

## OPPOSITION PARTIES AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN NIGERIA, 2007-2013: A DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT

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### **Abstract**

*Politics is a struggle of contending ideological viewpoints for the allocation and distribution of resources. Political parties are at the center of politics as modern democracy is unthinkable in the absence of viable political parties and the interplay of party politics that characterize the polity. This paper therefore examines the role of opposition political parties in political re-engineering of Nigerian state and the impact of absence of internal democracy on the electoral performance of the opposition parties in Nigeria. An attempt is also made to analyze the recent merger between the opposition political parties. The study adopts qualitative method of data gathering and uses theory of the post-colonial state. Hence, this paper argues that the opposition parties' inability to offer itself as alternative government in Nigeria today lies in their weak institutionalization and ideology drought, which results in an increasing disconnect between citizens and their elected leaders, and a decline in political activism. We conclude that the opposition parties should as much as possible avoid politics of tribe, religion, region, zone or race and field candidates who are true Nigerians with good track records, that will be marketable to the electorates as well as perform as expected. It recommends that the formation and merger of future opposition political parties should follow a micro natural evolution and patriotic commitment; and that opposition politics in the context of inter party relations in Nigeria needs a total overhaul through proactive and agenda setting governance policy engagement and commitments.*

**Keywords:** Inter-Party Politics, Political Parties, Election, Democracy and Nigeria

## **Introduction**

In less than a year from now Nigerians will, in a nationwide poll, elect a new set of leadership at the local, state and federal levels. Political parties will play an important role in this process. They will animate the entire electoral process with their campaigns and rallies, and will push for new policy agenda though usually stated but hardly implemented. Political party is one of the most complex and critical institutions of democracy. Thus, the pertinent institution in a democracy is political parties. Political parties, as “makers” of democracy, have been so romanticized that scholars have claimed that neither democracy nor democratic societies are thinkable without them (Omotola, 2009). They not only perform functions that are government related, such as making government accountable and exercising control over government administration; and electorate related functions such as political representation, expression of people’s demand through interest articulation and aggregation as well as structuring of electoral choices; but also linkage related functions, playing an intermediary and mediatory role between the government and the electorate (see, Moore, 2002; Lapalombara & Anderson, 2001; Simon, 1962). Following, Omotola (2005a) and Egwu (2005), Saliu & Omotola (2006) have pointed out that political parties can only cope effectively with these responsibilities to the extent of their political institutionalization in terms of structure, internal democracy, cohesion and discipline, as much as their autonomy.

As a concept, democracy is a system of government characterized by the participation of the people through their freely elected representatives, by which the recognition and promotion of the basic rights of citizens, including the rights of vulnerable groups such as the minorities (Omotola 2008). This is basically has to do with the ability of the people to control decision making in line with Osaghae (1994) who argues that the central thing about democracy is to ensure that power actually belong to the people. Dahl (2000) pointed out two dimensions of democracy that, democracy in theory (as an ideal, goal, aim or standard) and in practices. This takes us to the concept of political party upon which democracy, both as a standard and practice, should rest ideally.

Political Scientists have defined political party from different perspectives. There tend to be consensus than divergent views among scholars of stasiology in their submissions and conclusions on the conceptualization of inter party politics and political party relations in contemporary Nigerian society (Omoruyi, 2001; Coleman, 1960 & Whitaker,

1970, cited in Eme & Anyadike (2011); Sklar, 1963;; Dudley, 1968; and Post & Vickers, 1973 among others). Schattschnider (1960), cited in Eme & Anyadike (2011), Key jnr. (1964), Lawson (1980), Schilesinger (1984 and 1985), Gboyega et al (1993), Agbaje (1999), Elekwa (2001), Nnoli (2003) and Onwudiwe & Suberu (2005) cited in Eme & Anyadike (2011) define political parties in terms of their role in linking levels of government to levels of society. Political parties are crucial actors in representative democracies. Parties can help to articulate group aims, nurture political leadership, develop and promote policy alternatives, and present voters with coherent electoral alternatives.

For democracy to flourish there must be viable opposition parties on ground. Political parties play two important roles in a political process: they form a government or they serve as opposition (Matthias, 2007, cited in Lamidi & Bello, 2013). Obianyo (2014) conceptualized the term opposition as all the activities of political parties, their agents or representatives within and outside the legislature that criticizes queries and/or disagrees with the policies of the government in power, without challenging the legitimacy of the party in government and or the constitution that underlies it. It also denotes party or parties that lost the presidential election and lack control over the executive arm of government, as well as the parties in minority in the National Assembly by virtue of having lost the largest share of the seats in both houses of the National Assembly. Dolo (2006) cited in Lamidi & Bello (2013: 172) defines opposition parties as "partisan political institutions that are intentionally designed to temper the ruling party's excesses while still pursuing both legislative and presidential offices." The pivotal role of the opposition party, pressure and interest groups is a Magna carta enshrined in all constitutional democracies worldwide, as they enliven the market place of ideas, debates and well thought-out alternative policy options to governance.

There has been astronomical increase in the number of political parties in Nigeria since the restoration of civil politics in 1999. In 1999, three (3) political parties contested the elections, so that by the 2003 election year, about 28 political parties dotted the political space. The number increased to 50 political parties in 2007 and 67 in 2011. Only ten parties won seats in the 2011 elections. On 18th August 2011, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) de-registered seven parties that did not contest for any elective office in the 2011 elections. They are the Democratic Alternative, National Action Council, National Democratic Liberal Party, Masses Movement of Nigeria, Nigeria People's Congress, Nigeria Elements

Progressive Party and the National Unity Party (Daily Trust, 2011, as in Liebowitz & Ibrahim, 2013). At the end of 2012, an additional 31 political parties were de-registered, leaving only 27 registered political parties. Despite the large number of political parties, and continuous entrants of political newcomers, the political parties still lack ideology and are still in search of political programmes, members and alliance to offer alternative government. The Nigerian opposition parties lacked strong constituencies to play the roles of opposition parties let alone offering electoral appeal as an alternative government. Ours is a politics of convenience, devoid of ideology and any form of political philosophy.

It has been observed in recent times that many political parties in Nigeria find it difficult to adopt an open system that will not only allow members of the party to participate in the decision making but also give them constrained opportunity to contest in elections under the party's platform. This kind of socio-political restriction is poisonous and has resulted in party wrangling, acrimony and cross-carpeting in many Nigerian political parties. Is there internal party democracy in Nigeria's opposition parties? Do Nigerian opposition parties have an identifiable ideology in their quest to offer alternative government? These and other related questions are engaged in this paper with a view not only to understanding the depth of their roles and electoral performance in 2007 and 2011 gubernatorial and presidential elections, but also to mapping a viable path towards providing dividends of democracy and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Specifically the study examines the opposition parties lack of internal party democracy and non-adherence to party ideology (if it has one), which manifests in adoption of consensus candidate, non-transparent of candidates' selections in primary elections as well as in party leadership executive positions, the executive arrogance within the parties as a barrier to offering alternative government. It is this noticeable lacuna that this study seeks to analyze.

### **Towards a theoretical compass**

There is hardly any valid research study that has no theoretical construct. Meanwhile, the essence of theorizing is to explain in order to reach generalization, predict and control. It is on this note that this research work will be principally anchored on the Marxist theory of the post-colonial state. The major proponents of the theory of post-colonial state are Marx and Engel (1977). They argued that the major aim of modern state is only a committee for managing the common affairs of the ruling class. Alavi, (1973);

Miliband, (1977); Ake, (1985); Ekekwe, (1986); Lenin, (1988); Ibeanu, (1998) among others are the Marxist epigenists that have contributed to the explanation and understanding of the character of states in the periphery. The theory suggests that the post-colonial state is a creation of imperialism. As such, it has followed the developmental strategy dictated by the interest of imperialist and its local allies, not by those of the majority of the indigenous population. This post-colonial state has created for itself a deep crisis from which it can hardly extricate itself without fundamentally changing its present nature.

Miliband, (1977:109) aptly posits that "states in the periphery are sources of economic power as well as an instrument of production and hence the highest employer of labour". Ake (1985:5) also noted that:

The state is a specific modality of class domination, one in which domination is mediated by commodity exchange so that the system of institutional mechanisms of domination is differentiated and disassociated from the ruling class and even the society appears as an objective force standing alongside society.

Corroborating the above views, Alavi, (1973:146) opined that "post-colonial states are instrument of primitive accumulation by the dominant class and their collaborators". Similarly, Lenin, (1988:10) noted that "the state is a product of irreconcilable antagonism between classes that exist in society". According to Ekekwe (1986), the post colonial state rest on the foundation of the colonial state, this, in turn, had incorporated some important elements of the pre- colonial rudimentary state structures. The main goal of the colonial state was to create conditions under which accumulation of capital by the foreign bourgeoisie in alliance with the ruling elite would take place through the exploitation of local human and other natural resources. It was on this basis that the post-colonial state emerged.

In application of the theory to the study, we argue that the Nigerian political party is a replica of the post colonial state which is authoritarian in nature and hence an instrument for primitive accumulation of capital by the dominant economic class. In Nigeria, before the attainment of flag independence in 1960, ubiquitous state involvement in the formation of political parties was seen as an impetus to nationalistic struggles for the political emancipation of the people but in actual sense it was a façade.

Hence the various pre-independence political parties that emerged with the introduction of the elective principle, namely, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC) were all consumed with the ambition and volition to challenge the colonial state against its marginalization policies of the indigenous populace, be it on excessive taxation, shortages of social amenities, substandard education, to discriminatory practices against the indigenous population especially in the civil service (Sklar 1983 & Coleman, 1986 as cited in Obianyo, 2014). On gaining independence in 1960, the various pre-independence political parties that metamorphosed into independence political parties toed the line of least resistance and were engrossed in the very act of predatory and exploitative orientations of the colonial state. The promise of regional autonomy in anticipation of independence changed the trajectory of party politics as intra-party fragmentation and ethnicity colored emerging party system and party politics, though, without diluting the opposition sentiments and activities of the emergent parties. Thus, 1945 – 1960 witnessed the entrance of parties formed along the lines of ethnic cleavages and inter-party competition that many times threatened and queried the unity of the emerging Nigerian state (Obianyo, 2014).

From the foregoing, political party in power is now increasingly seen as the most viable and rapid avenues for acquisition of state power, positions and private capitals. Thus, experience had shown that belonging to ruling party have become the surest means to riches, affluence and prestige in the day – to – day struggle for political leverage. This explains the reasons for the floating of many opposition parties by wealthy few and Politicians' switch of allegiance from one political party to the other, depending on their assessment of their individual fortunes. What exists is an unfortunate situation in which the opposition declares for the winning party. Losers in party primary elections decamp to other parties and get elected only to change back to their parties. It is this which has made the ruling party all powerful and too rich, that is responsible for desperate contest by opposition parties to take control of the centre at all cost. The vestige of the authoritarian nature of the colonial state remains critical for any assessment of the performance of the opposition parties and democratization in Nigeria.

### **The authoritarian nature and death of internal democracy in primary elections of opposition parties**

Nigeria has been under democratic rule for the past fifteen (15) years but the political parties which are the spring board of democracy has been unable to inculcate internal democracy within their folds. With respect to the conduct of political parties since 1999, opposition parties are yet not engaged in the issues that will consolidate democracy in Nigeria. Nigerian politics has been stagnant with practically the same features since 1999. It has remained about individual aspirations, vote buying, and use of thugs for political campaigns, ballot box snatching and rigging during elections. Our politicians, with very little exception, are the promoters of these vices and our political parties the precursors and reservoirs. Issues and ideas are blatantly ignored. Therefore ideology and values are non-existent in our democratic practice. The result is that the only contest is that of personalities. What the personalities represent is often influenced, determined and controlled by ethnic, regional and religious considerations. The consequence of this reality is the absence of nationalism or patriotic commitments. Thus, we are a nation without nationalists or patriots, only religious, ethnic and at best regional leaders. These ethnic, religious and regional leaders employ primordial sentiments as rallying point for mobilization in a self-serving manner.

This lack of internal democracy within the political parties accounts to a larger extent opposition parties inability to challenge the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). The All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), the Congress of Progressive Change (CPC) and the Action Congress of Nigeria are the major opposition political parties in the country. The ANPP and CPC are considered as conservative parties while the ACN is seen as progressive in inclination. Political observers are of the opinion that no mainstream political party in Nigeria can honestly boast of a complete and sound internal democracy. Here, an attempt will be made to empirically examine the authoritarian nature and dearth of internal democracy in candidates selection during primary election in three (3) opposition political parties namely All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), and the Congress of Progressive Change (CPC) to make an informed generalizations. These parties can be described as the leading opposition parties (now All Progressive Congress -APC) in Nigeria during the 2007 and 2011 general elections not because of the extent of their institutionalization, but based on the fact that they have contested and won elections at various levels of

government despite certain metamorphosis at various level of government between 2007 till date.

### **Congress for Progressive Change (CPC)**

The CPC, one of Nigeria's newest parties, formed in 2009, is the third largest party in terms of seats in the National Assembly and the second largest in terms of presidential vote in the 2011 elections. The Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) confirmed General Muhammed Buhari as its presidential flag-bearer for the 2011 elections. Buhari was sole candidate for the post and delegates gave him tumultuous ratification. In retrospect, in 2007 at the ANPP national convention, Buhari was returned unopposed when several other contenders stepped down "voluntarily". The Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) which is largely a splinter group from the ANPP did not control any state government until the current dispensation. It now controls Nasarawa State following the defeat of the PDP candidate former governor Aliyu Akwe-Doma by its candidate now Governor Tanko Almakura. The CPC seems to be the guiltiest of all political parties in the observance of internal democracy. The party got entangled in controversies over the choice of candidates for the April 2011 election. The CPC primaries were also subjects of manipulations and litigation as was the case in Kano, Plateau, Kano, Katsina and Bauchi states to mention just a few. There was alleged imposition of candidates for the governorship race by the leadership of the party. Those who were alleged to have won primaries conducted by the party had their name changed for the favoured candidates by party leadership. The ensued violence resulted in the killing of about six persons. (The Punch, 5 January 2011). This led to series of court cases that eventually cost the party (CPC) victories in many states.

### **Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN)**

The Action Congress of Nigeria, one of Nigeria's growing parties, ranks as the country's second largest party in terms of gubernatorial, senatorial, and representative seats. In selecting candidates for elective positions, the party most often either failed to adopt primaries or where the primaries were conducted, the outcome of such primaries were not strictly adhered to in choosing of candidates. In the build up to the April 2011 general elections, no primaries were conducted in the selection of ACN presidential candidates, as the party leaders just put heads together and picked former Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Mallam Nuhu Ribadu



as its presidential candidate to the surprise of other presidential aspirants like former Sokoto State Governor, Alhaji Attahiru Bafarawa. The same scenario played itself out in the selection of candidates for various elective positions in all states where ACN fielded candidates.

Perhaps the highest disregards for internal democracy took place in the Lagos State Chapter of the party during the build up to the October, 22 Local Government elections as there were protests of imposition of candidates by party members in almost all the 57 Local Government Areas and the Local Council Development Areas (LCDA). Although a central primary was said to have been conducted at the party secretariat, the leadership of the party did not follow the outcome of the primaries in the selection of candidates for the election (Esan, 2011). The ACN leaders, most especially in states where the party governs and where it appear to have high prospects of winning, collected various outrageous sums from prospective aspirants and thereafter refused to organize primaries, in most cases, for the different aspirants. One Mr. Seun Williams, an aspirant for the Lagos State House of Assembly seat was quoted thus by the Independent of 20 January, 2011: "I can't count how many times I meet with members and supporters of the party since 2008, I spent my money gathering information from them and equipping myself with details on how to better their lot when I get to serve them in the Assembly. I have been assured by the ACN members I would get their votes regardless of the party platform I contest under. He recounted that he won the 2007 primaries under the ACN platform but was asked by Tinubu to step down for Ademola Adegunle, now a lawmaker. "My feeling was that I would get back my mandate this year, but there were no primaries as far as am concerned. The party hierarchy cannot deny this fact".

The Vanguard of January 14, 2011 also fielded this report on the ACN primaries in Lagos state. "An INEC Officer on ground of anonymity spoke to the Vanguard thus: the candidates emerged under questionable circumstances. After you media were asked to leave the election venue, we were equally ushered out while the officers took the ballot boxes into a room. Later they came out with a paper where the results were written and asked us to sign which we refused. It took the mercy of security personnel to see us safely to our cars and the result sheet is in our office and we have officially written our reports. The absence of agents for aspirants, which the party did not allow is the first indication that all is not well with the election".

### **All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP)**

The ANPP is one of the more well-established parties in Nigeria but has seen a significant decline in its membership and seats since its establishment in 1998, partly due to the PDP's overwhelming of the ANPP in the 2003 and 2007 elections, during which the ANPP lost much of its regional support base. The ANPP has now become a shadow of what it was in 1998, at the beginning of the current civilian rule. At the moment, the party has been decimated by series of defections into the PDP and CPC – direct political fallout of its opportunistic self-serving alliance with the PDP at the center. Despite the not too bright prospect for the ANPP in the 2011 elections, its primaries, particular in state where in controls or was active, were characterized by the same negative features prevalent in the PDP. For instance, only the very rich or those backed by the rich and of those who held political offices have been able to secure the party tickets across the country and of course, have created massive condemnations and resentment across the country amongst the party rank-and-file.

On Friday January 28, 2011 the ANPP governorship candidate in Borno State was gunned down in his father's house in Maiduguri alongside six other persons including a brother of the former governor, Ali Modu Sheriff. The former governor was of view that the gruesome murder was carried out by those who felt shortchanged in the party's primaries (The Punch, 29 January 2011). Harry Akande noted that he left the ANPP the party he nurtured for 12 years and committed a lot of resources, because some people had taken over the party, using their wealth. He said; "I trusted the ideology of the founding fathers of the party. I have known ANPP to be a sectional party long ago. But I was very optimistic that we can change the party from within. But the last two elections convinced me that I was just banging my head at the rock. There are some people who have technically taken over the party. It looks like the party is now in the hands of what I have always called a cabal and they are not more than four or five people".

When it comes to party nomination, opposition parties would put aside the provisions of their own constitutions, and actually substitute names without reference to democratic procedures. While the leaders, or can we say the owners, of those political parties got their people to compete in elections, they also denied the nurturing of democracy within the party. In many parties, financial procedure and accountability is deficient. Many hardly obey their own constitutions and they look for shortcuts in complying with electoral laws. Many are factionalized and not only will this translate in the

politics within the parties but it also has larger implication in terms of the national politics. There is deliberate exhibition of corruption and corrupt tendencies by the political parties. Modern representative democracy requires viable, ideology-based political parties capable of providing clear policy options as evidence of a demonstrable capacity to govern. Political parties ought not to be corrupt, self-centered organizations dominated by power-hungry elite who serve only their own interests and those of their cronies. Political parties must serve the interest of the ordinary citizen.

### **Assessment of opposition political parties in Nigerian election**

Political parties are crucial actors in representative democracies. Parties can help to articulate group aims, nurture political leadership, develop and promote policy alternatives, and present voters with coherent electoral alternatives. It has been observed in recent times that many political parties in Nigeria find it difficult to adopt an open system that will not only allow members of the party to participate in the decision making but also give them constrained opportunity to contest in elections under the party's platform. This kind of socio-political restriction is poisonous and has resulted in party wrangling, acrimony and cross-carpeting in many Nigerian political parties. Matthias (2007) posits that political parties play two important roles in a political process: they form a government or they serve as opposition. Thus, for democracy to flourish there must be viable and strong opposition parties on ground, which not only criticizes the government but offers tough credible solutions, and articulate a different set of answers to those of the ruling party.

The Nigeria political landscape has been dogged by the absence of credible and formidable opposition. Omoruyi, (2001), summarized the performance of the parties since 1999. For him, the so-called political parties are not in competition with one another. They are in factions; these factions are more in competition within themselves than with another party; and many political parties in Nigeria today function as ethnic or regional defenders, hence the high level of fragmentation and fluidity that has come to characterize party system in Nigeria. Tyoden (2002) as in Obianyo (2014) views the parties that emerged in 1999 as mere electoral coalitions put together to satisfy organizational criteria laid down by transitional authorities, rather than groups that have grown organically with a clear cut and long term political project or vision of society. He argues that the ideological vacuousity of the parties, made them reflect only the conflicting

personal interests of their leaders, and thus left the centre stage of politics to sectional and primordial associations like Afenifere, Oha n'eze ndi Igbo, Arewa Consultative Forum, Ijaw National Congress and similar primordial groups, each articulating its own agenda for the nation.

Teshome (2009) & Olukoshi (2009) carried an in depth study on the factors working against effective party opposition in Africa. Teshome identified high party fragmentation, personality parties, and lack of alternative programmes, poor mass base, and gender/youth insensitivity in party membership, poor finance and ethnicity as factors militating against strong opposition parties in Africa, Nigeria inclusive. Olukoshi on his part identifies electoral fraud, use of agent provocateurs by the ruling party to destabilize opposition parties from within, personality cut, lack of internal party democracy, winner take it all syndrome of first past the post electoral system, withdrawal of resources and development projects from opposition strongholds, donorisation of aspects of opposition party politics, neglect of rural areas for electoral support, factionalization and crippling financial problems as some of the factors working against effective party opposition politics in Africa (cited in Obianyo, 2014).

As regards the issue of opposition party politics, the current number of political parties in view of International Crisis Group (2007b) cited in Lamidi & Bello (2013) suggested a more democratic polity, a widening of political space and more options for voters. But most of these parties are composed of individuals whose personal interests are threatened by the existing governments and thus decided to join the opposition party. The existing opposition's parties in Nigeria today lack the integrity to stick to their stance on some salient political issues as it affects the citizenry. The priorities of all these parties are what they will gain in politics. Opposition parties in Nigerian democracy remained ineffective due to their failure to form coalitions that will give a strong opposition to the ruling party and make them obey the rule of the game for people to enjoy the dividends of democracy. The performance of opposition political parties in the 2011 general election as shown in tables 1 and 2 below reinforces the need to form a coalition or merger and make the ruling party to be sensitive to the plight of the people. Scholars emphasized the need for alternative policy in Nigeria. For instance, Isakpa (2008) as in Lamidi & Bello (2013:176) noted that:

If ruling politicians are failing the people, it is the responsibility of the opposition to step in, in a credible,

robust, articulate, clear and coherent manner, to provide alternative policy options on how to deal with the challenges that confront the country and the majority of the Nigerian people.

**Table 1: 2011 Presidential Election Results of Opposition Parties**

PARTY	VOTES	PERCENTAGE
CPC	12,214,853	31.98%
CAN	2,067,301	5.41%
ANPP	917,012	2.40%
OTHERS	504,866	1.32%

Source: Authors Compilation adapted from [www.inecnigeria.org](http://www.inecnigeria.org)

**Table 2: 2011 Gubernatorial Election Results of Opposition Parties**

PARTY	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
CAN	6	16.7%
ANPP	3	8.3%
APGA	2	5.6%
CPC	1	2.8%
LP	1	2.8%

Source: Authors Compilation adapted from [www.inecnigeria.org](http://www.inecnigeria.org)

**Table 3: Performance of Opposition Political Parties in 2007 Presidential and National Assembly Elections**

#### 21 April 2007 Presidential Election

Candidate (Party)	Number of Votes	% of Votes
Muhammadu Buhari (ANPP)	6,605,299	18.66%
Atiku Abubakar (AC)	2,637,848	7.45%
Orji Uzor Kalu (PPA)	608,803	1.72%
Attahiru Bafarawa (DPP)	289,224	0.82%
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu (APGA)	155,947	0.44%
Pere Ajuwa (AD)	89,241	0.25%
Christopher Okotie (FRESH)	74,049	0.21%
Patrick Utomi (ADC)	50,849	0.14%
Asakarawon Olapere (NPC)	33,771	0.10%
Ambrose Owuru (HDP)	28,519	0.08%
Arthur Nwankwo (PMP)	24,164	0.07%

Emmanuel Okereke (ALP)	22,677	0.06%
Lawrence Adedoyin (APS)	22,409	0.06%
Aliyu Habu Fari (NDP)	21,974	0.06%
Galtima Liman (NNPP)	21,665	0.06%
Maxi Okwu (CPP)	14,027	0.04%
Sunny Okogwu (RPN)	13,566	0.04%
Iheanyichukwu Nnaji (BNPP)	11,705	0.03%
Osagie Obayuwana (NCP)	8,229	0.02%
Olapade Agoro (NAC)	5,752	0.02%
Akpone Solomon (NMDP)	5,664	0.02%
Isa Odidi (ND)	5,408	0.02%
Aminu Abubakar (NUP)	4,355	0.01%
Mojisola Adekunle Obasanjo (MMN)	4,309	0.01%

The figures in the table are based on final results announced by Maurice Iwu, Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), on 23 April 2007.

## 21 April 2007 National Assembly Election

Party	Senate	House of Representatives
	Number of Seats (109)	Number of Seats (360)
All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP)	14	63
Action Congress (AC)	6	30
Progressive People's Alliance (PPA)	1	3
Accord Party (ACCORD)	1	-
Labour Party (LP)	-	1

Source: African Election Database, 2011

**Table 4: Performance of Opposition Political Parties in 2011 National Assembly and Presidential Elections**

### April 2011 National Assembly Election

Party	Senate	House of Representatives
	Number of Seats (109)	Number of Seats (360)
Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN)	13	47
All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP)	7	25
Congress for Progressive Change (CPC)	5	30
Others	4	9

**16 April 2011 Presidential Election**

<b>Candidate (Party)</b>	<b>Number of Votes</b>	<b>% of Votes</b>
Muhammadu Buhari (CPC)	12,214,853	31.98%
Nuhu Ribadu (ACN)	2,079,151	5.41%
Ibrahim Shekarau (ANPP)	917,012	2.40%
Mahmud Waziri (PDC)	82,243	0.21%
Nwadike Chikezie (PMP)	56,248	0.15%
Lawson Aroh (PPP)	54,203	0.14%
Peter Nwangwu (ADC)	51,682	0.14%
Iheanyichukwu Nnaji (BNPP)	47,272	0.12%
Christopher Okotie (FRESH)	34,331	0.09%
Dele Momodu (NCP)	26,376	0.07%
Solomon Akpona (NMDP)	25,938	0.07%
Lawrence Adedoyin (APS)	23,740	0.06%
Ebiti Ndok (UNPD)	21,203	0.06%
John Dara (NTP)	19,744	0.05%
Rasheed Shitta-Bey (MPPP)	16,492	0.04%
Yahaya Ndu (ARP)	12,264	0.03%
Ambrose Owuru (HDP)	12,023	0.03%
Patrick Utomi (SDMP)	11,544	0.03%
Christopher Nwaokobia (LDPN)	8,472	0.02%

**Source:** African Election Database, 2011

Once the elections are over, the interest of common man is no longer in the opposition party's agenda. They will be struggling to be part of a unity government initiated by the ruling party. In Nigeria, the party in power in connivance with the presidency through the instrumentality of Government of National Unity broke up other parties. They have openly induced the leaders of the opposition political parties with plum offices. What functions are these people performing for them when they are supposed to be a watch dog of the party in power? Are they by definition members of their party or members of their campaign team in future elections? Some opposition political parties struggled, and we dare say, lobbied to be part of the

Government of National Unity (GNU) under President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua administration in 2007. Progressive People's Alliance (PPA) nominated Dr. Chuka Odum, who served as a minister in Yar'Adua's Government of National Unity. There were crisis in the camp of the then main opposition party - All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) which bothered on joining the Government of National Unity (GNU). This was aptly captured by Gabriel, (2012:5) thus:

Members of All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), after 2007 general elections for example, abandoned their party and presidential candidate to be part of the Unity Government introduced by ruling party (PDP). The presidential candidate (Muhammed Buhari) of the party (ANPP) was persuaded by his party leaders to drop his case against the ruling party despite the admission of the president that the election is characterized by fraud.

The role of opposition is invisible. The party leaders who are expected to play these roles were busy to be part of the "National Government" proposed by the ruling party. Politicians switch allegiance or decamp from one political party to the other, depending on their assessment of their individual fortunes. What exists is an unfortunate situation in which the opposition declares for the winning party. Losers in party primary elections decamp to other parties and get elected only to change back to their parties. The Nigerian Constitution gives a leeway to this unwholesome development. The Constitution at least allows a person to change his party, if the party is in crisis. We can see how unscrupulously mischievous this provision of the Constitution can be, or was its insertion premeditated? (Ikejiani- Clark, 2008). The absence of viable opposition denied the ruling party alternative policy. This gives the ruling party opportunities to operate without serious constructive criticism. Thus, there is an increasing disconnect between citizens and their elected leaders, a decline in political activism, and a growing sophistication of anti-democratic forces, as democratic political parties are continually challenged. In other words, opposition political parties operate in Nigeria devoid of ideology and any form of political philosophy. If our political parties are ideology based, the moment you move from one party to another, it means you are changing ideological base, which in essence, is political suicide. Herein lays the unproductive antagonisms and



destructive criticisms which characterized opposition political parties' role in Nigerian politics.

What the new main opposition All Progressive Congress (APC) and other opposition parties have not been able to do are: demonstrate that there is a qualitative difference between them and the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) crowd. What is even more disturbing is that none of the opposition parties, least of all the APC, comes across as having any clues about how to proceed. True leaders excel in the way they respond to a major adversity. Great leaders separate themselves from the pack of pretenders when they are tested by crises. The APC advertises itself as the antidote to the ruling People's Democratic Party's lethargy, inertia, and incompetence. We are told that, come 2015, all we need do is replace the PDP with the APC—and, pronto, our headaches would vanish; we did usher in an era of superb statecraft and surpassing leadership. If this were so, what stopped the opposition parties in its tracks at this moment of grave danger and opportunity in our polity? Why have the opposition parties failed to rise to the challenge of defining themselves as a serious opposition body—and doing so by proposing tough, credible solutions to Nigeria's festering malaise? One expects, that Nigeria's "main opposition political party" and others would seize this opportunity to articulate a different set of answers to those of the ruling PDP. One wishes that the opposition political parties would go beyond mere politicking, beyond the symbolic gesture of hoisting brooms, and instead offer insights into what we must do to extricate ourselves from a lurching doom. In other climes, like America, which our politics and system of government is modeled after, mergers or cross carpeting that are a major feature of our democracy is almost a no go area for them. Theirs is a politics built on ideology and political philosophy entrenched in values and culture. It will be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for Donald Trump, a staunch Republican, to decamp to the Democratic Party. What Republicans and Democrats do not have in common goes beyond the ballot box. Their personalities, core beliefs and policy ideas are fundamentally different. In these circumstances, it is almost impossible to see an nPDP-APC merger. Ours is a game of numbers, where capacity is everything. Our parties must evolve a practice that is in consonance with international practice in party administration.

### **The present merger of opposition parties in Nigeria: Any Hope?**

There is no gain saying the fact that some political parties in Nigeria recently merged into one main opposition party. The pertinent question remains – how far can this political marriage of convenience go in securing electoral victory especially at the 2015 presidential election? There are similarities and differences between these opposition political parties which engaged themselves in a political marriage of convenience for the purpose of wresting power from the Peoples Democratic Party led government. In the first stance, all the opposition parties had or presently have seat(s) in the various State Houses of Assembly and the National Assembly (Federal House of Representatives and The Senate). In addition, some of these opposition parties had or presently have control of one or more state government.

Furthermore, they are ethno regionally based, parochial in outlook and character, and equally draw their support mainly from constituencies limited principally by tribe and region. For instance, the former Alliance for Democracy (AD) and Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) had electoral support and base in the South West, All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) and Progressive People's Alliance (PPA) had party faithfuls in the South East while All Peoples Party (APP); All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) and Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) had voters appeal and followers in the North. Many of them are characterized by personality cult heroes and "godfather syndrome" and all experienced electoral volatility in different degrees.

In terms of differences, they vary with regards to electoral successes, age, character of the political gladiators and character of their formation. Also, some of these political parties started as full-fledged parties but suffered from internal crisis that led to splits, while others emerged from factional splits arising from such crisis. For instance, Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) is a splinter group from All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) was formed from the splinter group in Alliance for Democracy (AD) and crisis in Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) while Progressive People's Alliance (PPA) came from a faction in Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Thus, some of these opposition political parties namely Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), and a faction of All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) recently merged into one main opposition party called All Progressive Congress (APC) on the 31st of July 2013. It could be recalled that the registration of APC by the Independent National Electoral Commission

(INEC) was challenged by another minor political party which claimed ownership of the acronym – APC.

After series of consultations were held, the plan to launch APC into the fold of Nigerian political parties was climaxed on Saturday, 11th May 2013, when all major parties that are part of the new APC held their final congresses. The All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) held its congress in Zamfara, while the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) held its congress in Abuja. The Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) had earlier held its congress. A faction of the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) led by Imo state governor, Owelle Rochas Okorocha held its final congress too. These congresses held, signaled the dissolution of the former political parties and the birth of APC. The APC also has a faction of the Democratic People's Party (DPP) in its fold and a breakaway faction of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) who walked out of the party's Convention held on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013 to form the new PDP, some of which later collapsed into the APC. From the foregoing, APC is a conglomeration of opposition political parties in control of some states in Nigeria.

The process of party formation is monopolized by the wealthy few who control access to power. The interests of the working class and the poor are excluded by implications. Even the middle class in Nigeria has been rendered obsolete and moribund. This dislocation of the middle class and the growing impoverishment of the vast majority of Nigerians have intensified the exploitative grip on power by the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). The primary focus of Nigerian opposition parties' political leaders has been the promotion of their respective ethnic interests. The emphasis is not on developing economic infrastructures that will benefit the entire country, but rather it is on which ethnic group will produce the next president. Defined in this context, therefore, the construct of political alliance and alignment in Nigeria is driven by inter-ethnic coalition, and not by any reasoned ideological framework that cuts across ethnic divide. As a rule, when people of diverse ethnic groups establish their respective political parties, the motivation has been on how to embezzle public funds and further the underdevelopment of the country.

Even the ruling party – Peoples Democratic Party, which control majority of the executive and legislative arms of government, is often driven by internal convulsions, lack of cohesion, indiscipline and a glaring absence of internal democracy and ideology. Since inception of this democratic experiment in 1999, manifestoes are prepared by political parties for

elections in Nigeria, and after the campaigns, they are thrown away. How then can we hold parties and elected leaders to their promises and manifestoes or if they have no manifestoes, what do you hold them on to? There is lack of discipline within the parties. Addressing his party's - the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) - 3<sup>rd</sup> National Convention in Abuja on March 31, 2001, President Olusegun Obasanjo seemed to lament the lack of an ideology in the PDP. According to him, the PDP is "no more than a dynamic amalgam of interest groups." He continued: And what has held us together, if anything at all, is that our party is in power and there is a strong expectation of patronage, our party lacks cohesion. He itemized the properties of a political party as "cohesiveness, organization propelled by strict discipline, ideology-based, human ideas and solidarity and socially motivated unity of purpose," he asked his PDP members: "Can we in all honesty say that we are such a party?" (Guardian April 6th, 2001).

The "dynamic amalgam of interest groups" that Obasanjo referred to, is the group of Nigerians whose main *raison d'être* in politics has been to "make money" and deplete the national treasury in the process. Not much thought has been devoted to nation building. This phenomenon is not restricted to the PDP; it forms the basis of the other political parties - All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD) which merged into All Progressive Congress (APC). The fact that some prominent leaders and members of this party, including their former Senatorial and Gubernatorial aspirants in the elections decamped and joined the PDP can only be explained by their desire to belong to the "party in power," because "there is a strong expectation of patronage" to be gained in the PDP. It is doubtful if such leaders play any significant role in advancing the democratic agenda in Nigerian politics. The question is: Can the present opposition parties utilize these loopholes to dislodge the ruling Peoples Democratic Party? Like we had consistently maintained, it is nothing short of outright naivety and plain ignorance to expect the opposition parties to be any different from the Peoples Democratic Party. What makes a political party? It's Membership and ideology. What is opposition parties' ideology? Who are their members? The same people they renounced in PDP, called names and advertised as symbolizing all that is wrong with Nigeria. Today, they court them as the beautiful brides. They call them courageous; we are told that only they can salvage "our democracy." Imagine a democracy salvaged by the band of political jobbers united only by hatred

and propaganda but failed to articulate a different set of answers to those of the ruling PDP.

Unlike in the United States where the Republican Party and Democratic Party recruit members based on conservative and liberal ideology respectively, the main opposition party (APC) is welcoming those who were resisting discipline in their former party into their fold. We have no problem with that, but, our problem is, if you say you are a progressive party, you should be able to recruit those who share the same progressive ideologies with you and not the usual "anything goes" style of membership drive, where people who know little or nothing about party discipline and ideology are welcomed unconditionally just for the sake of making headline news stories on the pages of our newspapers.

It was Confucius who said that, "If you want to define the future, study the past!" While Nigerians welcome opposition party politics, an opposition that constitutes itself into a nuisance is far from the ideal. It must be an opposition that must be tolerant, humble, and capable of producing an alternative government. All atoms of bitterness, brigandage or do-or-die affair must be jettisoned. The point we are making is that our opposition political parties need the vibrant type of politics devoid of ignominy, jealousy, hatred and castigation of individuals and the pursuit of programmes to make life worthy for the poor without limitations. By this, opposition parties' line of discussion on political issue will change. It will no longer be about individuals, it will be about policy differences.

### **Implications for research and practice**

Some scholarly works on the impacts of opposition parties to democratization were mainly Eurocentric with little attention paid to opposition political parties and democratization in Nigeria. Democracy in Nigeria cannot be institutionalized without an appropriate political structure to support it, namely opposition parties. With respect to the third wave of democratization, studies on opposition parties in Africa is still scanty as the focus of the work of Olukoshi, (1998) tilted towards the trajectory of opposition politics of civil society (Rackner and Van de Walle, 2007). Implicitly, the formation of opposition political parties in Nigeria revolves around new rich individuals and along ethnic lines and as such has not aided the roles of political parties as strong institutions in the democratization process. With respect to the current wave of the dominance of one political party in a multi party political system in Nigeria, the need to x-

ray the impacts of opposition parties to democratization process becomes timely and indispensable. From the foregoing, studies on opposition parties and democratization between 2007 and 2013 in Nigeria are almost non-existent. Herein lay the practical and theoretical justification for this study. The formation and merger of future opposition political parties should follow a micro natural evolution and patriotic commitment.

### **Conclusion/Recommendations**

Politics is seen in terms of a small group dominating the whole society and taking the decisions which make the mark and history in politics. Even when there is a mass participatory democracy, consensus is generally brought about by a few or supported by few people who constitutes informal exclusive group (Mba, 2006). Nigerian politics is characterized by religious and tribal sentiment. There is no political sacrifice, conviction and commitment among Nigerian politicians. As argued by scholar, the survival of democracy depends on its ability to address the major problems of the people, Ojo, (2008) cited in Lamidi & Bello (2013). The undemocratic nature of the parties also fuelled the violence and political assassination that portrayed Nigeria as one of the most risky nation in the world. Since its inception in 1999, the democratic government has not for once completed investigation in either political violence or political assassination.

While most Nigerian see the merger of opposition political parties as a welcome development even though it is long overdue, the new opposition party should be wary of some challenges which if not properly handled will cause disarray within the party and weaken its base. The All Progressives Congress (APC) is now frequently called Nigeria's main opposition party or group. Which designation raises the question: what exactly does the APC stand for? Or a different question: In what significant ways does the APC represent an alternative vision for Nigerians? Opposition parties in a democracy are like gladiators who engage each other in contests of ideas based on issues of national development. This, they do with respect and love for one another, since they know they are pursuing a common purpose for their country, it is all about patriotism amongst compatriots. Debates on vital issues of national emancipation is supposed to be a routine taking place within and across strong opposition parties so that the best can always emerge to serve at party levels, state and national levels, after elections. Debates between the opposition parties ought to be conducted and made open to the public so that the people can watch and listen to what they say in

order that they would be able to take informed decisions when they are told to vote at elections. Therefore, the country needs strong opposition parties to provide the alternatives required for decisive and smooth transition when the need arises.

Since political parties remained an important institution that democratic survival relied on, then this paper recommend that all political parties should be reformed. The area of reformation should include the procedure for admitting new cross carpeting members. The new opposition party may welcome more members into its fold as time passes by. Firstly, the opposition parties should as much as possible avoids politics of tribe, religion, region, zone or race. This has been the bane of Nigerian politics. They should field candidates who are true Nigerians that will be marketable to the electorates, candidates who will perform as expected and candidates with good track records. There exist such people around the country; the right time to start shopping for such prospective candidates is now.

Each political party has a duty to preach restraint, caution and political moderation. The political class as a whole also has the solemn duty of ensuring that Nigerians develop sustainable confidence in our electoral and justice systems. That is the only way that robust democratic institutions can be nurtured. We enjoin our political party leaders to direct their ingenuity on how to solve the problem of indiscipline, lack of cohesion, ideology drought and absence of internal democracy and transparency in our political parties. Deep reflection should as well be given to the malady of intra- and inter-party squabbles. To effectively address these issues is to establish a definitive roadmap on how to consolidate and sustain the gains of democracy in Nigeria.

There is hardly service in party politics in Nigeria. If political parties are the vehicle to participate in election, they must participate the way they should and make election free, fair and transparent in such a way that the election will be generally accepted. The formation and merger of future opposition political parties should follow a natural micro evolution. They should be transparent in the procedure of selecting party flag bearers as well as involvement of all party cards carrying members in their primary election. A well designed and meaningful party manifestoes should be developed by all political parties as there is an urgent need for our political parties to define their ideologies. By so doing, the political parties outside government can criticize the policy of ruling party based on their programmes.

Opposition political parties must clearly stand for something in a fragile democracy like Nigeria's in which destabilizing democrats have suddenly found their voices and have been let loose in the new air of freedom. Unless the spring sources, being the opposition parties, are themselves impartial, disciplined, buoyant with ideas, populated with visionary leadership, and in fact free of impurities and ardent observers of their own rules and the rule of law in general, then the hope of offering themselves as alternative government by providing the illusive good governance and institutionalizing democracy could not be realized but at best remains a mirage.

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