



## People's Democratic Party's Hegemony in Nigeria Political System; 2015 General Elections: A Benchmark of Turning Point

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### Abstract

*This paper is to critically assess the 2015 general elections in Nigeria as a benchmark of turning point in the electoral history of Fourth Republic and to examine the circumstances that surrounded the outcome of the election results. The results of the election was differ from all the previous election conducted in Nigeria (1999-2011) where People Democratic Party (PDP) was always declared winner. The paper identified the factors that determine the outcome of the election results and the reasons for political continuity of People's Democratic Party (PDP) for good sixteen years without any political interruption, and the benchmark of turning point in the electoral trend in 2015 in Nigeria. The paper employed purely qualitative method of sourcing data. The study found out that the election's results were a clear departure from what it used to be in the past. This study concludes that the results of the elections indeed reflect the will of the electorates and the political behaviour or voting pattern indicated without any ambiguity that majorities of the people's preference for "CHANGE" cannot be credibly disputed. Base on the finding, the paper recommends that the political actors should play politics with its virtues and that impunity and imposition of candidates should be eradicated in politics.*

**Keywords:** Election, Political Party, Malpractices, Parties Merger and Insurgency.

**JEL Codes:** P48

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### 1. Introduction

There is no doubt that election has been a factor in democratic government and since 1999 till date when Nigeria switch on to democratic system, election has been a factor in Nigeria' political development (Olaoye 2007: 64). Even in the first and second Republic, election played significant roles in the selection of leaders for elective post both at national and the states levels. But the fact remains that all the elections conducted in different phases of Nigeria Republic have a unique features that led to Election Petition Tribunal. These malpractices have gone a long way in affecting the quality of Nigeria political behaviour (Lawal 2003:129-130).

Since Fourth Republic (1999-2015), all the general elections conducted so far in Nigeria have been characterized by an array of problems. Such problems manifested, are the evidences of election cases at the Election Petition Tribunal in 1999, 2003, 2007, and 2011 general elections. Since 1999 to 2015, People Democratic Party (PDP) was the

dominant political party that maintained its hegemony for sixteen good years in all the general elections conducted in Nigeria. There is no doubt that PDP hegemony was ensured by its electoral strength and geographical spread in the country.

The 2015 general election in Nigeria was therefore a benchmark of turning point, a clear departure from the historical continuity of voting pattern in Nigeria. There was a significant change in voting behaviour which demonstrated a reverse of the past experiences. PDP in 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011 general elections, always won, and had electoral victories in Nigeria presidential elections. The abrupt change and perhaps, the new direction to All Progressive Congress (APC) make the assessment of the 2015 general election in Nigeria inevitable. It is on this note that this paper examines the factors that sustained PDP hegemony in Nigeria political system and the determinants of the outcome of the election result at the turning point in the electoral trend in 2015 general elections in Nigeria.

## 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

### *Theoretical Framework*

The theory adopted in this paper is based on game theory. The choice of this theory is justified based on its suitability to help understand the subject of inquiry. Game theory is the study of mathematical models of negotiation, conflict and cooperation between individuals, organization and government. It is used in an area of study to understand why an individual makes a particular decision and how that decision made by an individual affects others. It is used to find an optimal outcome from a set of choices by analyzing the cost and benefits to each independent party as they compete with each other. It is best exemplified in a hypothetical situation called the prisoner's dilemma where prisoners only have two possible actions or options.

The study aligns itself to this theory on the ground that an election is a game which serves as a model of an interactive situation among rational players in which options are left for electorates to choose from a set of choices by analyzing the cost and benefits. And why individuals have made such a decision to determine the winner among the competing political parties and the effect of such a decision. The most likely outcome is that electorates will make a choice among competing political parties like the prisoner's dilemma. Finally, the electorates made a choice by showing preference to the All Progressive Congress (APC). These are what this paper is out to examine.

### *Literature Review*

#### *Election Practices before Fourth Republic and in the Fourth Republic*

Elections are not just elections; they are part of a process, they determine leadership either continuity or change in this leadership (Timoth D. S. 2017:3). It is evident that an election becomes a pivotal point in any democratic selection of leadership. The election of the first and second Republic in Nigeria's political system demonstrated all forms of irregularities and malpractices like; rigging, stuffing of election results, falsification, burning of houses, destruction of lives by political actors etc. This position was captured by Joseph R. (1991: 171) that the political culture of electoral behaviour is appropriate for a long time being as Nigeria as pounded yam or millet. These and others triggered military to topple the government till the Fourth Republic when they decided to return Nigeria to civil rule.

In this Fourth Republic, elections have been conducted in different phases and proven to be the worst with obvious irregularities that were witnessed at almost all stages of the electoral process. Indeed, the evidence of irregularity can be seen in the effort of the judiciary in nullifying outrightly some elections and removing some of the governors (Isa A. M and Lawal A O.2012:34-35). This implies that elections generally in Nigeria remain the usual features of malpractices.

#### *PDP in the Political System of Nigeria*

Political party is a central key to democratic governance particularly in Africa that faces the challenge of democratic sustainability. PDP is one of its kinds in Nigeria's political system in this Fourth Republic. Hofmeister W. and Grabow K. (2011) defined political parties as a special form of social organization. It appears that this definition is too narrow as it does not capture the purpose of social organization. Meanwhile, political parties involve permanent and temporal association of citizens that is based on free membership in order to occupy a political position through election. For this to come to pass, it means there must be political competition among two or three political parties in an election. MacIver R.(1963:396), defines political parties as an association being organized to support some principle and policy which by constitutional means it endeavours to make the determinant of government. MacIver captures the purpose of political parties as to acquire governmental power.

PDP was the political party that ruled Nigeria from 1999 to 2015, is the most fluctuating and crisis-ridden political party with factions and unconnected aggrandizement of personal interest. The testament of a crisis-ridden party can be seen in the persistent changing of its national chairman intermittently. Between 1999 to 2015, the party was managed by not less than twelve (12) national chairmen in which all left office with altercation or controversial circumstances.

#### *PDP National Chairmen from 1998 to 2015 according to Saawua T. (2018)*

Dr E kwueme .....	1998
Solomon Lar.....	1999
Chief Barnabas Gemade .....	1999
Chief Audu Ogbeh.....	2001
Col. Adamu Ali.....	2005
Vicent Ogbulafor.....	2008
Okwesile Nwodo.....	2010

Haliru Muhammed.....	2010
Kawu Baraje .....	2011
Bamaga Tukur.....	2012
Adamu Muazu.....	2014
Uche Secondus.....	2015

This is an indication of low internal cohesion within PDP in this Fourth Republic. However, despite these internal challenges within this party, they were still coherent and logical in terms of securing, acquiring and guarding their political power for several years. The emergent of PDP as ruling party in 1999 in Nigeria gave them edge to be logical in employing political tactics to retain the state power for good sixteen years. In all presidential elections conducted in Nigeria Fourth Republic, 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011, PDP won all except that of 2015 general elections which was a benchmark of turning point in Nigeria political system where PDP was put on the toga of opposition and a new political party called All Progressive Congress (APC) emerged to receive the mandate of leadership.

### 3. Methodology

The paper employed qualitative method of sourcing data. The study made use of secondary data which involved textbooks, internet, journals and the news paper. The descriptive method is used to analyse the data sourced.

### 4. The Reasons for PDP Long Time Hegemony

Since 1999 till 2015, PDP sustained its hegemony and its electoral victory at national level in Nigeria particularly the presidency. There are certain factors that underpinned the long time hegemony of PDP in Nigeria, among others are:

*Weak Opposition Parties:* These are the parties that are defeated in the election, that come together to form opposition to the party that is ruling. Those parties became weak when the needed requirements to challenge the hegemonic power of the ruling party are lacking. The structure of the party, funding system, ideology and the leadership of the party determines its existence and its ability to serve as a strong challenger (opposition).

In a democratic society like Nigeria, strong opposition is needed to challenge the domineering power of the ruling party. No wonder Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe opined that democracy becomes sham in the absent of strong opposition (Dairo 2004:83 ). This revealed to us the extent to which strong opposition is important in the democratic government.

The most killing factor that renders political party impotent is Defection. When people decamp to the ruling party, it will directly or indirectly weaken the party they left and make the party they decamped to stronger. The weakness of such party cannot make it stand as strong opposition against the party (ruling party) that received more popular defectors. Opposition parties lose their potency as a result of political prostitution, and for democratic sustainability, strong and viable opposition is needed (Bratton and De Walle. 1997:248).

Bratton was of the opinion that if there are strong oppositions who could challenge the potency of the ruling party, the sustenance of democracy would be guaranteed. But the reverse is the case. Opposition parties are weak in Nigeria due to the incessant defection from growing political parties to the developed and ruling party. This can said to be an indicator that sustained the hegemonic power of the PDP for good Sixteen years without any interruption and there was no opposition party strong enough to challenge PDP's overbearing power until 2015 when All Progressive Congress (APC) subdued the PDP's hegemony.

*Electoral Malpractices:* Electoral malpractices are illegal act committed with corrupt, fraudulent or sinister intention to influence an election in favour of a candidate or party (Ologbenla 2003:97). Electoral malpractices can invalidate the result of an election, and these are carried out in various ways such as; undue influence of election officers with a view to gaining advantages over other candidates or parties, stuffing of ballot boxes, underaged and multiple voting, voting by non-registered individuals and falsification of results etc. All these are collectively call rigging. Rigging in an election has had long histories in Nigeria, and it has been argued that there has hardly been any election conducted in the country that has not been tainted by one manipulation or the other. Therefore, rigging became properly integrated into Nigeria's politics and electoral lives in all phases of the Republic, and it has remained a permanent features of election in Nigeria (Edoh 2003:71).

In this fourth republic, the elections that transcended into democracy and civilian to civilian transition in Nigeria have never been known to be credible and honest (Braithwaite 2012:14). The second, third, fourth tenures of the current democratic experiment in this fourth republic have not yet divorced from

the usual manipulation of the past (Muhammed in Hassan and etal, 2006:207). Nwabueze (2007:199-220),and Kehinde in Omotoso( 2007:113), all agreed and concluded that the democratic experiment in this fourth republic was characterized with array of problems, ranging from Electoral malpractices, falsification of election result, stuffing of ballot boxes etc. They opined that the illegality of the INEC appears to be a compromised set up, serving the interest of the ruling party.

The evidences of Electoral malpractices and the gross ineptitude of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) manifested in the series of upturned election result by the Election Tribunal. And there has not been any general elections conducted in Nigeria since 1999 till 2011 that have not involved petitions to Election Petition Tribunal except 2015 general election that received popular acceptance.

On this note, People's Democratic Party relied so much on amoral principle to sustain their hegemonic power. It is on this philosophy of Nicholo Machiavelli that pioneer president of fourth republic asserts that "we fight, and sometimes shed blood to achieve and retain political power because for us in Nigeria, the political kingdom has for too long been the gateway to the economic kingdom" (Obasanjo 2002:50-51). The foregoing statement demonstrates how PDP solely depends on amoral and Machiavellian principle to maintain their continuity in power. Conclusively, this will be one of those factors that sustain PDP long time hegemony.

#### *Factors That Determine the Outcome of the Election Result*

A lot of factors were responsible for the new voting pattern and the general outcome of the 2015 general elections. These factors serve as basic reasons why the winning party won and for the abrupt change in the electoral behaviour of the electorates. Among other factors are:

**Political Parties' Merger:** party merger is a process or act of merging two or more political parties together into a single entity to form one formidable political party. The major reason for parties' merger is to be strong enough to challenge the ruling party. Towards the end of the 2011 administration when brainstorming session began within the multi-opposition parties on how they could pull down PDP from the leadership of the country they quickly identified one of the strongest political tactics that

strengthen the continuity of PDP in Nigeria which was proliferation of multi-parties (Interview). This has not allowed opposition parties to be strong enough because, about different political parties will be agitating for central seat. An attempt to put an end to this political trick, party's merger came on board.

The marriage existed between Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), and All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) to form new party, and it metamorphosed into All Progressive Congress (APC). This merger has underpinned and fortified APC party to be able to challenge the continuity of PDP which produced victory to APC at last.

**Problem of Internal Democracy :** What makes people to join or remain in certain political party is the coherent ideology which they believe so much like observance of internal democracy, and any attempt to change it either by any means or by leadership introspective tendency, may curtail further people to join such political party and as well trigger most of the members of such political party to shift ground from such party to another party where they think internal democracy could be observed or respected,

Decamping becomes inevitable for politicians in a political party where introspection becomes the other of the day. This could be traced to PDP toward the end of 2015 administration, where a lot of political figures and macho of politics defected from PDP to APC. (News watch Dec. 20, 2014). Violation of the principle of internal democracy in PDP caused a lot to decamp to APC and weaken the potency of the party and, when the rain of election came, in 2015, the ship of the party (PDP) sank into Atlantic Ocean like "Titanic" on April 14, 1912.

**Leadership Problems within PDP/Internal Crisis:** The internal crisis engendered by leadership problem started under the leadership of Bamaga Tukur as the National Chairman of PDP and the gross ineptitude of Tukur's leadership manifested in the creation of "G7" governors fashion out from PDP governors forum. A lot of factors could cause this leadership problem but one obvious bone of contention was the insinuation that Bamaga Tukur was working for the ex-president Goodluck Jonathan to sustain the mandate. This crisis between G7 Governors and the PDP was responsible for up

to five of them dumping the party to APC. (Tribune Jan. 29, 2014, the Punch Jan. 30, 2014).

The array of problem of internal crisis within PDP continued to rock the party. Even when Bamaga Tukur had been forced to resign as PDP chairman, ranging from imposition of candidates, problem of internal democracy, hijacking the ticket to contest the senate by some governors, the activities of National Working Committee (NWC) of the party appear to be subjective and introspective, and constraining some people to contest against ex-president Goodluck Jonathan at presidential primary election. With all these, when the crisis within the party became stronger and the center can no longer hold, things fall apart (Achebe C. 1994). By implication, a lot of people that matters in the party (PDP) dumped the party to APC and even those that are political king that did not decamp, they work against the party to ensure that PDP and Goodluck Jonathan lost the election and that was the end of PDP as a ruling party.

*Political Will:* One of the beautiful virtues that gave birth to the outcome of the 2015 general election is the political will of the ex-president Goodluck Jonathan and the Chairman of Independent National Electoral Commission.

The pioneer president of the Fourth Republic in Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo had created a precedent for future presidents to be crooked on how to use federal might and amoral principle to influence the INEC Boss and have their way in electoral matter, Goodluck Jonathan did not consider this as alternative option for his victory, he rather conceived political will that will bring democratic sustainability. 2015 general elections remain the only election in this fourth republic that received popular acceptance without a case initiated in court.

More also, in this fourth republic, several elections have been conducted in which the INEC chairman became puppet and stooge in the hand of the president of Nigeria during elections, but in the case of INEC chairman, Atairu Jaga, who conducted 2015 general elections, he refused to relinquish his independent stand and was not ready to supplant his integrity for any materialism. In a nutshell, the Political Will of high pedigree and impeccable character from the above two actors can be said to have determined the outcome of the election.

*The Use of Card Reader in the Conduct of Election:*

This is a scientific method introduced in Nigeria political system by Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). This was used purposely to detect the ghost voters and to reduce electoral malpractices. The issue of card reader machine has effectively reduced to the minimum level fictitious voters, stuffing of ballot boxes and falsification of election result. This is because the machine has the record of every political units, the accredited voters and who actually voted. The evidences can be seen in some polling stations where about eight hundred to one thousand voters registered fictitiously and when it was time for voting, only eighty or one hundred voters appear at the polling unit to vote. Meanwhile there was political turn out from the electorates in 2015 general election (presidency) because everybody demanded “change” yet some registered names could not come out to vote. These nonexistent registered personalities are referred to as ghost voters and are intended to serve as one of the means of electoral malpractices.

Card reader machines have created a platform where the result of the election reflect the will of electorates unlike previous elections where “ghosts” will cast vote, and announcement of the election will be made base on the voting made by the electorates and ghost. Therefore, the machines have contributed in determining the outcome of the election since it reflects the will of the majorities. Although, the machine is not hundred percent perfect but it appears to be 70% effective in curtailing election malpractices.

*Insurgency (Boko Haram) and the Issue of Chibock*

*Schoolgirls:* The activities of Islamic sect called Boko Haram in the North East greatly contributed to the failure of ex-president Goodluck Jonathan and the PDP. Boko Haram is a clandestine group who pursue their causes through the use of terror. They often cause wanton destruction of life and properties and inflicting of immense suffering on their victims. Their activities includes: bombing, sabotage, assassinations, displacing people, intrusion into comfort zone of a region and kidnapping. This group is a religion fundamentalist. It was the continuation of their violence and illegal act that led to the abduction of about 234 chibock schoolgirls in a school at Borno State.

The numbers of victims and casualties of Boko Haram in Nigeria have increased in such a way that

it tainted the administration of PDP and ex-president Goodluck Jonathan both at national and international level with gross ineptitude and incompetence to provide security to the citizens. On this ground, majorities shifted their interest away from PDP administration and sought for change. By so doing, people turned out in the Election Day to initiative change. By implication, PDP lost the mantle of leadership to APC as the winner of the election.

#### *The Benchmark of Turning Point*

Change is extraordinarily difficult but absolutely necessary in the political terrain of Nigeria. Change is unavoidable part of life. Without change; life would soon become intolerably dull (Anderson 1990:10). When the status quo became intolerable in Nigeria before 2015 general election, people did everything to make a u-turn and initiate change. In the same way, people hated the changes that brought about deteriorating health, stagnancy, social upheaval, insurgency, poverty, intrusions into their comfort zones etc. Sometimes, people react so strongly against the changes they dislike that they either try to ignore or use all their resources to reverse it. These were the situation of things in Nigeria prior to 2015 general election.

The benchmark of turning point in the 2015 general election, was historic, the political fortunes of PDP that once pride itself as the largest political party in Africa and that will remain in power for 21 years was overturned. In the election, PDP lost its preponderant influence in the Fourth Republic. There was a sudden change in the electoral trend, in the voting behaviour, and there was a wagon effect. Everybody contributed to desired change by moving to the direction of change. There was a shift in the political behavior of the people, particularly the electorates. The politics of selling conscience and buying electorates mind, using federal might to influence the result of the election through Election Management Body (INEC) was defeated. It was a clear departure from the traditional and conventional pattern of election result and the 2015 general election returned a new party APC as the major one to pilot the affair of the country.

#### **5. Conclusion and Recommendation**

##### *Conclusion*

The result of the election demonstrated the readiness of the people to join the mainstream for change. Despite the cases of fraud that were noted in the

election in some area, it was convincing that the result did indeed reflect the will of the electorates. This was because the indisputable wind of change which had become necessary in the country prior to the election. The voting pattern indicated without any ambiguity that majorities of the people's preference for "CHANGE" cannot be credibly disputed and APC won the election convincingly in the count

##### *Recommendation*

Base on the findings of this study, the following suggestion are given adequate consideration to ensure meaningful and sustainable electoral values in the country: The appointment of INEC chairman should be based on integrity and worthiness. A People of impeccable character, who does not worship all form of transient things, who will not be ready to supplant his integrity to material things should be allowed to occupy the position. Individuals and political actors should develop political will that can promote democratic sustainability. People should not consider crook means as alternative option to political victory. People should play politics with its virtues. Finally, Impunity and imposition within political party should be discouraged.

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NOTE:

1. The data used for the analysis are in 4.1 and 4.2.
2. The declaration of APC as the winner of the 2015 general election without a case initiated in court by opposition party had revealed the results of the election