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Opposition Political Parties and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria: Examining All Progressive Congress (APC) in the 2015 General Elections

**Babayo Sule, Mohammed Azizuddin Mohammed Sani
and Bakri Mat***

Abstract

Opposition political parties in Nigeria have been battling with the politics of zero sum game where winner takes all and loser lose all in a democratic setting since political independence in 1960. The ruling party used powers of incumbency, state treasury, state apparatus and all advantages of power to emasculate and dominate the political arena. This paper examined the role that All Progressive Congress (APC) played differently from the previous opposition parties in the country during the 2015 General Elections. The methodology adopted is the use of qualitative data analysis where selected informants

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from the categories of stakeholders associated with the subject of study were interviewed. The research concludes that but, for the significant role played by APC in challenging the ruling PDP in the 2015 General Elections, Nigeria would have turned into an official one party system with a choiceless democracy. The research recommends that, opposition political parties need to form a platform of merger to be stronger the way APC did in 2015 and also a level playing ground should be provided for all parties to contest freely in addition an improvement in the electoral system in general.

**Keywords: Opposition, Political Parties, Democracy,
Consolidation, Election**

Introduction

Democracy is a type of governance that requires some institutions and agencies to operate successfully. Such institutions include political parties, rule of law, constitution and other agencies and principles such as healthy opposition and periodic free and fair elections. In most developing democracies like Nigeria, opposition seems a mirage and a difficult task to undertake as it is strangled and frustrated by the ruling party. Opposition parties are rendered weak, helpless and disorganized to the extent that they cannot challenge the ruling party during elections.

In Nigeria, opposition parties since pre-colonial period to date are subjected to oppression and domination in the previous elections until 2015 General Elections when a new page of history was set up. The opposition organised themselves and prepared a strong merger which challenged the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) squarely to the extent of wrestling power with a landslide victory. This paper examined the role that the APC played in the 2015 General Elections in the consolidation and sustenance of democracy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic which rescued the country from an unofficial one dominant ruling party (PDP) through securing of power at both the centre and the state levels.

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To examine the role played by All Progressive Congress (APC) during the 2015 General Elections as an opposition party then and
2. To evaluate the influence of All Progressive Congress (APC) in determining the outcome of the 2015 General Elections.

Materials and Methods

The paper adopted qualitative method of data collection and analysis. It is a qualitative case study method taking 2015 General Elections as the premise for analysis and APC as the party for the study. The informants were selected from five major institutions and agencies: senior party stakeholders of four of the major political parties that participated in the 2015 General Elections; politicians from the two major contending parties of the then ruling PDP and opposition APC; senior officials of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) the electoral body that conducted the 2015 General Elections; academicians and Focus Group Discussion comprising of eight (8) members derived from Unity Fountain in Abuja Nigeria, a centre where civil societies and other pressure groups meet frequently for meetings and political activities. The data obtained from the field was grouped into tables and simple percentage for analysis which led to research findings and discussions as well as conclusion. The

research also referred to the existing literature and other existing documents on the subject matter of study which complemented the data from the primary sources.

Theoretical Framework

The work adopted two theories: Theory of African Democracy and Politics and Theory of Consensus Democracy. The theory of African Democracy and Politics indicates the nature of democratic rule and politics in Africa precisely different from the Western democracies and other developing democracies in the world. African democracy and African politics denotes a politics of one party dominant ruling in most African states and zero tolerance to opposition political parties. There are many scholars¹ who discussed on the nature and pattern of African democracy and African politics.

Most African countries were legacies of colonial inheritance where smaller states were arbitrarily merged to form a colonial entity which later became a country. The political institutions and democracy were imposed on African countries as against the indigenous values and culture.² As such, democracy in Africa is too fragile and premature to operate along the line of Western

¹ R.. L. Sklar 1983, Richard I. Joseph 1989, Micheal Ross 2001, Mohammed J. Salih 2001, Micheal J. Bratton & Nicholas Van de Walle 1994, Robert H Jackson & Carl G. Rosberg 1984 and Karya Chandra 2007.

² R.. L. Sklar, "Democracy in Africa," *African Studies Review* 26 (1983): 11-24.

democratic system resulting from poor political institutions such as political parties; organized opposition; educated electorates; good economy and other socioeconomic wellbeing.³ African democracy operates in rentier states where democratic values are thwarted as most of the states rely on ethnic and regional in addition to religious sentiments to clinch to power continuously even amidst poor performance. Along this line, major ethnic groups dominated the politics through voting for their clan and the opposition parties could not find a way to acquire power.⁴

African democracy is besieged by Neopatrimonial tendency where the elite constituent themselves into power brokers who determine who gets what, when and how. They manipulated and controlled the politics to the extent that, electorates have no choice except voting for whom the power brokers anointed.⁵ In this direction, democratic values were abused and opposition politics was emasculated. Political institutions in Africa remain abstract leading to personal rule where politics is monopolized with no room for opposition or option.⁶ Democracy and democratic institutions were not truly instituted from the

³ Richard I. Joseph, "Democratisation in Africa after 1989: Comparative and Theoretical Perspective," *JSTOR Journal* 29 (1989): 363-383.

⁴ Micheal Ross, "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?" *JSTOR Journal* 53 (2001): 325-361

⁵ Micheal Bratton and Nicholas Van de Walle, "Neopatrimonial Regimes and Political Transition in Africa," *JSTOR Journal* 46 (1994): 453-489.

⁶ Robert H. Jackson & Carl G. Rosberg, "Personal Rule: Theory and Practice in Africa," *JSTOR Journal* 46 (July 1994): 421-442.

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inception⁷ which informed the pervasive legacies of colonial political institutions that impede real democratisation in Africa.⁸

The second theory is that of Consensus democracy or Consociational Democracy profounded by Arend Lijphart which is an attempt on how to make democracy stable and democratic worldwide. The major assumption of the theory is that; the position of some scholars that social fragmentation created by differing social, ethnic, religious and cultural groups had to be overcome before there could be any prospect of a stable democratic regime cannot be feasible in contemporary world.⁹ Drawing an example from Dutch politics, the theory believed that democracy can be sustained and instituted through accommodation and settlement of differences in other parts of the world as Dutch society has a deep social cleavages that were variant but were settled and accommodated leading to the emergence of one of the best democracies in the world.¹⁰

In essence, the theory denotes that divided territories even those that are historically hostile to each other, ethnically divided,

⁷ Karya Chandra, "Counting Head: A Theory of Voter and Elite Behaviour in Patronage Democracies," in *Patron, Clients and Policies*, eds. Herbert Kitschelt & Steven I Wilkinson (London: Cambridge University Press), 94-110.

⁸ Mohammed J. Salih, *African Democracies and African Politics* (London: Pluto Press, 2001), 37.

⁹ Arendt Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation* (California: Berkeley University Press, 1975), 73.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 74.

religiously different, linguistically variant are also effectively and efficiently governed in a democratic system according to consociational principles.¹¹ Such consociational principles involved consensus on power sharing and settlement of differences or accommodating them accordingly.

From the above two theories, it can be applied in this study by taking the first instance of African democracy and African politics, Nigerian democracy since colonial era to the post independence politics is bedeviled with power brokers who dominated the politics and subverted democratic principles where principles of democracy are cornered such as opposition politics thus, making opposition political parties for almost a century of democratic practice vulnerable and insignificant in influencing electoral outcome until 2015. The second theory of consociational democracy is applicable in this study in the sense that, accommodation of diverse ethnic, regional and religious cleavages by APC during the merger in 2013 led to the emergence of a strong national consensus party as an opposition which succeeded in wrestling power from the ruling PDP in 2015 General Elections.

¹¹ Arendt Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies* (New York: Yale University Press, 1977), 23.

Literature Review

This analyses various scholastic views in their divergent nature on the perception of political parties, Nigerian political parties, opposition politics in Nigeria and the 2015 General Elections.

Political Parties

Political parties are indispensable links between the people and the representative machinery of government. They serve as the motive force in crystallizing public opinion and as the unifying government agency which make democracy workable.¹² 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 democratically process of election.¹³

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 mass party will

¹² A. C. Kapur, *Principles of Political Science* (New Delhi: S. Chand, 2009), 249.

¹³ Adigun Agbaje, "Political Parties and Pressure Groups" in *Elements of Politics*, ed. Remi Anifowose & Francis Enemuo (Lagos: Sam Iroanusi Publishers, 2008), 128; A. A. Appadorai, *The Substances of Politics* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 118.

emerge to overthrow the existing elite capitalist parties for egalitarian society.¹⁴

Political parties as one of the most important democratic institutions perform many functions in democracy as identified by many scholars.¹⁵ 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.

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.¹⁶ The above denotes that political parties in most

¹⁴ J. C. Johari, *Comparative Politics* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 2011), 62.

¹⁵ Such as A. C. Kapur 2009, J.C. Johari 2011, Adigun Agbaje 2008, A. A. Appadorai 2004 and Mohammed J. Salih 2003.

¹⁶ Mohammed J. Salih, *African Political Parties* (London: Pluto Press, 2003), 57.

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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 with many of them but, there were three dominant ones with 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 they set the foundation for such outlook in future Nigerian political parties. In the Second Republic, five political parties emerged 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. In the Aborted Third Republic, only two parties were registered the National Republican Convention (NRC) and Social Democratic Party (SDP) but the transition was halted by the military shortly after it was introduced.¹⁷

In the Fourth Republic, multi party system was reintroduced again where from 1999 to date more than fifty political parties

¹⁷ Alexander Akinboyega & Remi Anifowose, "Nigerian Government and Politics," in *Elements of Politics* ed. Remi Anifowose & Francis Enemu (Lagos: Sam Iroanusi Publishers, 2008), 244.

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 opposition to play any significant role. This has been the trend in the First Republic, Second Republic and the Fourth Republic where PDP has been in power steadily for straight sixteen (16) years.

Opposition Political Parties

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, enemy, distraction and an immoral activity that should not be tolerated. Right from the emergence of active politics under the British colonialist, opposition was never taken lightly by the ruling party. For instance, in Northern Nigeria, the late Malam 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 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 intra-party crisis.¹⁸

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 standing 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 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.¹⁹

With the return to democratic rule in the Fourth Republic from 1999 to date, the scenario which was obtainable 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 PDP.

¹⁸ Toyin Falola & Heaton Matthew M.II, *A History of Nigeria* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 12.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

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.²⁰

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 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 reader, 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 opposition APC stronger, PDP would have continue beyond 2015.

²⁰ Samuel Adams & Kingsley S. Agomor, "Democratic Politics and Voting Behaviour," *International Area Studies Review* 9 (May, 2015): 1-17.

The 2015 General Elections

The 2015 General Elections is entirely different and unique from the previous general elections in the history of the country. This is because it was the first time that the incumbent was defeated by opposition in a free and credible election with a peaceful handover. There were ten general elections in the history of the country but, none have recorded such feat like that of the 2015. Besides, there were many issues that made the elections unique such as the Boko Haram insurgency, widespread allegations of massive corruption against the PDP government, economic backwardness, political crisis and many other socioeconomic issues that made the election outstanding.

The ruling PDP had already found itself in a serious crisis of party positioning for a suitable candidate in the build up to the general elections.²¹ A strong merger of opposition parties emerged which includes: Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN); All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP); Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) and a faction of All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) in addition to the coming of new PDP lately into APC further aggravated the problem of PDP while sustaining the tempo for APC in the

²¹ John Paden, Midterm Challenges in Nigeria: Elections, Parties and Regional Conflicts. *United States Institute of Peace. Security Analysis and Research. Evolving Security Situation in Advance of Presidential Elections* 14, February (2015), 21.

process.²² The preparedness of the electoral body; INEC was doubted by many stakeholders while a survey was conducted on the anticipated outcome of the elections results which showed a close contest between PDP and APC.²³ There was a significant improvement in the electoral umpire as a result of introduction of some reforms such as the use of electronic card reader for accreditation and voting.²⁴

The 2015 General Elections witnessed the first successful transfer of power from one democratically elected government to another on different party platform. There were pre-elections violence and hate speeches which made the atmosphere tense but they were all overwhelmingly suppressed.²⁵ The growing tension of Boko Haram made the elections seemed not feasible with many zones identified as insecure before the conduct of the elections.²⁶ The level playing ground for both the ruling and opposition parties improved positively.²⁷

²² *Ibid.*, 22.

²³ CLEEN Foundation Nigeria Headed for Closest Election on Record. *Afrobarometre*. (2015), 6.

²⁴ Jideofor Adibe, *The 2015 Presidential Election in Nigeria: The Issues and Challenges* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2015), 16.

²⁵ International Republican Institute, *Nigeria National Elections, March 28 2015*.

²⁶ Benjamin Auge, *Nigerian Presidential Elections: what's at Stake?* (Al Jazeera Centre for Studies. 2015): 1-16.

²⁷ Lai Oluode, "Electoral Reforms and Election Security" in *Election Security: Stakeholders' Perspective*, ed. Lai Oluode Abuja (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2014), 14.

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The March 28 and April 14 2015 General Elections marked another turn in the history of Nigerian politics as it was the first time that the opposition unseat the incumbent President in a successful election. Of the sixty seven million and four hundred and twenty two thousand and five (67, 422, 005 million) registered voters, only thirty one million and seven hundred and forty six and four hundred and ninety (31, 740, 490 million) were accredited for 2015 Presidential elections. Twenty nine million and four hundred and thirty two and eighty three (29, 432, 083 million) of the votes were casted with 97 % of the votes valid. The 2015 General Elections and the outcome were entirely different from the previous elections in Nigeria in many different ways.²⁸

In the 2015 Presidential elections, 14 (fourteen) political parties contested for the post of Presidency, less votes were cast in 2015 than in 2011 by 25 %, the incumbent lost to the opposition by 45 % to 54 %, the opposition won more States 21 out of 36.²⁹ The above analysis showed that, the 2015 Presidential election in Nigeria set a culture of departure from the previous norm of the incumbent always winning in every re-election without a serious challenge. It was also the first time that campaign activities were

²⁸ The Centre for Public Policy Alternatives (CPPA). *2015 Presidential Election Outcome: Analyses & Implications*. 2015, 1-20.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1-20.

dominated by issue based politics and the voters voted across all regions unlike the previous situation where every contestant was elected by voters from his geographical region and religion. The election also pointed to many changes that will continue to impact on the future elections in the country.

Discussions and Major Findings

The 2015 General Elections is a rubicund for democratic development and consolidation in the history of the country. The sixteen years dominance of PDP and the seemingly unofficial one party system was overturned by APC in the polls in March and April of 2015 subsequently. The election is considered as an improvement and most credible in the Fourth Republic from the previous one.³⁰ The introduction of smart card readers helped curbed rigging drastically which is an advantage that made the elections more credible. The amalgamation of strong national opposition parties of ACN, ANPP, faction of APGA, CPC AND newPDP to form a strong party; APC made the polity interesting since the PDP was never challenged by such a strong opposition. The outcome of the elections revealed clearly that APC succeeded

³⁰ Ejikeme Jombo Nwagwu, "Political Party Financing and Consolidation of Democracy in Nigeria 1999- 2015," *International Journal of Political Science* 10 (December 2016), 243-267; Araba Akeem Ayanda & Braimah Joseph Odunayo. "Comparative Study of 2011 and 2015 Presidential Elections in Nigeria," *Global Journal of Human Social Sciences: F Political Science* 15 (2015), 48-54.

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in winning the elections at Presidential level, the party won majority states and majority seats in National Assembly. The results are presented below:

Table 1
2015 Presidential Elections Results in Nigeria

Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage
Muhammadu Buhari	APC	15,424,921	53.96 %
Goodluck Ebele Jonathan	PDP	12,853,162	44.96 %
Adebayo Ayeni	APA	53,537	0.19 %
Ganiyu Galadima	ACPN	40, 311	0.14 %
Sam Eke	CPP	36, 300	0.13 %
Rufus Salau	AD	30, 637	0.11 %
Mani Ahmad	ADC	29, 665	0.10 %
Allagoa Chinedu	PPN	24, 475	0.09 %
Martin Onovo	NCP	24, 455	0.09 %
Tunde Anifowose Kilani	AA	22, 125	0.08 %
Chekwas Okorie	UPP	18, 220	0.06 %
Comfort Sonaiya	KP	13, 037	0.05 %
Godson Okoye	UDP	9, 208	0.03 %
Ambrose Albert Owuru	HP	7, 435	0.03 %
Invalid votes	All Parties	844, 519	-
Total	14 Parties	29,432,849	100 %
Registered voters		67,422,005	100 %

Source: Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) 2015.

The 2015 Presidential Election disclosed a low voter turnout of less than 50 despite all the high anticipation from the electorates of a free and fair election. The election results indicated that even though there were many contestants for the plum position in the country, only two contenders fought it in a

tight race; the incumbent President Jonathan and opposition Muhammadu Buhari. The final results disclosed that, Muhammadu Buhari of APC won the election in an unprecedented electoral victory making a history as the first opposition party to win the Presidency and dislodged the incumbent party from power.

The 2015 General Elections also showed that the tradition of PDP winning majority of the seats in the Governorship election and National Assembly was upturned as the opposition APC went ahead to win majority of the seats. The results of the Governorship elections are presented below.

Table 2

2015 Governorship Elections Results

Party	Seats	Percentage
APC	19	61.29 %
PDP	12	38.71 %
Total	31	100 %

Source: Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) 2015.

The above results indicated that state Governorship elections took place in 31 of the 36 states in the country as the calendar for elections in other states differed. The newly ruling party APC won 19 out of 31 making a total of 61.29 % of the states while the newly opposition PDP won 12 or 38.71% of the seats. There was already a state controlled by APGA Anambra and Osun controlled by APC, Ondo Labour Party, Edo APC and Bayelsa PDP which

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made a total of 36 states if added together. In total, APC controlled 21 states (58.33%), PDP have 13 seats (36.11 %) with APGA and Labour Party each controlling 1 state (2.78%).

This shows clearly that PDP has been relegated into an opposition party at state level too. This comparatively indicated a decline in the performance of PDP from the previous elections. For instance, in 1999, PDP won 21 Governorship seats, 28 seats in 2003, 25 seats in 2007 and 23 seats in 2011. This domineering trend was reversed by APC in 2015 as it wrestled many seats from the ruling PDP which won only 12 seats. Thus, APC set the record of capturing power at all levels within less than three years of its formation from 2013. Such feat was obtainable also in the National Assembly.

Table 3

2015 National Assembly Elections Senate

Party	Seats	Percentage
APC	60	55.05 %
PDP	49	44.95 %
Total	109	100 %

Source: Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)2015.

Table 4
2015 National Assembly Elections
House of Representatives

Party	Seats	Percentage
APC	225	62.5 %
PDP	125	34.72 %
Other Parties	10	2.78 %
Total	360	100 %

Source: Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) 2015.

The results above indicated a reverse of trend in the number of seats won in the National Assembly as the APC won most of the seats in the upper chamber with 55.05 % and the lower chamber with 62.5 % the APC went ahead to form the leadership of both the houses dislodging PDP from its strong hold majority leadership of 16 years rule.

One of the distinguishing features of the 2015 General Elections is; it is regarded as the most credible of all the previous elections in the Fourth Republic. There are many writings, reports and observers that took that position.^{31,32 &33} Such position is also

³¹ Ejikeme Jombo Nwagwu, "Political Party Financing and Consolidation of Democracy in Nigeria 1999- 2015," *International Journal of Political Science* 10 (2016), 243-267.

³² Araba Akeem Ayanda & Braimah Joseph Odunayo. "Comparative Study of 2011 and 2015 Presidential Elections in Nigeria," *Global Journal of Human Social Sciences: F Political Science*. 15 (2015), 48-54.

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agreed upon by many of the informants in this research that were consulted during the field work that the 2015 General Elections is the most credible in the Fourth Republic. And this position has been agreed upon by both the ruling and opposition parties after the election.

It is discovered that APC as an opposition played a major role in the outcome of the 2015 General Elections in many ways which supported the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. Some of these roles are identified as follows:

- 1. Merger:** the APC stalwarts realised that there is no single party no matter how strong it is can defeat the ruling PDP for many factors such as incumbency, better organisation, financial muscle, grassroots mobilisation etc. The ANPP attempted to battle it out with PDP twice in 2003 and 2007 with Muhammadu Buhari as its candidate but he was always defeated by the ruling PDP. In 2011, the CPC under Muhammadu Buhari attempted again but was defeated by the ruling PDP again. There was an effort in 2011 to form an alliance between the ACN and CPC but it failed at the late hours prior to the elections in 2011.

³³ Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room Monitoring the 2015 Elections in Nigeria. (2015), 1-10.

In realizing the invincibility of the ruling PDP and the non leverage of one single opposition to challenge PDP properly, in 2013 February, four major national opposition parties consisting of ACN, ANPP, faction of APGA, CPC and they were later joined by newPDP in 2014. This led to the formation of APC which became as stronger as PDP. It was the foundation that made the 2015 General Elections a strong contest.

2. Financial Support: the newly established APC succeeded in having top political echelons in the country in the National Assembly from both the Senators and Members House of Representatives, serving Governors and former Heads of States in addition to many PDP members underground who committed anti-party activities. The members were financially stronger and also have the powers of incumbency as well as public treasury and private sponsorship.

The party members provided all financial support and spent much although; not nearly that of the ruling PDP but they still wither the financial strength to sponsor APC candidates at all levels thereby giving the PDP an equal match in campaign spending in terms of billboards, posters, media adverts and providing for their supporters and agents which probably prevented them from being bought out by PDP for anti-party compromise.

3. Prevention of rigging: the APC on emergence already has 16 state Governors, simple majority members in the Federal House of Representatives, significant strength in Senate and many top politicians from the ruling PDP and other parties who decided to work underground for the APC. They prevented any attempt at rigging and ensure that all votes count especially in the APC stronghold where they suspected rigging activities.

There were allegations of massive rigging by PDP in the 2003, 2007 and 2011 elections but it was agreed that in 2015, the machineries for rigging was prevented by two major factors: the use of card reader which accredited voters before voting and the PDP members that decamped to APC and secured their territories from usual PDP style of rigging.

4. Capturing Power: one of the major functions of political parties is capturing power through a constitutionally stipulated process which is a periodic election. APC as an opposition political in 2015 played the role of not only opposition but also captured power successfully at the centre and in majority of the states. Such made the Nigerian democracy to enter a new phase in its history as consolidated and sustained democracy perpetuated by principles of democracy in terms of tolerance for

opposition politics, politics of consensus, fair play ground and good conduct of electoral process.

5. Preventing Institutionalisation of one Party System:

the APC can claim credit for rescuing Nigerian democracy from the shackles of one party institutionalisation and choiceless democracy which seemed to have been perpetuated by the ruling PDP for sixteen (16) years. If not because of timely intervention of APC in seizing power from PDP, there might be a situation where all other parties might cease to exist and the ruling PDP can transform Nigerian democracy into a one party Communist style of ruling where the electorates have no choice of party platform. Indeed, that of the Communist would have been even better since they have an ideology universally recognised while PDP has no ideology except power control for personal gain owing to massive corruption allegation labeled against them so far.

Conclusion and Recommendation

It is concluded that, the 2015 General Elections is the foundation for strengthening and consolidation of Nigerian democratic governance and the most improved elections so far conducted in the Fourth Republic perceive nationally and internationally as credible and fair. The merger of major opposition political parties of ACN, ANPP, faction of APGA,

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CPC and newPDP all together led to the formation of All Progressive Congress (APC) which is believed to have altered the entire political terrain of the country. This has been in addition, supplemented by the improvement in the electoral body INEC in the introduction of better procedure for election conduct in using smart card readers for accreditation and voting of electorates.

The APC as an opposition played a greater role in determining the outcome of the elections result and in shaping the democratic trend of the country. It has revealed that, opposition politics is gaining root in Nigeria and will very soon spread into other parts of Africa. This will make Nigerian and developing democracies more consolidated and advanced according to the principles of democracy.

Recommendation

The paper recommends the following for a better opposition politics and an improved election in future in Nigeria:

1. The ruling APC should ensure that it provide a level playing ground that it enjoyed to capture power where other opposition political parties should have a chance of capturing power too in future as options for voters when the need arises;
2. The opposition PDD should learn a good lesson from the ruling APC and organise itself to give the APC a

formidable challenge in future elections so as to avoid institutionalisation of one party system which will be detrimental to democratic rule;

3. Other powerful opposition parties need to organise themselves and form a strong alliance like that of APC in order to have a better chance of challenging the ruling party in future and
4. The measures that were put in place during the 2015 General Elections such as the use of 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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