DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS AND OPPOSITION PARTY IN NIGERIA: AN INSIGHT

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ABSTRACT
As a potent opposition to the ruling party, political parties perform one of the most significant functions in a democracy. Though political opposition is essential to the functioning of self-governing institutions and societies, the role of opposition parties in developing democracies like Nigeria has gotten little attention. Based on this, the research aims to investigate Nigeria's opposition party and democratic process. The Theory of Consensus Democracy and Prebendalism Theory serve as the theoretical foundation for this study. The overall weakness of Nigeria's political opposition was revealed through qualitative examination of material that was mostly collected from secondary sources. The study asserted that among other things, fragmentation, violence, desertion, manipulation of election rules, and money politics are to blame for political parties' inability to function as effective platforms for opposition to the ruling party. The study suggests, among other things, that Nigerians and the media oppose increased political chances. Additionally, the supporters of the competing parties must immediately mobilize the voter. This circumstance is an out different from how they have always been marketed as being reachable in developed countries.

Introduction

The role of opposition parties in transitional democracies like Nigeria, especially in recent years, has not received much attention. The stability of authority and the dynamism associated with the operation of democratic systems and societies depend on political opposition.

Nigerians are currently debating the quality of their election system, which is a key factor in the consolidation of democracy, rather than simply whether or if democracy can endure. The duties and responsibilities of opposition parties in strengthening democracy are crucial (Southall, 2000). In order to prevent the electoral system from being abused, a legitimate democratic electoral process must include a viable competitive or multi-party struggle that would aid in the abolition of

authoritarian democracy and one-party rule (Khan, 2021; Oyewole & Omotola, 2022).

Unquestionably, political parties continue to be one of the most important tools and structures for political organization. Parties do, in fact, play a crucial role in improving the effectiveness of any democratic system. The function of opposition parties in maintaining the balance of power and adding dynamic elements to the functioning of democratic systems is crucial for the legitimacy of such governments (Adebiyi, Bakare & Saka, 2019). Dahl's definition of democracy as it is generally understood today dictates that democracy requires both public engagement and competitive contestation. It is anticipated that there would be multiple parties competing, giving the electorate a choice of options (Weghorst & Lindberg, 2011).

Opposition parties are just as crucial to the consolidation of democracy as political parties are. This is because they are crucial in setting up partisan movements that aim to challenge and oppose the party in power during elections, which lends legitimacy to those elections. According to Auwal in Amos (2023) opposition parties have also been viewed as watchdogs, supporters of good governance, and potential replacements for established governments.

As the lung through which democracy breathes, democracy is intended to be formed upon normative norms of constitutional governance, public involvement, competition, and accountability. When there is competition in the election, voters have more quality and quantity of options, which broadens their political horizons and improves the quality and scope of their involvement (Adenuga, 2022; Adenuga, &Oderinde, 2021; Huntington, 1991; Mauk, 2022).

In truth, in developed democracies political parties are important cornerstones of good government, the rule of law, and the defense of human rights. In essence, the institutionalization and strengthening of democracy depends on the existence of strong political parties. In any democratic democracy, but particularly in those that are in transition, political parties serve purposes that support the ongoing democratization process (Adebiyi, Bakare & Saka, 2019). In a fully democratic society, opposition parties also assist in stabilizing regimes. It is important to remember that an opposition party's ability to serve as a countervailing force mostly depends on how unified its leadership and organizational structure are.

Along with opposition party structure and leadership, the ruling party is a significant factor in the opposition parties' inability to function successfully. Most ruling parties have a strict policy of not tolerating opposition parties and lack the political courage to do so. The history of violence in Nigerian elections stems from the ruling party's fear of competition in the electoral market and its desire to hold onto power despite its failure to fulfill its promises made during the election campaign and in terms of leadership (Hamalai, Egwu, & Omotola, 2017; Omotola, 2010; Oyewole & Omotola, 2022). The entire process becomes violent as a result of both the opposition and the ruling party wanting to keep their positions of authority. It is in the light of the above this study seeks to examine democratization process and opposition party in Nigeria.

Conceptualizing Democratization

The concept of "democratization" is a new political lexicon for the analysis of public actors in a democratic system in the modern period. However, political analysts from a number of fields have gathered to construct broad empirical theories in line with global politics on the process of democracy that occurred in Western countries via the evolution that adopted various political patterns. In the first place, "democratization" is a relative term.

The idea was described by Huntington (1991) as a time or evolution that emerges from increasing waves that systematically transcend in the context of international politics. But democratic transitions from non-democratic to democratic regimes also fall within the umbrella of democratization. According to Alumona (2010), democratization is a process that takes place over time. The state and the entire population are the main actors who must demonstrate dedication to make sure that sustainable democracy functions well throughout the entire society. As explained by Whitehead (2002), democratization is best viewed as a difficult, protracted, dynamic, and unfinished process. It entails advancements toward a politics that is more consensus-based, rule-based, and participatory.

Adesoji (2006) established numerous approaches to the idea of democratization in a

similar spirit. The transitional method places a focus on elite efforts and decisions, political processes, and movements from an authoritarian ruler to a liberal. This implies that some decisions, choices, and tactics made by the political elite are advantageous to democratic institutions. In a similar vein, democratization relies on the interrelationships of the political elite to organize for effective political structures that could aid in overall achievement for the people in the area of power, economic, social, and political, as they gradually change over time, providing constraints and opportunities as it also propels the political elite and others along a historical trajectory in liberal democracy. According to Jayasuriya (1994), democratization is the process of bringing about a democratic system and must be rooted in the actors and social movements of civil society organizations. The civil society group is an area of human activity that was largely focused on the fulfillment of political needs that necessitate an alliance more significant than family concerns.

The Concept of Political Party

Political parties are associations of people who, at the very least, participate in formalized contests or fights for power and who hold particular values, interests, and goals in common (Kura, 2011). Political parties, according to Johari (2008), are organizations that mobilize the populace's support before elections. He added that partiesare a vehicle for the aggregation of interests that call for strident expression.

A political party, according to Sartoriin Adeleke (2018), is any officially recognized political group that takes part in elections and has the right to nominate candidates for public office through periodic election either free or not.A political party, in Agbaje's opinion as quoted in Adebiyi, Bakare & Saka(2019), is a group of individuals united in policy and ideology in support of a broad political purpose, which is essentially the chase, seizure, and retention of power for as long as democratically possible.

As a result, political parties share two important traits: they are made up of individuals who share the same objectives and interests, and they are associations that vie for power. Political parties frequently need a few distinctive characteristics to distinguish them from other social and political groupings. Ideology is one of the important defining characteristics. Political parties need clearly defined ideological conceptions in order to operate effectively in a democratic society. In this context, ideology can be referred to as what Omotola in Howarth (2001) as calling democratic ideology. Political parties that come up short in elections become the opposition and keep the government under constant scrutiny. When they are in the minority in the legislature, they organize an opposition and continuously apply pressure to the administration to ensure good governance.

Based on the aforementioned, it can be concluded that unlike the first-generation political parties during the colonial era, the post-colonial Nigerian State no longer has as many ideologically motivated political parties. Since the fourth republic's multi-party system was established on May 29, 1999, the majority of the nation's numerous political parties have a hazy ideology or none at all (Ogunnoik, 2018).

Opposition Political Party

Opposition political parties are groups that have a link with another organization with which they disagree in some way (Norton, 2008). According to Kiiza (2005), an opposition political party serves the following functions, which can be summed up as follows: aggregating interests, fostering responsible and reasoned debates, staying in touch with voters and citizens, highlighting the importance of politics to regular people, and offering a workable alternative form of government. It would be impossible to have a completely democratic society without respectable opposition political groups.

Brack &Weinblum (2011) claim that the definition of political opposition has rarely been exact. According to the academics, a study of the classic literature on opposition politics offers a somewhat ambiguous and comprehensive definition. By putting up alternative concepts, tenets, and governing principles, opposition parties offer a strong challenge to the current administration. In the event that the party in power disappoints the electorate, the "government-in-waiting" assumes control through free and fair elections (Adebiyi, Bakare & Saka, 2019).

It's important to remember that no political party ever sets out to remain in constant opposition. It is crucial to understand that there

are many disagreements on the idea. However, Southall (2000) noted six instances of the word "opposition." First, opposition could refer to utter opposition to the structure and foundation of the state. Second, when the state is perceived as an oppressive entity, it may signify opposition to its authority. Third, it could mean a rejection of the authority of the organization, faction, or dynasty in charge of the state. Fourth, it might refer to a steadfast resistance that challenges the commanding group without undermining or rejecting the foundations of the state or the constitution. Fifth, the opposition may refer to a system of checks and balances that the constitution uses to protect against and rein in its own excesses. Finally, the term may refer to strategies used by individuals or groups to change the policies of a government or stop its tyranny without necessarily condemning the former as inherently oppressive.

Therefore, the opposition political party's importance in any democratic context cannot be disputed (Linz & Stepan, 1996; Wiebrecht, 2021). Democracies are strengthened and deepened by opposition political parties, but when there is no opposition, voters are never given the chance to participate in the political process.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on Theory of Consensus Democracy and Prebendalism theory as theoretical framework of analysis.

Theory of Consensus Democracy

Arend Lijphart proposed consensus democracy, also known as consociational democracy, as a means of promoting democracy that is stable and democratic globally. The main premise of the theory is that it is not possible to achieve a stable democratic system in the modern world due to the social fragmentation caused by different social, ethnic, religious, and cultural groups, contrary to certain researchers' views (Lijphart, 1975).

Using Dutch politics as an example, the theory held that the establishment and maintenance of democracy can be achieved through the accommodation and resolution of differences in other parts of the world. Dutch society had significant social divisions that were once varied but have since been resolved, resulting in the emergence of one of the best democracies in the world.

Under summary, the idea suggests that divided territories, even those that have a hostile history, are ethnically diverse, have diverse religious beliefs, or have distinct languages, can nevertheless be effectively and efficiently administered under a democratic government using consociationalprinciples. These consociational principles called for agreement on how authority should be divided and how disagreements should be resolved or accommodated.

The theory of consociational democracy can be used in this study because the APC's accommodation of various ethnic, regional, and religious cleavages during its merger in 2013 resulted in the emergence of a potent national consensus party as an opposition, which was successful in ousting the ruling PDP in the general elections of 2015, 2019, and 2023.

Prebendalism Theory

In 1996, Joseph formulated this idea and declared that political party members no longer exist. The fundamental tenet of this theory is that office holders and those in positions of authority should take into account the interests of the nation or the people rather than disregarding popular opinion by constantly changing their party platforms in an effort to preserve their positions of authority and access to resources for their own political aspirations. Therefore, in this situation, good governance is defined as when government programs and policies are implemented with a focus on improving the socio-economic well-being of the people rather than using the opposition party structure as a platform. This definition holds true for every functional democracy. Most members that leave or defect are looking out for themselves. Consequently, for the benefit of the economic success of the general populace. This development urgently requires a reminder or pressure from the opposition structure, which is rare in nations with substantial opposition parties like Britain and the United States. If it is to live up to her expectations.

The foregoing assertion's implications in regard to the phenomenon being studied is when a given state's elected Democratic Party representatives become the main opposition in Nigeria following the 2015, 2019 and 2023 national elections. However, based on the role

played by the necessity of such a platform against personal political present ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) when it aspired, it appears that the PDP is failing as party framework misappropriate the democratic an opposition party. Thus, this puts even more at risk the opposition party that was doing its job. the anticipated results of excellent governance, for instance.

In support of this, a researcher like Aborishade (2013) claims that the Action Congress of Nigeria fought the PDP in January 2012 when it sought to entirely end the frequent practice of party members defecting. not actually for a national benefit or goal, but rather out of want Unfortunately, since 2015, the opposition PDP's power brokers have not appeared to be making any progress toward improving their political prospects. Prebends' political injury was brought on by her (party members) consistently making opposition elements suffer shocking defeats in the general elections of 2015, 2019, and 2023. She also promoted a culture and internal crisis that plagued the party over leadership indicators of good governance in Nigeria.

Political Parties and Opposition Politics

The People's Democratic Party has been Nigeria's leading party since the Fourth Republic's founding until 2015. Other political parties with regional or sub-national representation, depending on the situation, include the All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), formerly the All People's Party (APP), Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), Labour Party (LP), and Progressive People Alliance (PPA), among others (Ibrahim and Hassan, 2014). It is essential to note that no powerful opposition party can be regarded to have existed during former President Obasanjo's first term in office (1999–2003). After the 1999 general elections, parties that failed to have an influence or continue to be a credible opposition started rethinking their strategies in order to get ready for the 2007 general elections. Instead of genuine resistance, this time period has been characterized as one of sycophantic accolades (Epelle&Enyekit, 2015).

According to Naanen (2015), none of the three parties that emerged in 1999 had significant ideological differences. None of them qualified as leftists. The Alliance for Democracy, which won every state in the region, carried on the policies of the South-West, which had a strong welfarist slant. There was no ideological distinction between the People's Democratic Party and the All Peoples Party (APP), afterwards renamed as the All Nigeria Peoples Party, because both could be described as right of the center. Between 2003 and 2007, Olusegun Obasanjo, the current president, and Atiku Abubakar, the vice president, engaged in a form of intra-party dispute and a struggle for power.

Umar Ya'Adua emerged as the PDP's presidential candidate in 2007 and won the election. Due to health issues, Umar Ya'Adua was unable to carry out his responsibilities as the president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Before Yar'Adua became Nigeria president in May 2007, according to Omotola (2011), there were already increasing worries about his health. Between 1999 and 2007, Yar'Adua presided over Katsina state and was rumored to have frequently traveled overseas for medical treatment. President Yar'Adua was taken to Germany and then Saudi Arabia for medical care when his health problem reached a critical point.

However, a severe constitutional crisis resulted from Yar'Adua's refusal to deliver a letter to the National Assembly authorizing his deputy, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, to preside over the Republic in his absence. That meant Jonathan would be unable to serve as acting president. Therefore, a presidential vacancy was imminent. Dealing with the issue became very challenging since, as it eventually became clear, the president had been taken over by a "cabal" of strong people who are a member of the government (Omotola, 2011). This situation led to strong intra-party resistance that, for the most part, was motivated by the personal interest of a few influential people in the Yar'Adua presidency. The circumstance split the ruling party in half. On one side was the "cabal," which was determined to defend Yar'Adua's presidency to the latter end, at any costs, even if it meant ignoring the law. The additionalset was made up of those who believed the philosophy of need should be put into practice in order to prevent a governance vacuum (Omotola, 2011).

Upon the incapacitation of the then-president Umar Ya' Adua, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, the vice president at the time, first served in an interim capacity until being sworn

in as president upon President Yar'Adua's passing. However, Jonathan was chosen to run as the PDP's presidential candidate in the 2011 general election(Adebiyi, Bakare & Saka, 2019).

Under Jonathan's leadership, political opposition assumed an unparalleled scope. The three major opposition parties, the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the All Nigerian People's Party (ANPP), and the Congress for Progressive Change, successfully merged on July 31, 2013, and the Independent National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (INEC) subsequently registered the new party. Following the merger, the new opposition party took the names All Progressives Congress (APC) and "the broom" as identifiers. According to Saka and Amusan (2018) and Adeseri (2014), the coalition was regarded as the opposition's most ardent attempt to date to put out a unified face in Nigeria. A wave of senior PDP members defected to the newly registered political party APC after the merger. The PDP's rank and file leaders defecting to the APC offered the party hope that, at least in principle, it is still possible to gain political power at the federal level.

The majority of the populace seems to have been relatively disgruntled with the federal administration led by Jonathan's PDP before to the 2015 general elections. However, by engaging in a well-organized and issue-informed critique of President Jonathan's government on a variety of grounds, with a special emphasis on the rampant corruption that defined governance under the regime, the opposition party stoked popular discontent. In fact, a number of corruption cases involving PDP leaders and government employees were exposed in the media in the months before the 2015 general elections (Adebiyi, Bakare & Saka, 2019). Among these was the corruption controversy involving Hon. Farouq Lawan, who served as the head of the House of Representatives' special committee established to look into how the gasoline subsidy budget that had previously been authorized by the National Assembly had been used (Ezigbo, 2012). Another example of this is the previous aviation minister, Mrs. Stella Oduah, who allegedly coerced a cash-strapped division of the aviation ministry into paying exorbitant costs for two armored BMW 760 series (bullet proof) automobiles. The administration received criticism for how it handled the Boko Haram terrorist group's abduction of 270 schoolgirls from the Chibok hamlet in Borno State. These were just a few of the themes the opposition APC seized in its vote-gathering efforts for the 2015 general elections in an effort to cast doubt on the incumbent PDP.

According to Lunn & Harari (2015), Buhari and the APC's win represents a turning point in the political history of the continent and the first time in Nigerian history that one party has lost an election to another. With 54% of the vote, Muhammadu Buhari and Yemi Osinbajo were elected as president and vice president, respectively. Even Nevertheless, the election was held in a relatively calm manner. The low turnout is especially encouraging since it shows relatively minimal post-poll vote inflation, which is by far the most typical method of meddling with elections in the past. Jonathan's prompt and gracious capitulation was also a first for Nigeria, suggesting that the political elite of the nation may have finally started to accept defeat as an essential part of the democratic process.On May 29, 2015, the People's Democratic Party's (16-year) rule at the center came to an end as a result of the election. The implication was that the APC would hold office for the next four years and play a completely different role than that of the opposition it served for the two years prior to its formation as well as for the many years prior as component party units (Adebowale, 2015).

Prior to the 2019 elections, President Muhammadu Buhari's opponent in the PDP presidential primary was former vice president Alhaji Atiku Abubakar. Despite efforts to defeat the APC in the 2019 elections, the party was plagued by a lot of internal strife that limited their effectiveness as an opposition force. This PDP internal fight persisted up until the most recent general election in 2023, when Atiku Abubakar ran against Senator Bola Ahmad Tinubu of the APC on February 25. Due to a PDP internal party split that rendered them an ineffectual opposition, Atiku lost to Bola Ahmad Tinubu.

Factors hindering effectiveness of Opposition Parties in Nigeria

The efficiency of opposition parties in Nigeria's democratic process is hampered by a number of reasons. These elements consist of:

Fragmentation: The first strategy the ruling party often uses is to split and dominate the opposition by taking advantage of its

disintegration. Due to the opposition party's disarray, the ruling party consciously uses the divide and conquer strategy. The potential of the ruling party to undermine opposition parties by separating them via intra-party disputes is constantly strengthened by this fragmentation (Howard & Roessler, 2006; Jiménez, 2023; Lust-Okar, 2005; Teshome-Bahiru, 2009). In order to increase its chances of winning the election, the governing party targets any credible opposition group it thinks might challenge it, perhaps influence the results of the vote, and bring it down.

Violence: Second, both in favor of itself and against rival parties, the ruling party manipulates elections by violence. Let's be clear: All political parties promote violence, but according to Collier & Vicente (2008), it is the weaker party (i.e., the opposition party) that promotes violence. However, Oyewole & Omotola (2022) have made it obvious that violence in elections is often carried out by the governing party, especially in the weak or strongholds of the opposition, with the intention of annulling such elections. In the same spirit, it is thought that the governing party is more equipped to exploit the institutions of governmentsuch as security agents, INEC, and the mediabecause it controls them. For instance, during the 2023 gubernatorial election in Adamawa State it was evidence that the returning officer was kidnapped and torture. It is important to note that electoral violence typically occurs at several times, including before elections, on election days, and after elections. The governing party consistently manipulates the political landscape in its favor through harassment, intimidation, repression, and other strategies, creating an unfair campaign climate that benefits the incumbent (Selçuk &Hekimci, 2020).

Defection: The issue of party defection, decampment, and carpet crossing is one more difficulty the opposition political party is facing. Decampments, carpet crossings, and defections frequently happen for a number of causes. For example, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar decamp from APC to PDP in 2019 to contest for presidential position against Muhammadu Buhari. In recent time it was also evidence when Peter Obi left PDP for Labour Party to contest for 2023 Presidential election. Political party defection, decamping, or carpet crossing can be caused by a variety of factors, including personal disputes, power struggles, crises or divisions within a particular party, disagreements over the party's stance on a particular subject, the realization of one's own political ambition, and a feeling of threat (Aleyomi, 2013).However, some politicians switch parties because they believe that if they join the ruling party they would not be pursued or hounded and that even if they do any atrocities, their crimes will be covered.

Manipulate Electoral Norms: The current administration's continued manipulation of election rules, restrictions on dissent, and changes to the constitution to serve their interests and bring them within the bounds of the democratic system are further methods used to undermine opposition political parties. In order to suppress dissent, neutralize political opposition, and weaken the authority of the democratic system, they also utilize the legislation to restrict civic and political space and freedoms (Burcher &Bisarya, 2017).

Money Politics: Above all, Nigeria's politics has been bedevilled with money, as money becomes the determinant factor of who to be voted for by the electorates. Before now, religion and ethnic cleavages were the major factors but now money has taken centre stage and electorates sell their votes to the highest bidder. Money politics have hampered genuine contenders to emerge as party flag bearers because he/she does not have the money needed to finance campaigns and at the same time, no opposition who will want to use his personal money against the incumbent government who is using the state resources. Though money is an essential ingredient in politics it has been used negatively in Nigeria and specially to weaken opposition parties as a result of vote buying (Adenuga Adenuga, &Oderinde, 2021; Olaniyan, 2020; Onuoha & Ojo, 2018).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Political parties continue to be a viable means for voters to voice their preferences for governmental policies and choices, even if their existence is not the essential requirement for the growth and maintenance of democracy. In a democratic context, political parties play crucial functions that are essential to the efficient and successful operation of a democratic government.In Nigeria's Fourth Republic, political parties have struggled to carry out these duties well, particularly when it comes to becoming a strong political opposition.Because of the prevalence of weak opposition politics

throughout Nigeria's political history, a strong and viable political opposition that might effect change has yet to form in the country after independence. Political leaders in Nigeria have lacked a clear political effort to create and sustain a strong and effective opposition platform.While it is still true that Nigeria's Fourth Republic is the nation's longest attempt at democratic governance, it is equally important to note that if the country's fourth attempt at democratization is to be consolidated and nurtured so that it will serve as the springboard for the qualitative improvement of democratic process, a viable political opposition must be created.

Based on the study's results, the paper makes the following recommendations for Nigeria's future opposition politics and democratic process:

i. There is a tendency for unjustifiable defection from one political party to another, particularly in the wake of the All Progressives Congress's (APC) selfish governance issues. Better political opportunities should be condemned by the Nigerian people and the media.

ii. Given the strategic significance of this function in advancing the right opposition ideas and ideals, democratic consolidation and significant inculcation in the direction of Nigeria's political stride toward good governance should be accomplished. As a result, parties can take this action to better grasp the issues.

iii. Any political party's guiding principles should be based on the idea that fighting the unfavorable opposition party requires reawakening the spirit and duty of patriotism and selfless devotion. Thus, via political education, political enlightenment, internal stability, and sensitization, the people's emotion.

iv. The opposing parties' constituents urgently need to gird the electorate. This situation is a striking departure from how they have traditionally presented themselves as being attainable in industrialized nations like the United States and Britain. As a result, it adopts a democratic and practical attitude.

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