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SAGE Open
April-June 2016: 1–11
© The Author(s) 2016
DOI: 10.1177/2158244016651910
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Peoples Democratic Party in the Fourth Republic of Nigeria: Nature, Structure, and Ideology

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Abstract

Their nature and functions make political parties central to democratic governance especially in the new democracies of Africa that face the challenge of building strong and enduring democratic institutions. It is accepted that the existing trend in most of these democracies of one big party dominating the political space weakens democracy and undermines its prospects for consolidation. Big parties—usually the ruling ones—exhibit tendencies such as absence of internal democracy that are antithetical to democratic governance. While observations such as these are incontestable, there is little understanding into the nature, character, ideology, and internal structure of big parties generally. In this article, I attempt to address this concern. Specifically, I examine the nature, structure, and ideology of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Nigeria's ruling party at the federal level with considerable strength at local level between 1999 and 2015. Relying on data obtained from multiple sources, I investigate the process of its formation, the nature of its ideology, internal organization, its electoral strength, and how absence of internal democracy contributed significantly to its defeat in 2015 general elections.

Keywords

party politics, opposition, Nigeria, fourth republic, democracy.

Between May 1999 when Nigeria returned to democratic rule for the third time in its political history and May 2015 when it held its fifth general election in this dispensation, the country was ruled by the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). The dominance of this party for 16 years in the electoral politics of Nigeria was ensured by its electoral strength and geographical spread in the country. The 2015 general elections were, therefore, a turning point on the electoral and political fortunes of this party that once prided itself as "the largest party in Africa." In these elections, PDP lost its status as the dominant party in the Fourth Republic. The 2015 general elections returned a new party, the All Progressive Congress (APC), as the major one for the first time in the electoral history of Nigeria.

For a party that governed for 16 years and witnessed the transformation of Nigeria and the eruption of some of its greatest security challenges including militancy in the Delta, Boko Haram terrorism in the North-East, and sectarian tensions in the North-Central, there is little understanding of the nature, ideology, structure, and organization, and how lack of internal democracy and cohesion cost PDP victory in 2015 (Aleyomi, 2013; Awopeju, Adelusi, & Oluwashakin, 2012; Azeez, 2009; Kendhammer, 2010; Kura, 2011; Nwala, 1999). My aim in this article is to examine the nature and character of PDP as a party operating in a new democracy, its ideology or lack of it as a ruling party, its organizational structure at the national and local levels, and its electoral strength as well as how it gained and lost its dominant status in the party politics of the Fourth Republic.

This objective is important because understanding the rise and fall of PDP in Nigeria, arguably Africa's largest democracy, will help us to draw lessons on the nature of party politics and internal dynamics of other big parties in other new democracies. Furthermore, this will help us to appreciate the forces that shape the evolution of party systems in these new democracies and how they affect the quality of their democracies (Burnell & Gerrits, 2010; Dix, 1992; Stokes, 1999). Before proceeding, it is important to briefly mention the type of data used for this purpose. In determining the nature and character of PDP, there are two invaluable sources—what the party says about itself and what others say about it. Separately, neither of the two sources is completely objective. But when combined, they counterbalanced each other and helped us to achieve our goals. As for the ideology of PDP, there is no

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better way of grasping its orientation except by examining its constitution and manifesto, specifically those sections and provisions on mission, vision, aims, objectives, programs, and policies. Examining the constitution of PDP will also enable us to construct its organizational structure, while we can determine its electoral strength and geographical spread across the federation on the basis of its performance in the five general elections held in Nigeria between 1999 and 2015. Media reports complement these sources with empirical data especially on variables such as internal democracy, internal stability and cohesion, and relationship between various party units.

Parties in the New Democracies: A Framework for Analysis

It is apt to start with a framework for analysis. Fundamentally, there is some form of consensus among scholars that party politics is indispensable to democratic governance. This is because of the wide-ranging functions of parties that include recruiting the political class, conducting election campaigns, educating the electorates, organizing the business of governance, and aggregating public interests and viewpoints in democratic states (Driver, 2011). From this conception of parties and their roles, scholars further draw about four important points of convergence among parties as against other forms of political associations.

First, parties bear labels that differentiate them from other sociopolitical institutions in the society. Second, parties are voluntarily formed associations in which common outlook or shared ideology supposedly attracts and binds members in the pursuit of predetermined goals. Third, parties are expressly committed to transforming their environments to reflect their values and ideologies through electoral politics and other legitimate means. Fourth, because parties operate in liberal environments, they compete with each other for access to political power and resources in modern societies (Aldrich, 1995; Epstein, 1980; White, 2006).

Defining parties is not the only concern of scholars. They have interest in classifying them too. However, as parties are products of diverse sociological factors, classifying them tends to be a bit problematic. Should focus be character and structure, or should it be on ideological, institutional, and systematic convergence and divergence? These have largely remained contentious issues (Krouwel, 2006). For instance, Maurice Duverger (1976) choose to focus on the nature of party organization—inclusive versus exclusive, general versus specific, ideologically broad versus narrow—as the most important feature to look for in classifying parties. Generally, this and other parameters of classification give us different party models such as the elite, cadre, caucus, mass, catch-all, cartel, and business-firm.

There are strong indications which suggest that catch-all party is not only becoming the most dominant party model but also proving to be an attractive successor to the mass party model (Krouwel, 2003). In fact, there are scholars who regard the catch-all party as a form of upward progression from the mass party model that lost its appeal following the professionalization of politics in the latter half of the last century (Katz & Mair, 1995; Koole, 1996). Due to this, the catch-all party emerged as the successor to the mass party and took over its functions in a rebalancing act that makes it impossible for other party models to perform representative functions in democratic states (Mair, 2005; Webb, 2005).

Otto Kirchheimer is credited with introducing the concept of the catch-all party model into party literature (Forestiere, 2009). According to Kirchheimer, catch-all parties evolved from mass parties after they shifted their emphasis from ideological purity to votes and winning elections. Certainly, responding to political exigencies of their environments, these types of parties had no qualms transforming into "rationally conceived vehicles of interest representation" in the political system (Kirchheimer, 1969, pp. 245-268). Not surprisingly, Andre Krouwel (2003) believes that catch-all parties have ideologies that are steeped in political expediency because their primary goal in any electoral contest is to capture power at all cost irrespective of ideological concessions and compromises required.

Catch-all parties have the following elements that define their nature and distinguish them from other party models. The first is the receding significance of ideology which is evident in these parties. The second is the ascendance of leadership groups because of their contributions toward the success of the parties rather than their attachment to their original goals. The third is the loss of relevance which individual members suffered in managing the affairs of these parties. The fourth is the inclination of these parties to place less emphasis on social status and class when mobilizing support. The fifth is the gradual ascendance of special interests groups, mostly with financial and or political clouts, in these parties especially in deciding their affairs (Kirchheimer, 1966).

Additional insights into the character of catch-all parties could be gleaned from other scholars. For instance, Michelle Williams (2009) is one of those scholars who notes that catch-all parties are

> identified by their size as larger mainstream parties, by their pursuit of votes at the expense of ideology, by their centrist and often inconsistent party platforms designed to appeal to ever wider audiences, and their organizational style that is elite driven. (p. 539)

Their genetic, electoral, ideological, and organizational dimensions not only differ from those of the other parties but, in fact, also form important criteria for differentiating them from other party models.

Electorally, catch-all parties target the middle and lower classes in the society as their core support bases. This is due

to the fact that traditionally these classes are outside the support group of more exclusive parties such as cadre and caucus parties (Mair, 2005; Webb, 2005). This makes catch-all parties to rely on external recruitment of supporters from all sections of the society. Ideologically, these parties place more emphasis on management competence and the ability to deliver public goods rather than philosophical argumentations and doctrinaire contestations. Organizationally, catch-all parties marginalize their members. Ironically, in turn, they are subordinated to their members occupying public offices because of patronage reasons. In other words, these parties depend on support from interest groups, patronage from rich members, and subventions from the state to manage their activities (Krouwel, 2006). As this article shows in subsequent sections, PDP fits the picture of a catch-all party. But before looking at this party, it is important to start with a brief background to democracy and party politics in the Fourth Republic.

Party Politics in the Fourth Republic: A Brief Background

The death of Nigeria's military head of state in 1998, General Sani Abacha, and the appointment of General Abdussalam Abubakar as his successor changed the trajectory of democratization program in the country dramatically. Before his death, Abacha had unveiled a democratization program in 1994 but received little support from the civil society because it was perceived to have been designed to ensure his self-succession plan. This unenthusiastic reception affected the credibility of the program and left the country with a transition program defective in its popularity (Abubakar, 1998a). Abacha's death before the transition ran its course, therefore, was a lifeline to democracy that saved Nigerians the prospects of an elected government with dubious legitimacy.

In his first days in office, Abubakar took steps that restored the confidence of Nigerians on the possibility of having a sincere democratization experience under military supervision. The first step he took was to jettison Abacha's political program. In its place, a new program was initiated with May 1999 as the date for terminating military rule and inaugurating democratic government in Nigeria (Abubakar, 1998b). To achieve this goal, he proscribed the institutions and structures established by Abacha to facilitate the transition including the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON)—the agency responsible for overseeing elections in the country. NECON was replaced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) with the mandate to register new parties, supervise their activities, and conduct new rounds of elections. In addition, a Constitution Debate Coordinating Committee (CDCC) was established to advise the government on the choice of a new constitutional and political order for the country. Furthermore, Abubakar (1998b) released political prisoners and invited political exiles to return home. A former military head of state, Olusegun Obasanjo, convicted of plotting to overthrow Abacha in 1995, was one of the released prisoners. Shortly afterward, Obasanjo joined PDP, contested, and won the 1999 presidential election to become the first elected president of Nigeria in the Fourth Republic.

These measures helped in democratizing Nigeria successfully, especially when we consider some of the major challenges it faced at the time. Feelings of sectional marginalization were intense to the extent that some sections were threatening to secede from the country. Then there were those who were skeptical of the military's sincerity to keep its promise of disengagement from power (Maier, 2000). Freeing prisoners and inviting exiles home as well as designing new legal and institutional frameworks and establishing new structures, therefore, helped in facilitating reconciliation and building confidence in the sincerity of the military to democratize and disengage from power. With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that these steps defined the subsequent trajectory of democracy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. They shaped the nature of its politics, its parties, its party system, its other institutions, and the long-term prospects of democratic consolidation in the country.

In the pursuit of its mandate, INEC invited interested political associations to submit their applications for registration as political parties. About 26 associations submitted their applications with only nine receiving provisional approval to participate in the December 1998 council elections. These were the Alliance for Democracy (AD), All Peoples Party (APP), Democratic Advance Movement (DAM), Movement for Democracy and Justice (MDJ), National Solidarity Movement (NSM), and PDP. The rest were the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), United Democratic Party (UDP), and United Progressive Party (UPP). To avoid cluttering the political space with redundant parties, participation by any of these parties in the subsequent rounds of election was made dependent on its winning at least 10% of the total votes in the council elections of 1998 in at least two thirds of the states in the federation.

The outcome of the council election showed AD as having won 100 local councils, APP won 182, and PDP won 389 out of 774 local councils in the federation. The other six parties divided the remaining 103 councils with none of them getting the stipulated percentage. Thus, with more than 70% of the local councils divided between AD, APP, and PDP, INEC granted them approval to participate in the state assembly, gubernatorial, national assembly (NASS), and presidential elections of 7 January and 27 February 1999. Cumulatively, the electoral performance of PDP in 1999 made it the dominant party in the country which controlled the federal government. This allowed the party to subsequently establish its nationwide dominance over the other parties and to substantially define the structure of the party system up to 2015.

Investigations on party politics and party system in the Fourth Republic showed that most of the parties are defective in terms of cohesive sociopolitical ideologies for

attracting and securing membership loyalty. Other visible traits of most of the parties include their seasonal life cycles, policy inconsistencies, absence of institutional and financial autonomy, absence of genuine national outlook, and lack of strong support base beyond the immediate neighborhoods of their leaders. Then, there are also issues of ceaseless defections of party elites occasioned by absence of internal democracy and accountability, and intraparty crises usually resulting into factions violently competing against each other within these parties (Animashaun, 2010; Lewis, 2003). PDP, like the other parties, had its share of policy inconsistencies, heavy dose of internal conflicts, absence of institutional and financial autonomy, and problems of subordination between party organization and members holding political offices. In fact, it would appear that, probably because of its position as the ruling party, these problems were more noticeable in PDP than in the other parties combined (Katsina, 2013).

It is, however, important to observe that some of these problems are directly traceable to the incredibly short period—less than a year—in which most of the institutions, structures, and even the legal framework necessary for democratization were designed and incubated in the country. For instance, it would be expecting too much from parties formed in less than a year not only to show maturity and discipline but also to exhibit cohesive ideologies and sufficient institutionalization. The absence of sound social policies guiding their pursuit of power, the ideological emptiness underpinning their campaigns, the fickle nature of the loyalty of the party elites, and the unwieldy nature of the organizational structures through which they ran their affairs are all manifestations of the consequence of this short period. It could be argued that these parties have power literally thrown on their laps before they were sufficiently prepared for it. These factors contributed substantially in the formation of a skewed party system in which a single party dominated the polity while the other parties sat on the fringes and provided weak and ineffectual opposition for 16 years (Akubo & Yakubu, 2014; Animashaun, 2010; Katsina, 2013; Lewis, 2003).

PDP: Formation and Nature

In fact, it is remarkable that since the 1999 general elections that brought it to power, PDP had managed to remain the only party substantially intact from organizational point of view until 2015. Its two contemporaries, AD and APP, had suffered a less glorious fate. AD had split into factions, a situation which saw its decline and loss of relevance in Nigeria's electoral space. APP, however, had merged with other parties and changed its identity and character (Chidi, 2015). The formation of PDP dated back to the historic step taken in 1997 by a group of 18 eminent but angry Nigerians known as the G18. The grouse of this group led by Alex Ekwueme—Nigeria's former vice president in the Second Republic—was Abacha's militarization of the political space and his perceived plan to transform himself into a civilian president at the end of his transition program in 1998 (Osumah & Ikelegbe, 2009).

This group later expanded its membership to 34 and became known as G34. The fundamental mission which this group set for itself was the total and unconditional demilitarization of Nigerian politics. It called for democratization and even gave Abacha a deadline for the transfer of power to civilians (Osumah & Ikelegbe, 2009). Before Abacha could respond to the demands of the group, he died together with his perceived self-succession plan. Power changed hands and, under Abubakar, the political space was opened to interested players. With this development, a number of political associations mostly those denied registration by NECON under Abacha such as the All Nigeria Congress (ANC), Peoples Consultative Forum (PCF), Social Progressive Party (SPP), Peoples Democratic Movement (PDM), and Peoples National Party (PNP) joined G34 and formed a single umbrella organization—the PDP with Solomon Lar as its pro tem chairman. The party was registered with INEC on 28 July 1998 (PDP, 2011a). Its performance in the local council elections of December 1998 made it the largest party with the widest geographical spread in the country. And unlike AD and APP, its two contemporaries, PDP had a truly national composition and outlook even at that period. Indeed, it was the only party that was not associated with any one ethnic or religious group in the country.

Between 1999 and 2011, PDP had won every presidential election in Nigeria, producing three presidents in the persons of Olusegun Obasanjo, Umaru Musa Yar'adua, and Goodluck Jonathan. Due largely to a higher and quick turnover of national leadership, PDP is undoubtedly the most unstable and crises-ridden party with low-internal cohesion in the Fourth Republic. Between 1999 and 2015, the party was managed by no less than 11 national chairmen all of whom left office in controversial circumstances. Although Solomon Lar served as its foundation chairman, its first substantive chairman was Barnabas Gemade who was elected at its post-1999 general elections convention. Many observers believed that this convention was rigged by Obasanjo to achieve a predetermined objective. Audu Ogbeh was later elected to replace Gemade. In 2005, Ahmadu Ali was appointed as the replacement to Ogbeh. The next national chairman was Vincent Ogbulafor who was replaced by Okwesilieze Nwodo in 2010. After Nwodo resigned in the same year, Halliru Mohammed and later Kawu Baraje were appointed as acting national chairmen. After the 2011 general elections, PDP elected Bamanga Tukur as its national chairman, who was also replaced by Ahmed Adamu Mu'azu in controversial circumstances in 2014 ("PDP Chair," 2015).

PDP Ideology: Cohesion or Confusion

Leadership problem was not the only challenge that PDP faced while it held power. It also suffered from absence of coherent ideological principles that could have focused its

government and guided its members in public offices. There is a general understanding that ideology is central to the strength, viability, and solidarity of a party. It also distinguishes parties from each other in the political system (Vassallo & Wilcox, 2006; Volkens & Klingemann, 2002). We have already seen that most parties in the Fourth Republic suffered from absence of cohesive ideologies. A plausible explanation for this revolves around their nature as catch-all parties that made it easier to adjust to convenience rather than ideological coherence and consistency. Nothing supports this than the vague and fuzzy interpretations of liberalism and free market principles that passed for its ideology. Evidently, this was meant to satisfy specific interests: perhaps its rich benefactors, or simply to burnish its liberal credentials.

The vision, mission, and objectives upon which PDP as a party was originally conceived were not different from the way other parties viewed their objectives in other democracies such as Ghana and Senegal (Kura, 2009). The fundamental objectives which PDP gave for itself in its founding constitution centered around democratization of Nigeria, promoting national reconciliation, building true political and fiscal federalism, and ensuring equitable distribution of power, wealth, and opportunities to conform with the principles of power-shift and power-sharing. Its other objectives were to promote the rotation of key political offices, and an equitable devolution of powers to the zones, states, and local governments so as to create sociopolitical conditions conducive to national peace and unity. The rest were to institutionalize the rule of law, social equality, and justice; build an egalitarian society; promote independence of the judiciary; and eradicate illiteracy from Nigeria (PDP, 1998, preamble). Akin to Marxists' mantra, PDP is equally interested in building a country "in which all Nigerians are equal, where each contributes according to his ability, where no one person dominates and where no political party belongs to one individual" (PDP, 1998, Art. 6). Many of these principles and objectives were modified or altogether expunged in later amendments, perhaps as a reflection of new realities, or as is the case with catch-all parties to accommodate certain constituencies and expediencies (PDP, 2009).

Turning to its manifesto for a little help on where PDP stood, ideologically speaking, we confront even more nebulous principles and goals. In its manifesto, PDP outlined what appear to be the usual political commitments calculated to please average voters in the new democracies. These include commitment to a dynamic national economy, a free and democratic society built on the foundations of social justice, and people-centered approach to governance. PDP also vowed to wage war against poverty, promote integrated rural development, industrialization, advancement in education, science and technology, and provision of basic infrastructure. These are not the only areas which PDP considered worthwhile, but there are at least 25 other goals which the party set for itself.

These were administration of justice, building a strong economy, reviving agriculture, boosting health services, strengthening national defense, and providing transportation services. Other goals were to ensure energy security, reliable communication system, internal security, provision of affordable water supply, building strong labor force, employment and wages, natural mineral industries, iron and steel, youth and sports, culture, women empowerment, human rights, environmental obligations, civil service, strengthening of traditional institutions, affordable housing, developing tourism, land, and a robust foreign policy (PDP, 2011b). When we juxtapose these principles against the different policy thrusts and agenda which Olusegun Obasanjo, Umaru Musa Yar'adua, and Goodluck Jonathan pursued while occupying the presidency, it does not baffle therefore to note that all indices of sociopolitical and economic development sharply declined. Poverty level rose, so was insecurity, sectarian tension, corruption, and bad governance under PDP's rule ("Bitter Truths About Economy the Jonathan Government," 2014; "Nigeria Was Almost a Pariah State Under Jonathan," 2016).

The explanation for this poor situation is partly located in these type of principles which the party espoused under its rule. They were generic that gave no clear-cut direction for governments produced by the party. They only exposed its nature as a catch-all party quick to stretch its principles and policies to accommodate conflicting interests. This does not imply complete absence of ideology in these parties. Most of them gravitate toward neoliberal capitalist ideology. It is not difficult to see how this observation aptly fits PDP. When we compare its principles and objectives against the liberal tradition, it is easy to see that these ideas have their larger narrative within this discourse, albeit in its distorted form. Interestingly, this process of "stretching" for political expediency continued in the organizational structure of the party where, obviously, the concern was to placate party elites and patrons through accommodating them in various party organs.

PDP: Internal Structure and Organization

Between 1999 when it was formed and 2015 when it suffered its first major electoral defeat, PDP operated on six structural levels, namely, ward, local government, senatorial district, state, zonal, and national levels. With only two organs, executive committee and congress, the ward level was the lowest in its hierarchy. Composition of the ward executive committee was, however, broad enough to accommodate 17 elected members and other members holding political offices at the local, state, and national levels. This organ managed the affairs of the party at the ward level, raised funds, and implemented decisions made by ward congress and other party organs of higher jurisdiction. Expectedly, the congress was designed to accommodate and give all registered members an avenue for interaction and of exercising their powers of oversight at ward level (PDP, 2009, Art. 12, Sections 2-21).

Relations, however, between the party leadership and members, which the congress epitomized, were not always cordial and viable. There have been numerous instances where election of party leadership, delegates, and other functions of the congress were usurped by state governments in tandem with the national leadership of the party. This contributed in eroding the goodwill and support which it enjoyed at the grassroots in its early days.

Above the ward, there was the local government level also with two organs. These were the local government executive committee and the local government congress. These organs performed functions similar to those of the ward level. Composition of these organs, however, differed from those of the ward. The membership of the local executive committee comprised 18 elected members including the ward executive committee chairmen and other members holding political offices. Local government congress comprised of elected delegates from the wards, the ward executive committee members, local government executive committee members, and political office holders elected and appointed in the local, state, or federal government.

The next two levels above the local government were the senatorial district and state. The senatorial district had two organs. The first was the senatorial district working committee comprising of elected public officials at the state and national levels, political appointees at the state and national levels, local government executive committee chairmen and secretaries, council chairmen and their deputies, members of the state executive committee from the district, elected councilors from the district, and five elected ex-officio members. The second was the senatorial caucus that linked the state executive committee and the local government executive committees in the senatorial districts (PDP, 2009, Art. 12, Sections 22-27).

At the state level, the party had four organs. These were the state working committee, state caucus, state executive committee, and state congress. The composition of the state working committee included the chairman of the state executive committee, chairmen of the senatorial district working committees, and 10 other members drawn from the state executive committee. This organ coordinated and administered the daily affairs of the party at the state level. The state caucus also comprised the state executive committee chairman and his deputy, state secretary, treasurer, youth leader, party officials, and elected or appointed public officials serving at the state, zonal, or national levels. In the state executive committee, there were the state chairman, elected officials of the party from the state serving at the zonal and national levels, 23 other elected officials of the party, and council chairmen. This committee, through the state working committee, administered the party at the state level.

The state congress was the highest organ at the state level with power to elect state executive committee members and gubernatorial candidates. This committee also approved party budget. The composition of the state congress was made up of the state chairman, president and his deputy, governor and his deputy, gubernatorial candidates, political appointees serving at the national level, members of the Board of Trustees (BoT), state executive committee, national and zonal executive committee members from the state, national and state assembly members, and 10 commissioners. Other members were 10 special advisers to the governor, council chairmen and their deputies, local government party secretaries, treasurers, women and youth leaders, three ward delegates, former members of the state working committee, former governors and their deputies, and former speakers of the state house of assembly and their deputies (PDP, 2009, Art. 12, Sections 28-49).

The zonal level had three organs. These were the zonal working committee, zonal executive committee, and zonal congress. This committee, with 10 members drawn from the zonal executive committee, administered the party at the zonal level and liaised with the national secretariat of the party. The zonal executive committee, however, was made up of the zonal chairman and nine other elected officials, president and vice president from the zone, NASS members, state governors and their deputies, national executive committee, and BoT members from the zone. Other members were the speaker, deputy speaker, party leader and party whip in the state house of assembly, state chairmen, secretaries and treasurers, and one ex-officio from each state in the zone. This organ performed similar functions to those of the state, local government, and ward levels. The last organ at the zonal level was the zonal congress which also had functions similar to those being performed by sister organs at the state and other lower levels. It consisted of the zonal working committee, zonal executive committee, states' executive committee, former and serving zonal working committee members, and all national convention delegates from the zone (PDP, 2009, Art. 12, Sections 50-60).

PDP had five organs at the national level, namely, national working committee, national caucus, BoT, national executive committee, and national convention. The national working committee with the responsibility of routine administration of the party had 12 members including the national chairman and the secretary of the party. The national caucus was responsible for maintaining cordial relationship between the executive and legislative arms of government as well as streamlining party policies at the national level. It consisted of the national chairman, president and vice president, three ministers nominated by the president including the attorney general and secretary to the government of the federation, special advisers to the president on political and NASS matters, senate president and his deputy, senate leader and his deputy, senate whip and his deputy, speaker and his deputy, house leader and his deputy, and the house whip and his deputy in the House of Representatives. Other members were the chairman and secretary of BoT and one member from each of the six geopolitical zones, deputy chairman, secretary, legal adviser, treasurer, women leader, national youth

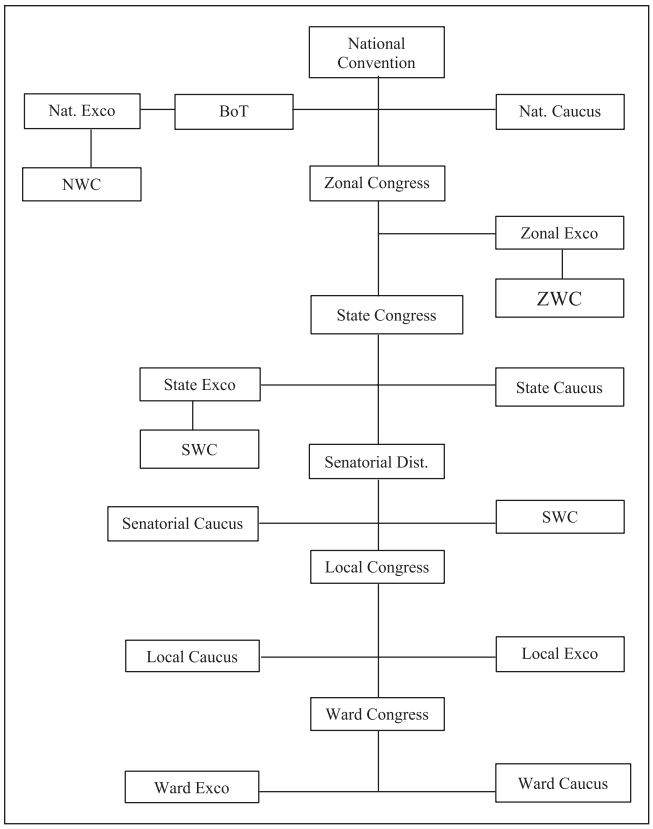


Figure 1. Organizational structure of PDP.
Source. Constructed from PDP (2009).
Note. PDP = Peoples Democratic Party; BoT = Board of Trustees; NWC = National Working Committee; ZWC = Zonal Working Committee; SWC = State Working Committee.

leader, and national security adviser to the president (PDP, 2009, Art. 12, Sections 61-70).

PDP's constitution vested the power to organize the party's national convention with the national executive committee. Other functions of this organ were to implement decisions of the national convention and to supervise other party organs at all levels. It comprised 25 elected officials and four ex-officio members. Other members were the president and his deputy, BoT, senate president and his deputy, senate leader and his deputy, senate whip and his deputy, two senators from each of the six geopolitical zones, speaker, deputy speaker, house leader and his deputy, house whip and his deputy in the house of representatives, and three members of House of Representatives from each of the six geopolitical zones. The rest were state governors, state party chairmen, and all former deputy national chairmen, chairmen, and secretaries of BoT (PDP, 2009, Art. 12, Sections 71-75). The other two national organs of the party were BoT and the national convention. Membership of BoT was confined to members who have attained 50 years of age and had served or were serving in an elective capacity such as the president, vice president, national chairman, deputy national chairman, national secretary, senate president, speaker of the House of Representatives, and founding members of the party. Additional members included two women and three other members selected from each of the six geopolitical zones. BoT is responsible for ensuring highest ethical standards for the party, advising the party on appropriate policies, and sourcing funds for the party (PDP, 2009, Art. 12, Sections 76-83). PDP's structure and its linkages with various organs at the local and national levels are presented in Figure 1.

The national convention of PDP was its highest decision-making organ. It designed and ratified the party constitution, approved budget, elected national officers, and nominated presidential candidates. Its composition included members of the national executive committee, the president, vice president, ministers, ambassadors, special advisers and special assistants to the president and vice president, members of the NASS, governors and their deputies, and all gubernatorial candidates under the party. Other members were 10 state commissioners and special advisers, members of the house of assembly, BoT members, zonal working committee members, state executive committee chairmen and secretaries, local government executive committee chairmen, one elected national delegate from the local government congress, council chairmen, members of PDP serving as chairmen of federal boards, former members of the national working committee, former deputy senate presidents, and deputy speakers of the house of representatives (PDP, 2009, Art. 12, Sections 84-93).

Looking at the elaborateness of this structure, there is the tendency to believe that it succeeded in accommodating conflicting interests within its fold and strengthened its support base. However, because the party from inception depended heavily on the support and patronage of rich benefactors, control of the party structure gradually passed into their hands. This greatly affected internal democracy, promoted the ascendance of rich interest groups, and the dominance of elected and appointed party members with fat purse. From 2006, PDP began to witness mass defection from its ranks to other parties. So severe was this defection movement that prominent members including Atiku Abubakar, then Nigeria's vice president, several state governors, former cabinet members, and countless federal legislators dumped the party ("VP Wins Opposition Ticket," 2006). To properly appreciate how this situation affected the party electorally and led to its eventual defeat in 2015 general elections, let us look at the electoral strength of PDP beginning from 1999.

PDP: Size and Electoral Strength

Between 1999 and 2015, Nigeria had witnessed five general elections, each with four rounds of contests for presidential, gubernatorial, national, and state assemblies. For PDP, the 1999 general elections were its defining moment. The outcome of these elections established its strength and conferred on it the status of the dominant party in Nigeria. Subsequent elections entrenched this dominance until March 2015. Table 1

Table 1. Presidential Elections Results, 1999-2011.

		1999		2003		2007		2011		2014	
S. No.	Party	Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes	%
1.	AD/APP	11,110,287	37	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2.	ANPP	—	—	12,710,022	32	6,605,299	18	—	—	—	—
3.	APC	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	12,853,162	44
4.	CPC	—	—	—	—	—	—	12,214,853	31	—	—
5.	PDP	18,738,154	62	24,456,140	61	24,638,063	69	22,495,187	58	15,424,683	53

Source. African Elections Database (n.d.).
Note. AD = Alliance for Democracy; APP = All Peoples Party; ANPP = All Nigeria Peoples Party; APC = All Progressive Congress; CPC = Congress for Progressive Change; PDP = Peoples Democratic Party.

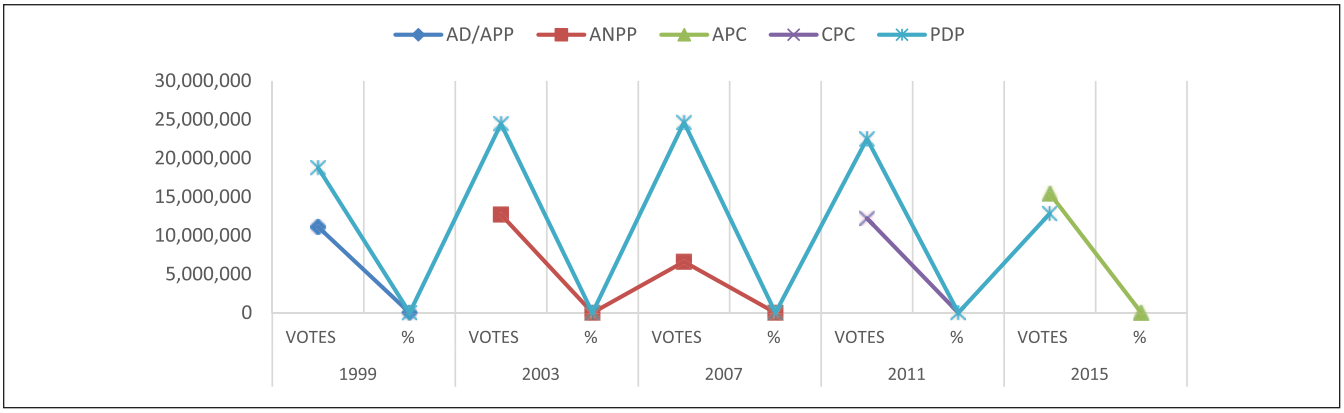


Figure 2. Presidential elections results, 1999-2015.
Source. Constructed from Table 1.

shows the results of the five presidential elections held between 1999 and 2015 and the performance of PDP against its closest rival in those elections. The first presidential election held on the 27 of February 1999, the second was on the 19 of April 2003, the third was on the 27 of April 2007, the fourth was on the 16 of April 2011, while the fifth was on 21 March 2015. During the 1999 presidential election, PDP sponsored Olusegun Obasanjo against Olu Falae of AD/APP alliance. In this election, 62% of the votes gave PDP the presidency and made it the ruling party at the federal level (Figure 2).

The performance of the party in the gubernatorial and NASS elections from 1999 to 2015 appears to have followed similar trend with the presidential elections. Table 2 provides a summary of the NASS elections in this period. The NASS is the highest lawmaking organ in Nigeria. Structurally, it is a bicameral house with the senate containing 109 members equally divided among the 36 states in the federation and one senator from the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, and the House of Representatives with 360. Members of the House of Representative are divided in proportion to the population size of each state.

The general picture from Table 2 suggests that PDP's fortunes rose steadily until 2011 when they began to plummet. By 2015, this dominance in NASS was altogether lost to APC. And for the first time in 16 years, PDP had become the minority party in the country. Evidently, presidential and NASS elections must have a bearing on gubernatorial elections in Nigeria. For the same pattern which we observed in those elections appears visible in the gubernatorial election too. Table 3 shows that the sway of PDP over state governments reached its peak in 2007, after which it began to decline until 2015 when it was only left with about one third of the total number of states in the federation.

There are a number of reasons that explain this rise and fall of PDP in the span of 16 years in Nigeria. Chief among these reasons was the absence of internal democracy especially in the process of nominating flagbearers. Several members had complained about this bitterly, and there had been instances where judiciary had to intervene to redress injustice related to primary elections in PDP (Kura, 2011; "PDP Primaries and Jonathan's Candidacy," 2011). There was also its evident disdain for rule of law in how it dealt with internal dissension. Elements considered subversive to the president and state governors were often edged out of party affairs. The incidence of membership renewal in 2006 where Atiku Abubakar was conveniently denied re-registration opportunity by his ward executive was instructive here

Table 2. NASS Elections Results, 1999-2015.

		1999		2003		2007		2011		2015	
S. No.	Party	Senate	HoR	Senate	HoR	Senate	HoR	Senate	HoR	Senate	HoR
1.	ACN	—	—	—	—	6	32	18	66	—	—
2.	AD	19	68	6	34	—	—	—	—	—	—
3.	ANPP	23	80	27	96	16	62	7	25	—	—
4.	APC	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	60	225
5.	CPC	—	—	—	—	—	—	7	35	—	—
6.	PDP	67	212	76	223	85	262	72	201	49	125

Source. African Elections Database (n.d.).
Note. NASS = national assembly; HoR = House of Representatives; ACN = Action Congress of Nigeria; AD = Alliance for Democracy; ANPP = All Nigeria Peoples Party; APC = All Progressive Congress; CPC = Congress for Progressive Change; PDP = Peoples Democratic Party.

Table 3. Formation of State Governments by Parties, 1999-2015.

S. No.	Party	No. of states (1999)	No. of states (2003)	No. of states (2007)	No. of states (2011)	No. of states (2015)
1.	ACN	—	—	1	6	—
2.	AD	6	1	—	—	—
3.	ANPP	9	7	5	3	—
4.	APC	—	—	—	—	23
5.	APGA	—	1	—	2	—
6.	CPC	—	—	—	1	—
7.	LP	—	—	—	1	—
8.	PDP	21	27	28	23	13
9.	PPA	—	—	2	—	—

Source. Nigeria Elections Coalitions, "Gubernatorial Elections"; http://nigeriaelections.org/gubernatorial.php.
Note. ACN = Action Congress of Nigeria; AD = Alliance for Democracy; ANPP = All Nigeria Peoples Party; APC = All Progressive Congress; APGA = All Progressives Grand Alliance; CPC = Congress for Progressive Change; PDP = Peoples Democratic Party; PPA = Progressive Peoples Alliance.

(Diamond, 2008). Equally contributing to its defeat was the process of undermining the mutual trust that guided the party in its early days which was embraced and completed by Goodluck Jonathan when, in 2011, he rejected the principle of power rotation as enshrined in the party's constitution (Ojougboh, 2015). For voters, the causes for its defeat were more immediate and had direct bearing to its inability to combat corruption, entrench good governance, fight insecurity, and stabilize the economy (Akinloye, 2016).

PDP: Wearing the Toga of Opposition

Nigeria practices presidential democracy, a situation that spares PDP leaders the ordeal of having to form a shadow government. However, as the party and its leaders adjust to the new role which the events of March 2015 forced on them, students of Nigerian politics will ask these questions: Is PDP capable of providing an effective opposition to APC, and is the party capable of repositioning itself and bouncing back into power in 2019? To understand the first question, we need to look at how PDP has been handling post-2015 general election shock. The defection of its prominent members started at the eve of 2015 general elections with Obasanjo who dramatically tore his membership card continued unabated after its defeat. Already, several prominent members had either resigned such as Bamanga Tukur and Tony Anenih, or defected such as James Nwobodo. And with several of its top members facing various charges of corruption, it is not likely to see the party mobilizing needed resources to rejuvenate itself any time soon ("Sheriff's Chairmanship: PDP Faces Mass Defection," 2016).

At present, the party is polarized into camps with each staking claim to legitimacy. The crises that this polarization created had already consumed its acting national chairman, Uche Secondus. But his replacement, Ali Modu Sheriff, is not a person that engenders confidence in the minds of Nigerians. Besides charges of corruption and abuse of office hanging on his neck, there is the perception among many Nigerians, even if unsubstantiated, that Sheriff was the founder and sponsor of Boko Haram while he was the governor of Borno state between 2003 and 2011 (Akinloye, 2016; "Sheriff Still Under N300bn Borno Allocation Probe," 2016; "Sheriff's Chairmanship: PDP Faces Mass Defection," 2016). Whether these allegations are true or false is immaterial. What is important is that almost a year after its defeat PDP could not find a more credible person to lead it to reposition it and revive its fortunes.

As for the second question, it is impossible to rule PDP out of political reckoning in Nigeria ever again. There have been instances, even if rare and uncommon, among African democracies where parties that lost power at the center bounced back. In countries like Benin, Ghana, and Senegal, incumbent presidents and their parties had at different times lost elections and accepted defeat only to strategize and win back power later (Kura, 2009). Much of this, however, depend on the interplay of several variables including how the defeated party reposition itself, and the party in power acquitted itself. For PDP, therefore, the challenge depends on how it resolves its internal contradictions, entrenches internal democracy, sheds the gradual appearance of sectional character it has been taking since 2015, and becomes once again attractive to the voters in the next 3 years. Much will also depend on the popularity of APC in the years ahead, and whether it will succeed where PDP failed such as internal democracy, engagement with members at the grass-roots, ensuring good governance, and fighting corruption effectively.

Conclusion

Party politics in the Fourth Republic started when the government of Abubakar adopted a new democratization program for Nigeria. This program introduced a new constitution as the legal framework for the new republic, and led to the formation of new parties as critical institutions for electoral politics. Sixteen years later, a number of remarkable developments had occurred that altered the trajectory of party politics in the country. This article had investigated, in a manner of speaking, the rise and fall of PDP, once the largest party in Nigeria. In the article, I have shown the process that led to its formation, the ideals upon which it was originally built, and its ideological character. Over the years, this ideological character, which in any case was quite flexible, had experienced a greater level of fluidity. This, I contend, was due to the catch-all nature of PDP. In terms of organizational structure, I have shown that PDP was governed through six levels each of which had specific organs that coordinated and managed its affairs.

Whereas this might appear as a concern for political inclusion in managing party affairs, we should not forget to mention that there may actually be an alternative explanation for this broad-based structure. Like many other parties in the new democracies, PDP was essentially built on patronage. Thus, for it to continue to survive and succeed, it needed to find outlets through which generous patrons and their acolytes could be rewarded. Thus, this structure was designed with this in view. The challenge for the party, therefore, is to look beyond this source of patronage and consider re-establishing relationship with the grass-roots if it desires to remain relevant in Nigeria's electoral politics. In this investigation, I have tried to show that there are lessons for parties and their leaders. Electoral success and continued political relevance should not be taken for granted by parties. Rather, party leaders need to continue to work for these through respecting principles of rule of law, internal democracy, and adoption of coherent policy blueprints for the development of their societies.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

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