoid of violence and must be within the globally accepted standard or best practice. The people in government are not angels; they are human and, indeed, Nigerians. They are liable to make mistakes, and in the same way as the party in opposition. The only duty an opposition party need's is to provide an alternative view, and this must be properly dissected, articulated and effectively communicated to the general public.

## **Recommendations**

For and effective opposition politics, under the present dispensation in Nigeria the paper recommends the followings:

- i. The ruling APC should ensure that it provides a level playing ground that it enjoyed to be able to capture power from the then ruling PDP. It should make provision other opposition political parties to have a chance of capturing power too in future as options for voters when the need arises.
- ii. The ruling APC should, as a matter of fact, stop the intimidation of the major opposition political party, the P.D.P by sending EFCC to arrest and detain them.
- iii. The opposition PDP should learn a good lesson from the ruling APC and organize itself to give the APC a formidable challenge in future elections so as to avoid institutionalization of the one party system which will be detrimental to democratic rule;
- iv. Other powerful opposition parties need to organize themselves and form a strong alliance like that of APC in order to have a better chance of challenging the ruling party in the future; and,
- v. The measures that were put in place during the 2015 General Elections such as the use of the electronic card reader and prevention of rigging should be consolidated and improved upon in future elections. It should be enacted into the electoral law for future elections.

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