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ISSN: 1594-3586

Table of Contents

Income Determinants Among Rural Women In Nigeria: Evidence From Niger State Abdulumuni Baba Alfa.....	1
Assessment Of Amnesty Policy In Nigeria Under President Umar Musa Yaradua's Administration Alabi Abdullahi & Ahmed Mohammed Letswa.....	12
Political Instability And Foreign Direct Investment In Nigeria Umar Habiba Mohammed Bello.....	31
Appraisal of the Causes and Consequences of Political Violence on National Development in Nigeria: 2007–2014. Isyaku, Shuaibu Shittu & Obi Success Esomchi.....	51
The Diversification Of Nigerian Economy For Sustainable Development: Challenges And Possibilities Abdulrahman Adamu.....	72
Effects Of Off-campus Accommodation On Students' Academic Performance In Tertiary Institutions In Niger State Shehu Adamu Abdullahi & Abdulrauf Yusuf Aliyu.....	87
The Effect Of Foreign Policy To National Development: An Appraisal Of Goodluck Jonathan's Administration. Riyauddeen Zubairu Maitama.....	95
Enhancing Service Delivery Through Modern Information Technology In Bayero University Kano. Riyauddeen Zubairu Maitama.....	119

Lapai International
JOURNAL OF POLITICS

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2017

ISSN: 1594-3586

Pathways To Africa's Development And The Option Of "delinking": A Theoretical Approach Aliyu Mohammed Shamsudeen.....	257
Do Care Givers Matter On The Physical Health Status Of The Children Left-behind By Rural-urban Migrants? Evidence From Niger State, Nigeria Muktar Bala.....	274
Political Entrepreneurs: The Bane Of Democracy In Nigeria Ichima, Sunday	289
Political Parties And Democratic Growth In Nigeria: Insights From The People's Democratic Party Adebiyi, Oluwashina Moruf & Isiaq, Atanda Abdulwaheed.....	298
The Effect Of Training And Development On Employees' Performance: A Study Of Ifelodun Local Government Area Of Kwara State MURANA, Asimiyu Olalekan; ¹ AMBALI, Abdul Rauf; ¹ SALAHU, Moshood Olayinka and ¹ LETSWA, Ahmed Mohammed	320

POLITICAL PARTIES AND DEMOCRATIC GROWTH IN NIGERIA: INSIGHTS FROM THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC PARTY

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Abstract

While the constitutions of most democracies, developing and developed do not statutorily stipulate the functions and roles of political parties, political parties remain central and significant to the workings of any democratic polity. The centrality of political parties to democracy can be located in the critical roles and functions they perform in consolidating democracy. The extent to which they perform these functions however, particularly in nascent democracies has been a source of concern. The perception is that political parties may have not been performing these functions to expectation. This paper examines the role of political parties in a democracy. The major objectives of this paper are to undertake a critical evaluation of the nexus between political parties and democracy and review the roles of the Peoples Democratic Party in Nigeria's nascent democracy. Using secondary data analysed through the historical qualitative method it was discovered that Nigerian political parties are not adequately institutionalised in the country's political system. Thus, they have not impacted positively on the democratization process. It is however, recommended among others that there is the need for political parties to imbibe and observe democratic principles in governance process.

Key Words: Democracy, Political Parties, Democratic Consolidation, Peoples Democratic Party, Nigeria

Introduction

In virtue of the roles they play in democratic settings, political parties are crucial and important to the workings and development of any democratic society. However, despite the important functions political parties perform in democratic societies, there is a general notion that political parties have not really been performing these functions satisfactorily so as to deepen democracy. These have led to popular dissatisfaction of citizens with party politics (Webb, 2007:10). Public dissatisfaction of citizens with party politics is evident in the increasingly volatile electoral behaviour and widespread fall in electoral turnout since 1990 (Webb, 2007:) in Sub-Saharan Africa. It has also been observed that in some new democracies, citizens have experienced either minor or no tangible benefits from their new governments (NDI, 2013) formed by political parties in the aftermath of winning elections.

It was further lamented that in these new democracies poverty levels have remained the same, government services remain ineffective and citizens continue to feel disconnected from their governments (NDI, 2013). The continual disconnection between the citizens and the government formed by political parties remain a matter of concern. There is therefore, the need to re-evaluate the roles and functions of political parties in democracy, particularly in developing democracy. It is against this

backdrop that this paper tends to examine the role of political parties vis-a-vis democratization process in Nigeria with focus on the people's Democratic Party (PDP).

The major objectives of this paper are in two folds. The first is to attempt a critical overview of the nexus between political parties and democracy. Second, the paper undertakes an in-depth review of the roles of the PDP in the democratization process in Nigeria. To achieve these, the paper is divided into various sections. Following the introduction the paper proceeds to conceptualizing political parties and democracy after which the emergence and structure of the PDP are discussed. This is followed by an examination of the critical nexus between political parties and democracy. After these, the paper proceeds to a review of the roles of the PDP in the democratization process in Nigeria. The last part however, concludes and suggests recommendations.

Political Parties and Democracy: An Attempt at Conceptualization

Political Parties

Political parties connote "any political group identified by an official label that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through election, candidates for public office" (Satori, 1976). According to Downs (1957) a political party is a team of men seeking to control the governing apparatus by gaining office in a duly

constituted election". In his own perception Schumpeter (1962:283) views political parties as "groups whose members propose to act in concert in the competitive struggle for political power". Schnattschneid (1942:35) views political parties as "an organized attempt to get power". Power in this regard means control of the government (Schnattschneid, 1942:35). In another perception, LaPalombara (1974:509) perceive political party as "a formal organization whose self-conscious, primary purpose is to place and maintain in public office persons who will control, alone or in coalition, the machinery of government". Even though these definitions may demonstrate some diverse perceptions of scholars about political parties, it is important to note that a common denominator to all these perspectives is the control of power. The sole aim of a political party is to capture public offices through competitive elections. Hofmeister and Grabow (2011:11) asserted that all the definitions "emphasize the participation in elections and the interest to gain public offices and mandates". Hofmeister and Grabow (2011:11) further claimed that for an organization to be termed a political party it must satisfy some certain criteria. These include the following:

A party strives to influence the formation of political opinion and aims to have a general political impact. The active influence of political opinion-making is aimed at a

longer period of time as well as a wider region and should not be concentrated on a local level or a single issue. Secondly, a party is an association of citizens holding individual memberships, and shall have a minimum number of members, so that the seriousness of its targets and the prospects of success remain clear. Thirdly, a party has to demonstrate the will to consistently take part in the political representation of the people during elections. It, therefore, distinguishes itself from unions, non-governmental organisations and other initiatives that does not want to carry any political responsibilities for larger sectors but only try to have selective influence, and that do not participate in elections. Fourth, a party has to be an independent and permanent organisation; it shall not be formed only for one election and cease to exist afterwards. Fifth, a party must be willing to appear in public. Lastly, a party does not necessarily need to win elective seats, but should fulfil all the other criteria. This paper however, defines a political party as an organization which can be distinguished by an official label or logo and which has as its major aim capturing political power through presenting candidates for elective positions.

Democracy

Democracy in contemporary times has appeared to be a worldwide phenomenon. According to Isakhan (2012:4) democracy is becoming a widespread component of political life. Despite this, arriving at a

diverse conceptualization of democracy has proved both elusive and controversial (Isakhan, 2012: 4). This may have prompted Isakhan and Rocamora (1992:501) to describe democracy as a struggle which involve a ideological battle. Despite the complexity, vagueness and varied opinions on the concept, one can still be able to make some definitions of the concept of democracy. Isakhan and Slaughter (2014:3) stated that democracy can be conceptualized from two broad schools of thoughts. The first is the "liberal democratic tradition" while the second is the "civic republican tradition" (Isakhan and Slaughter, 2014:3). The "liberal democratic" view posits that democracy can be understood in the minimalist, individual and aggregate terms. This definition can continuously characterise model of democracy in contemporary times. In this view, people participate in politics through elected representative where they engage in a trade-off in which they sacrifice direct and ongoing involvement in government for the functionality and stability of representative democracy (Isakhan and Slaughter, 2014:3).

Proponents of this school of thought include Rawls (1971) and Schumpeter (1949). The "civic republican tradition" views democracy from the perspective of participatory, inclusive and deliberative forms of government (Isakhan and Slaughter, 2014:3). The proponents of this school of thought view democracy as more

than mere representation arguing that citizens ought to be directly involved in their government (Isakhan and Slaughter, 2014:3). Democracy as a concept has also been described as including "the right of people to decide their own aspirations and programmes, not only in political life, but also in economic, cultural, religious and other aspects of life including the right of people to participate fully in decisions that affect their life" (Imam 1991:6). However, democracy irrespective of its perception and practice is based on possessing a consensual philosophical justification which is built on certain universal values and ideal, which include freedom, equity and justice (Nnoli 1986:166). Democracy can therefore, be seen as a continuous process and agitation for the achievement of these democratic values.

Political Parties and Democracy: An Examination of the Critical Nexus

While political parties perform the major function of recruiting men of integrity and leadership for elective positions (Goel, 2015), their emergence, development and the roles they play in democracies have always aroused curious debates in the study of democracy and democratization. This cannot be unconnected with the fact that the existence of political parties and the free competition between them is an indispensable pre-requisite for modern democracy (Simon, 2003:3). It has been observed that the analysis of the history of the debate on political parties is laced with

thrilling professional and ideological debates relating to the role played by political parties themselves in the democratic system as a whole (Burnell, 2005; Sartori, 2005; Ostrogorski, 1976). Political parties are indeed endemic to democracy. The endemicity of political parties to democracy may have prompted Schattschneider (1942) to state that "political parties created democracy and modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties".

Political parties occupy a central position in democratic governance. Thus, there exists a strong synergy between the two variables. The nexus between political parties and democracy can be located in the indispensability of the existence of political parties in a democratic polity. Indeed political parties form the cornerstone of a democratic society and serve as important political institution of a democratic polity. They have been seen as key and vital contributors to nation-building. Scholars over the years have stressed the increasing importance of political parties to the sustenance and consolidation of democracy. For instance, Burnell (2005) argued that "Political parties are crucial for long term political development in emerging democracies". In a similar vein, Menocal (2006) maintained that 'it is extremely difficult to imagine a democracy that can function without political parties'. Randall and Svasand (2002:1) analysed

political parties' contribution to democratization in terms of the functions. They categorised the functions to include: representative integration into the democratic process, aggregating and channelling political interests, recruitment and (democratic) training of political leaders, making government accountable and organising opposition (Randall and Svasand 2002:1).

On this basis political parties ensure the survival and consolidation of the democratic regime, in at least two broader respects. First by "instilling appropriate attitudes and expectations in the public and by contriving through their own actions to give substance to constitutional rules and thus confirm and enlarge on the formal outcome of transition" (Pridham, 1990: 22) and second, "they bolster regime legitimacy, accumulating a reservoir of good will to help tide fragile new democracies over bad times" (Mainwaring and Scully, 1995). In another claim, Johnston (2005:1) posits that "any democracy needs strong and sustainable political parties with the capacity to represent citizens and provide policy choices that demonstrate their ability to govern for the public good". Thus, while strong and vibrant political parties are a necessary pre-requisite to competitive democratic politics both in emerging democracies and consolidated ones, political parties provide a platform through which the society relates to the political process.

dition, Schmitter (1992) argued that "in effort to consolidate new or nascent democracy, parties remain dominant in governing the electoral process, governing even perhaps in the symbolic integration of citizens into the electoral process". In demonstrating the nexus between political parties and democracy, others (2006:56) pointed out that "conscious democratic parties do not necessarily emerge out of repeated elections as there are other factors present, such as mobilized mass public, civic organizations, funds and access to state resources". In his own perception, Reilly (1963) pointed out that aggregative parties have helped to consolidate democracy. He recalled how since the late majoritarian electoral systems have hindered the production of less fragmented party systems which have helped stabilize democracy in Asia (Reilly, 1963). According to Stokes (1999: 263), "the direct relationship between political parties and democracy cannot be overemphasized. It was observed that 'parties are the makers of democracy, inevitable conditions of its advance, without being directly connected to all that is presumed about democracy'" (Stokes, 1999: 263). Recognizing the assumption that the contemporary model of political parties may reinforce the fears that political parties would stand as a stumbling block to "elected governments and the achievement of the public good" (Stokes, 1963).

Lai and Melkonian-Hoover (2005) showed the importance of political parties in democratizing states that have not transitioned to democracy. They opined that the institution of political parties plays a fundamental role in democratization by serving as an intermediary between the state and the civil society. They further claimed that parties comprise of "a legitimate, stable procedural mechanism for the alternation of power and the representation of majority and minority interest" (Lai and Melkonian-Hoover, 2005). In their opinion, "party competition can reduce state limits on citizen dissent and lead to increased parity and access to government resources for parties and can also provide a democratic means of redress for the citizenry, and stimulate increased responsiveness on the part of the ruling party" (Lai and Melkonian-Hoover, 2005). Similarly, the ability of political parties to legitimately contest for power with the ruling party solidifies norms of peaceful transition of power from one political group to another. In this way, political parties thus convey and reinforce democratic norms, and help a state to democratize (Linz and Stepan 1996 cited in Lai and Melkonian-Hoover, 2005).

After democratization states which have transitioned to democracy have the responsibility of making its democracy strong thereby ensuring that such democratic arrangements do not relapse back to the initial autocratic regime. This is another sphere which demonstrates the

inextricable linkage between political parties and democracy. Linz and Stepan (1996) posited that "one domain in which the importance of political parties is generally acknowledged is in their positive contribution to the consolidation of democracy, the relevance of which has become especially pertinent with the recent expansion of democratic polities emerging out of the third wave". The most significant question as regards the study of the politics of democratic consolidation has been "what consolidates democracy and which institutions and agents matter most in consolidating democracy?". In this context, there is widespread consensus that political parties are the principal agents of democratic consolidation. This is not only because they are key strategic actors which shape the emergence of democracy (Capoccia and Ziblatt, 2010:941). In studying the process of democratic consolidation it is observed that "approaching parties as independent variables, and as institutions with significant bearings on how political systems works is crucial in explicating the quality of democracy and the progress towards democratic consolidation" (Mainwaring and Scully, 1995:3).

While presenting the requirements for consolidating democracy Przeworski (1991:10) affirmed that "democracy is consolidated when under given political and economic conditions a particular system of institutions becomes the only game in town,

when no one can imagine acting outside the democratic institutions" and "when compliance i.e. acting within the institutional framework constitutes the equilibrium of the decentralised strategies of all the relevant political forces.". One major part which forms the system of political institutions is the political parties. These political parties according to him make up the part of multiple democratic forces which compete for power in an institutional framework (Przeworski, 1991:10). Some inferences can however be drawn from these: political engagement is democratic only when it takes place within an institutional setting, non-compliance occurs not only when political actors in the formal institutional setting break the rules of the institutional game, but also when political engagement happens outside a prescribed political institutional framework. The practice of democracy within the institutional framework involves striving to set a balance between the party which organizes the government and the party which performs the functions of opposition. Indeed the existence of a legal opposition party strengthens democratic process.

Opposition parties according to Kiiza (2005) promote democratic governance through the various roles it performs in a democracy. Opposition parties promote "national conversation" and pushes democratic discussion to a higher level of political development and maturity through

being responsible and reasoned. Second, they "maintain touch with inter-citizen and demonstrating the place of politics to the ordinary people". Opposition parties hold the government responsible for their actions. Again, "they, present a viable alternative to the incumbent government by presenting alternative ideas, principles and for governing society". In the reality of the incumbent government living up to the expectation of the "government-in-waiting" (the opposition party) takes over the reign of through free and fair elections (Kiiza, 2005). In addition, opposition parties strengthen the culture of democracy within the party and the political community in by promoting open debate during conferences, promoting intra-party democracy and ensuring accountable use of public funds". Lastly, opposition parties are the unpaid but dedicated researchers for the government in (Kiiza, 2005).

Parties through the practice of internal democracy contribute to the larger democratization process. One of the ways a party can exhibit the traits of internal democracy is through party primary elections. Internal democracy or intra-party democracy is a broad term describing a wide range of methods for including party members in intra-party deliberations and decision making. Nominating candidates within a party is an important

task because the stability of a party largely depends on well established and institutionalized internal party structures. A political party stability can be examined through the manner in which it conducts the process of electing candidates for a general election. In essence, it is significant for political parties to strictly take to the ideals of internal party democracy. When candidates are elected through primary elections, it means that party structure and organization are participatory and inclusive which thus, results to the harmonious co-existence of members within the party. The conduct of free and fair primary election builds party discipline and cohesion.

A political party which uses internal democratic and transparent procedures in selecting candidates is likely to select more capable leaders. Thus, parties which make use of free and fair primary elections to select candidates for elective posts strengthens and stabilizes the party and strengthen democratic practices both within the party and the entire polity. According to Scarrow (2005:3) those who emphasize the participatory aspects of democracy place the most value on intra-party democracy as an end in itself. They see parties not primarily as intermediary but rather as incubators that nurture citizen's political competence. To fulfil this role parties decision making structure and process should provide opportunities for individual citizens to influence the choices that parties offer to voters. These opportunities will help

citizens expand their civil skills and the inclusive process can boost the legitimacy of the alternative they produce. In this regard, party institutions can perform useful educative function while transferring power to broader sector of the society. All these play crucial role in political party's quest for promoting party stability.

From the foregoing, it has been demonstrated that political parties are indispensable to democracy and democratization process. However, the effective performance of the functions of political parties in representative democracies particularly, in the new ones has come under intense criticism (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000). While scholars have theoretically explicated the relationship between political parties and democracy based on the unique functions and roles they perform in a democratic society, some other scholars shared pessimistic views of the importance of political parties to democracy. It is believed that political parties may have not been performing these functions after all. For instance, Webb (2007:5) lamented that "in many of the world's democracies, there is disconnect, alienation and apathy" between democracy and political parties. It was claimed that the burden of the blame of this unfortunate state of affairs may be heaped on various targets which include, the political parties and the politicians, role of the mass media and the general public (Webb, 2007:5). It was however, observed that a considerable

blame could be placed at the doorstep of the debate that has long been in existence between the protagonist of the participatory and representative democracy (Webb, 2007:5).

While the advocates of the participatory democratic school hinge the blame on politicians and the entire system, the protagonist of the representative school indict the citizens and the media on which the citizens rely on for political information as responsible for the low esteem in which politics and its leading protagonist are presently held. However, (Webb, 2007:5) was quick in debunking the claims of these two schools of thought. According to him "radical participationists are unrealistic in their vision of a widespread popular capacity to engage with politics, and prone to stray uncomfortably close to the territory of shallow populism in their naive and unreasonable view of the job done by political elites". From the perspective of the participationists, it is believed that "their critics appeared to be apologists for an anachronistic elitist view of democracy, and take insufficient account of the cognitive revolution which has facilitated a far greater potential for popular political engagement" (Webb, 2007:5).

While bearing in mind, organising accountable and effective *government* as one of the major functions of political parties in representative democracy Webb, Farrell and Holliday (2002) lamented that

political parties in contemporary democracies have not been able to meet up with the performance of this functions as they have "often seemed to struggle to propose distinctive and effective policy solutions when in government". They however, advanced two reasons for this. Firstly, they believed that political parties often find it difficult to 'make a difference' policy outcomes given the legacies of previous incumbents in office". Secondly, they are of the opinion that "a variety of socio-social developments can seriously constrain party governments' scope for autonomous action, including technological changes, demographic and social trends, economic cycles". These factors aids understanding of why political parties have been on the receiving end of widespread opinion of policy ineffectiveness and the seeming ineffectiveness of government to resolve persistent national policy challenges (Webb, Farrell and Holliday, 2002).

Other aspect were political parties have abundant wanting is in the performance of increasing political participation. According to Webb (2007:9) political record in the performance of this function seems to be increasingly disappointing. It was observed by Mair and (2001:5) that "there is incontrovertible evidence of the decline of memberships and activism in established democracies". This trend appeared to have spread to new

democracies. Webb (2007:9) observed that "new democracies seem to have moved to operate in a low-participation phase of democracy without ever passing through the mass party stage of development". Reasons for this decline may have been captured by Susan Scarrow. Scarrow (1996) offered a two-way explanation for this trend and can be summarized into the "supply side" and the "demand side". According to the "supply side" low political participation occur as a result of social changes which reduces citizens interest in joining political parties. The "demand side" on the other hand, bother on the organizational reasons why party bigwigs might no longer be interested in recruiting members (Scarrow, 1996). The supply side however, seems to be the most tenable since there are no sufficient evidence to demonstrate the fact that political parties are no longer interested in recruiting candidates. In addition, one of the ways to assess the strength and weaknesses of political parties is to look at their level of followership. While parties with more followership and members are regarded as strong, parties with relatively low number of members are considered weak.

The People's Democratic Party: Emergence, Structure and Objectives

The People's Democratic Party was formed out of a group of eminent people who opposed the transmutation of the late Head of State of Nigeria, General Sanni Abacha into a civilian Head of State and the People's

Democratic Movement on July 28, 1998. This group was named the G-34. At that time the country was at the peak of political crisis caused by the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election, believed to have been won by Chief MKO Abiola. The G-34 at that time was a moral interventionist movement in the political affairs of Nigeria. Following the death of Gen. Sanni Abacha in 1998, the G-34 and the People's Democratic Movement transformed into a political party known as the Peoples Democratic Party.

The party has however, been described as a coalition of some of the nation's most powerful neo-patrimonial networks (Kew, 2010:501). The party is one of the nine provincially registered parties under the General Abdulsalam Abubakar administration based on its satisfactory performance in the December 5, 1998 local government elections in which the chairman and councillors were elected in all local government councils in Nigeria (Osumah & Ikelegbe, 2009). Political parties are institutions with many detailed parts that are combined in a particularly complex way. As such they possess both formal and informal structure (Alapiki, 2004). The structures and organs of political parties help them to effectively aggregate and process the societal demands. It is therefore, imperative that all parties should possess internal structures and organs with which they work with. The Peoples Democratic Party has a hierarchical

organizational structure organized in the Ward, Local Government Areas, States Zones and the National Cadre. The organs of the party are however spelled out in the constitution of the party.

It is generally argued that there is no universal pattern of the structure and organs of political parties and that all political parties like large organizations are inherently oligarchic (Osumah & Ikelegbe 2009). The oligarchic nature of political parties dwells on the fact that the leadership of any party like any other organization is conferred on a small proportion of people i.e. members. Political parties and other organizations are established to achieve some certain aims. Though the primary aim of any political party in a democratic setting is to sponsor candidates to attain political offices under the party label, there are other objectives which political parties wish to achieve. These objectives vary and largely depend on the ideology and the vision of such parties. Most objectives of political parties are largely derived from the factors which surround their establishment. Thus, the objectives of the People Democratic Party are clearly stated in the Constitution which established it. It has however, been observed that there is a linkage between the political development which led to the formation of the PDP and its set objectives. It is believed that the PDP emerged in response to the political developments especially to foster liberalism and political participation after prolonged years of

stage managed convention of the PDP before the party's national convention which made a good number of the president's political appointees automatic delegates to the convention smuggle into the party rule, the presidential primary became a mere ritual (Odey, 2003).

Atiku Abubakar who would have provided a formidable opposition was cajoled out of the way by a promise from the then incumbent president to support his presidential candidacy come 2007. A situation where all political appointees of the then incumbent president and governors were automatic delegates to the party congress that elected the party's presidential candidate made the election process structured in favour of the then incumbent president. The apparent and unprecedented nature of the non-transparent party primary and its resultant effect of politically motivated killings were amazingly worrisome (Garuba, 2005). Prior to the adoption of candidates by the Peoples Democratic Party, the effect of political assassination and attempted murder had appeared as an intra-party phenomenon because of the belief that winning at the primary level is as good as winning in the general elections. The pattern of politics with bitterness which had long characterized Nigerian politics was more horrifying during the period, particularly within the Peoples Democratic Party. From the beginning of the 2003 electoral process there were intra-party squabbles, protest,

complaints of intimidation and the influence of "ethnicity" and corruption within the party. The conduct of staged-managed party primary elections in 2003 also manifested in state primary elections that were held to present the party's gubernatorial candidates. With the exception of few states, incumbent governors were given automatic tickets (Odeh, 2003).

In a similar vein, on the 4th December, 2006 the Peoples Democratic Party organized its gubernatorial primary election in order to present the party's flag bearer in the 2007 gubernatorial election in Imo state. Senator Ifeanyi Ararume, one of the 21 contestants, won the gubernatorial primary (Adejumobi & Kehinde, 2007:10). Ararume reportedly polled 2,061 votes, followed by Chief Hope Uzodima with 1,649 votes. Since both results fell below the party's requirement of 50 percent for a clean winner, it was expected that a run-off election would be organized. However disregarding the outcome, the party leadership in the state announced Chief Tony Ezenwa, who had come fifth in the primary election as the party's flag bearer (Adejumobi & Kehinde, 2007:107). Having polled the highest number of votes the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) published Ararume's name as the party's flag bearer. Dramatically, the party substituted Ararume's name with that of Engineer Charles Ugwu through a letter sent to INEC dated 18th January, 2007. Charles Ugwu

reportedly poll 36 votes and was in the fourteen the position. Ugwu who was a former president of the Manufacturers Association Nigeria, had supported president Obasanjo's aborted third term bid. It was generally believed that the former president was rewarding a "loyalist" with the party's gubernatorial nomination. (Adejumobi & Kehinde, 2007:107). Ararume however, headed straight to the court to seek redress to what he viewed as injustice. His challenge to the party's decision was upheld by the Supreme Court which directed INEC to list him as the party's gubernatorial candidate. Complying with the Supreme Court decision INEC listed Ararume as the party's candidate, but the party worked against him to ensure his defeat at the polls (Adejumobi & Kehinde, 2007:107).

The lack of respect for the rules of the game in the party's primaries also manifested in the gubernatorial primary held in Rivers state to present the party's flag bearer for the 2007 gubernatorial election. In the primary election conducted in the state, Rotimi Amaechi emerged winner with the highest votes of 6,527 votes out of 6,575 total votes cast. Expectedly, Amaechi's name was forwarded to INEC as the party's candidate for state governorship election. However, in a letter forwarded to INEC dated 2nd February, 2007 the party sought to replace Amaechi's name with Celestine Omehia's name giving the reason that Amaechi's name was "submitted in error". Omehia

never contested the primaries in which the Amaechi emerged as winner. The party eventually won the gubernatorial election. Consequently, Amaechi headed straight to court. In October 2007 the Supreme Court ruled in favour of Amaechi and directed that he should be installed as the elected governor. The party accused Amaechi of working against the party. Based on this he was expelled from the political party.

The undemocratic conduct of party primary elections within the PDP definitely does no good to the democratization process. The undemocratic manner in which the PDP conducts its primaries was aptly described by Osumah and Ikelegbe (2009:192) when they asserted that "within the PDP there has been serious erosion of democratic values. Its primaries, conventions and congresses, which are the democratic institutions for nominating party candidates for elections and electing party officials, have little been regarded". The nature of the conduct of the primary elections in the PDP has been largely responsible for the occurrence of intra-party conflict within the party. At one point or the other intra-party squabbles have threatened the cooperative existence of the party. Omoruyi (2002:8) lamented that Nigerian political parties are not in conflict with one another but rather members of the same party are in conflict with one another. He said this in the following words "the so-called parties are not in competition with one another. They are in factions; these factions are more in competition with

themselves than with another party." Osumah and Ikelegbe (2009:192) put it as thus: "since its first tenure the party (PDP) has become an academy of intrigues ridden by lack of coherence, cordiality, internal wrangling, squabble, divisions, schisms and factions.

The various levels of party hierarchy have been factionalized." It has been observed that the resultant conflicts which ensues as a result of the conduct of non-transparent primaries could have resulted in the incessant leadership problem facing the party which according to Katsina (2006:4) may have been orchestrated by the lack of coherent ideological principles. The fall in the dominance of the PDP as witnessed in the last presidential election when it relinquished power has been attributed to the absence of internal democracy especially in the process of nominating flag bearers (Katsina, 2006:8).

From 1999 through 2015 the Federal Government formed by the PDP conducted four different elections i.e. the 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 general elections. The 2003 and the 2007 general elections were described as the worst to be conducted in the electoral history of the country (EUEOM, 2007). The elections were characterised by monumental fraud and malpractices. These elections particularly the 2007 general elections were devoid of democratic principles and ethos (EUEOM, 2007). The nature and conduct of the general elections

were antithetical to democratization. The widespread condemnation which heralded the outcome of the elections attested to this. The elections were condemned in totality and were described as a step backward in the country's quest for a consolidated democracy and a stable political entity (Omotola, 2009:195). The elections were characterised by a high degree of electoral violence such that the elections were described as "garrisoned elections" (Omotola, 2009). Both local and international observers expressed their displeasure over the conduct of the elections. For instance, the European Union Election Observation Mission (2007:2) lamented that "the 2007 state and federal elections have fallen short of basic international and regional standards for democratic elections". (EUEOM, 2007:2).

The 2007 general elections portended great dangers to the country's democratic project. In the aftermath of the elections many wondered if the nation's democracy can survive. The elections were devoid of minimum democratic ethos. According to Omotola (2009:210) "the elections merely consolidated the PDP's hold on power". He thus, noticed that "one indisputable fact about the 2007 elections was that they helped to consolidate the emergence of a one party dominant state in Nigeria, with attendant implications for the decline and decay of opposition politics". The elections were far from being democratic and were in no way close to deepening the existing

democratization process which commenced in 1999.

Since losing power at the national level in the 2015 presidential election, the PDP have not lived up to the expectation of forming viable political opposition against the ruling party. The political party which held power from 1999-2015 is believed to have garnered prowess to establish itself as a formidable opposition party and be in a leading position to strengthen the country's democratization process. What is however, obtainable is that the former ruling party has failed to practically perform the functions of an opposition party. The failure of the party to perform the roles of a formidable opposition is detrimental to the country's democratization project. The inability of the party to stand as a viable opposition cannot be unconnected with the challenges facing the party. These challenges are however, derivable from the leadership crisis facing the party since it relinquished power. The party has been engulfed in a leadership crisis since the resignation in May 2015 of the former National Chairman of the party Alhaji Adamu Muazu. The crisis is worsened by the choice of the new Chairman between Sen. Ali-Modu Sherrif, who was claimed to have been sacked as the party's National Chairman at its May 21 National Convention and Sen. Ahmed Makarfi the Chairman of the constituted National Caretaker Committee. While some party bigwigs is of the opinion that Sen. Ali-Modu Sherrif has been sacked, Ali-Modu

Sherrif believes he remains the National Chairman of the Peoples Democratic Party until the court states otherwise (Vanguard News, August: 2016).

It was reported that "Sheriff has, on different occasions, rejected the Makarfi-led National Caretaker Committee which was constituted at the convention as an aberration, saying that there is no provision for such bodies in PDP's Constitution (Vanguard News, August: 2016). However, attempts at resolving the leadership crisis amicably and outside the court failed as both factions refused to "sheath their swords". This led to a legal tussle and on the 16th of February, 2017 the Court of Appeal sitting in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, on Thursday affirmed Sen Ali Modu Sheriff, as the authentic National Chairman of the party (Opejobi, 2017). The Markafi faction however, rejected the Appeal Court judgement claiming that Ali-Modu Sherrif cannot lead that party.

Opposition parties are necessary constituents of a democratization process. The contribution of opposition parties, civil society organizations as well as the citizens in scrutinising, critiquing, and protesting against ideas and policies of government is invaluable critical to the strengthening of the democratic process and achievement of socio-economic development. Indeed, the centrality of opposition party to the development of democracy cannot be overemphasized. Democracy cannot

blossom in a situation where there is no opposition party or where the opposition is suppressed or weak. While democratic principles such as the conduct of free, fair and regular elections, respect for fundamental human rights of citizens, free press, independent judiciary, transparent and accountability are fundamental principles of democracy, "informed control of rulers by the electorate, and tolerance on the part of government of critical dissents in manners expected of a well-institutionalised opposition and responsible citizens are other fundamental principles that define a decent democratic culture" (Adesola, 2016). In this context, citizens and opposition parties are allowed to state their grievance and disagreement with actions and policies of the ruling party. They are also giving the room to differ and provide reasonable alternatives to issues affecting the country since their constructive dissents cannot be treated as treasonable acts (Adesola, 2016).

Considering the foregoing, it can be deduced that the Peoples' Democratic Party have not demonstrated considerable capability in fostering the nation's democratization process. The actions and character of the party are not in tandem with its founding objectives and mission statement. The ability of the PDP to serve as a viable agent of development and consolidation of democracy in Nigeria is retarded by its inability to imbibe and observe the fundamental principles of

internal party democracy. This have manifested within the party in the form of constant intra-party conflict and leadership crisis, inability to function as a viable opposition, lack of transparency and accountability, mutual distrust and mass defection and disregard for democratic ethos and principles. Owing to these, the PDP has not been able to perform credibly its functions as a political party. This has invariably led to the citizens' discontentment with the operations and character of the party when it held power and hence it was voted out of office. Signifying therefore, a democratic disconnect between the activities of the party and efforts at democratizing the polity. The political party which once boasted of holding on to power for more than sixty years before it was eased out of power through the 2015 presidential election had not exhibited the characteristics of a well institutionalised political party and according to Adesola (2016) the "PDP since losing power has continued to grope in the dark of divisiveness, illogicality, irresponsibility, and sheer vapidty".

The nature and character of the PDP can be located in the description which Morrison (2004:421) gave to African political parties. According to him after independence, African political parties "lost all importance as democratic institutions and became tools for authoritarian leaders who articulated the parties' priorities as well as governments' policies, and later on became only interested

in the inviolability of their monopoly on power (Morrison 2004:421). Rather than being developed as organizations, the political parties turned out as valuable vehicles for ambitious politicians. Consequently, the parties were not institutionalized as viable political institutions. The party leaders used the party structure to mobilize adequate support from the electorate so as to negotiate with the other party leaders for the distribution of public good (Rakner and Svasand, 2007:14). As a result, African political parties have weak roots in the society and possess an extremely low level of institutionalization. Thus, such parties find it extremely difficult to emphasize politics of issues. Rather, their mobilization of popular forces have been largely driven by ethnicity and religion, as much as the influence of money politics" (Omotola, 2006:62).

Conclusion

Political parties are integral and viable political institutions of democracy. When they are deeply rooted and adequately institutionalized as political organizations, political parties through the roles and functions they perform are capable of strengthening and consolidating democracy. By virtue of these functions and roles most democratic societies accord political parties the foremost position in its democratic system. Despite the importance of political parties to democracy, political parties most especially in new and developing

democracies have failed to adequately perform the roles and functions which they are designed to perform. Consequently, the standard of living of the citizens continues to deteriorate as a result of insensitivity of governments to perform its functions adequately. Using the Peoples' Democratic Party as a point of reference, it is discovered that political parties in Nigeria are weakly rooted in the society.

Therefore, they are characterised by low level of political institutionalization. Political parties in Nigeria lack internal party democracy, internal unity and discipline. These have been largely responsible for their inability to perform the functions of a well institutionalized political party so as to help drive the democratization process. For political parties to be able to achieve this, they must first and foremost imbibe and observe to the letter, the principles of internal party democracy. The process of selecting candidates for elective posts must be transparent and open to everyone who is qualified. Secondly, Nigerian political parties should be reformed in order to move them away from being agents of acquisition of power and medium of gaining unfettered access to the nations' treasury to viable political institutions capable of meeting the needs of the common man. Equally important is the fact that political parties, most especially the PDP should devise a means of settling its internal wrangling which is largely orchestrated by the leadership crisis the

party is presently facing. This will enable it to reorganise and reinvent itself to meet up with the challenges of fostering the democratization process as an opposition political party.

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