

# The Politics of Opposition Parties Merger and the Struggle for Power in Nigeria's 2015 General Elections

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## Abstract

Since 1999 up till the conduct of the 2015 general elections, Nigeria's party politics has exhibited the near dominance of the political space by the then ruling People's Democratic Party, PDP. Aside the then four leading opposition parties, the Action Congress of Nigeria, ACN; All Progressive Grand Alliance, APGA; All Nigerian People's Party, ANPP and Congress for Progressive Change, CPC; the rest of the opposition pack comprised of smaller parties that lack organizational structure, possess little electoral worth and lack the capacity to make meaningful contribution to the deepening of the nation's democratic process. Realizing the importance of pulling resources together in an alliance, four main opposition parties, ACN, ANPP, APGA and CPC entered into talk directed at facilitating the merger of their parties to form a formidable opposition party. The result was the collapse of their structures and subsequent formation of, the All Progressive Congress, APC. While numbers of issues and factors accounted for the electoral defeat of the then ruling PDP in the 2015 general elections, this paper advance the argument that the united front presented by the opposition elements under the banner of the emergent All Progressive Congress was instrumental to the alternation of ruling party at the national level that Nigeria witnessed in 2015. Informed by this position and drawing insights from newspapers articles, commentaries, opinion piece and academic literature, this paper interrogates the politics of opposition merger and struggle for power in the course of the 2015 general elections.

**Keywords:** Opposition Parties, Party Merger, Party Alternation, People's Democratic Party, All Progressive Congress.

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## Introduction

Political parties is a veritable institution and stands at the heart of the working of a viable and credible democracy and democratic process. Indeed, the centrality of parties to the democratic process is such that without viable political parties and party system, the working of modern democratic process as we have come to conceive it is not only impossible but also impracticable.<sup>1</sup> Political parties are an essential component of democracy and they are central to an understanding of how politics works in modern democracy.<sup>2</sup> This position is informed by that fact that parties serve as the bridge between the citizens and the government. Political parties are traditionally the most significant intermediary organization in democratic societies. Indeed, students of political parties have commonly associated parties with democracy itself.<sup>3</sup> As such, while democracy rests on the informed and active participation of the people, political parties more than any other political institutions are viable tools in this regard.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, the importance attached to the institution of political party loses its meaning outside of the context of democracy and that of been a veritable instrumentality for achieving popular participation of citizens in democratic society. For as Schumpeter notes, democracy entails an institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions, which realizes the common good by making the people decide issues through the election of individuals, who are to assemble in order to carry out the popular will.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the notion is that democracy exists where political office holders within the political system aspire to their office through competitive elections in which majority of the population has the opportunity to participate. In essence, the condition of parties within a political system, is an important yardstick for gauging the health and vitality of any democratic society.<sup>6</sup>

While, political parties play many important roles in the sustenance of democratic process, yet the most fundamental of these in almost all democratic polity is to motivate the citizens to actively participate in elections and the whole

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1 J.S. Omotola, 'Nigerian Parties and Political Ideology', *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 2009, 612-634; B. J. Adele, 'Political Parties and Democracy in Nigeria', (Lagos: Ijede Commercial Enterprises, 2001); A. Agbaje, 'Political Parties and Pressure Groups', in R. Anifowoshe and F. Enemu (Eds.), *Elements of Politics*, (Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited, 1999).

2 A. A. Aduku and Y. U. Adejo, 'Political Parties and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic', *Global Journal of Political Science and Administration*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 2014, pp. 79-108.

3 N. Orji, 'Political Parties, Civil Society and Democracy in Nigeria', Being a paper Presented at National Conference on Political Parties and the Future of Democracy in Nigeria, Organized by the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) in collaboration with the Democracy and Governance Development Project (DGD) II of UNDP, 26-28 June, (Kuru, Jos: 2013); N. Yaqub, 'Political Parties and the Transition Process', in B. Onuoha and M. M. Fadakinte (Eds.), *Transition Politics in Nigeria, 1970-1999*, (Lagos: Malthouse Publishers, 2002), pp. 118-134.

4 A. Agbaje, 'Political Parties and Pressure Groups', (Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited, 1999).

5 J. S. Omotola, 'The limits of Election Monitoring: The 2003 General Elections', *Representation: A Journal of Representative Democracy*, Vol. 42, No. 2, 2006, pp. 57-67.

6 R. Anifowoshe, 'Political Parties and Party System in the Fourth Republic of Nigeria: Issues, Problems and Prospects, in Olurode, L. and Anifowoshe, R. (Eds.), *Issues in Nigeria's 1999 General Elections*, (Lagos: John West Publications and Rebonik Publication Limited, 2004), pp. 55-78.

gamut of the electoral process. This is assured through the massive mobilization of the people using the structure and institutional platform of political parties. In specific term, parties deployed their organization skill to canvass neighbourhoods to get people out to partake in the electoral process and most importantly to vote in elections. In fact, in a democracy, the personnel selected through the electoral process are expected to embody specific norms and policy platforms (as represented by their parties' manifestoes) which command the support of the electorate and form the basis for the election of parties' candidates to elective positions. Thus, the mobilization role and other functions that political parties perform contribute to the deepening of democratic process and good governance.<sup>7</sup>

However, the ability of parties to effectively perform the role of mobilizer and other important functions necessary for the deepening of democratic process, depends on the vitality of political parties operating within a political system at a given point in time. In fact, the ability of parties to perform the role of a credible opposition that has the capacity to provide platforms for policy alternatives and enhance the chance for electoral choice of the electorates depends on the depth of opposition parties' institutionalization, mobilization and outreach to the citizens. In situation where opposition parties' are fragmented, lack institutional depth, unable to marshal resources needed for effective citizen mobilization among other, then the emergence of a dominant ruling party becomes a threatening political reality and this was the case in Nigeria until the electoral defeat of the ruling People's Democratic Party in the 2015 presidential election.

The near dominance of the political space by the then ruling People's Democratic Party, PDP, especially at the national level has been a central feature of Nigeria's democratic experience since the return to civil rule in 1999. Aside the then four leading opposition parties, the Action Congress of Nigeria, ACN; All Nigerian People's Party, ANPP; All Progressive Grand Alliance, APGA and Congress for Progressive Change, CPC; the rest of the opposition pack operating in Nigeria's democratic space are smaller parties that lack organizational structure and lack the capacity to make meaningful contribution to the deepening of the nation's democratic culture, values, and electoral process. In three consecutive electoral cycles (2003, 2007 and 2011) after the transitional elections of 1999, the People's Democratic Party trounced opposition parties at the poll at the national level and increased the number of constituent states it control.

Realizing the importance of pulling strength and resources together in an alliance, four main opposition parties, ACN, ANPP, APGA and CPC entered into talk directed at facilitating the merger of their parties to form a formidable opposition party. The result was the collapse of their structures and subsequent formation of a new party, the All Progressive Congress, APC. While numbers of issues and factors accounted for the electoral defeat of the then ruling PDP in the 2015 general electi-

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<sup>7</sup> K. Weissenbach, 'Political Parties and Party Types-Conceptual Approaches to the Institutionalization of Political Parties in Transitional States: the Case of the Philippines (Mikati City, Manila Office: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2010).

ons, this paper advance the argument that the united front presented by the opposition elements under the banner of the emergent All Progressive Congress was highly instrumental to the alternation of ruling party at the national level that Nigeria witnessed in 2015. Informed by this position and drawing insights from newspapers articles, commentaries, opinion piece and academic literature, this paper interrogates the politics of opposition merger and struggle for power in the course of the 2015 general elections.

### **Political Parties and Democratic Process**

There are number of institutions that perform central role in the deepening and sustenance of democratic process, however, the role political parties remains pre-eminent. This is informed by the fact that the notion of majoritarian democracy becomes inconceivable outside of the context of parties and viable party system.<sup>8</sup> As Adele notes, political parties are the lubricant of democracy and without viable parties and vibrant party system the ideal that form the basis of Western democracy and democratic practice becomes unattainable.<sup>9</sup> Adele's position is significant given that political parties as an aggregation of individuals formed with the overriding objective of contesting and winning elections, is a veritable platform for the realization of the objective of continuous peoples participation in governance.<sup>10</sup> As Jinadu averred the functioning of parties as vehicle for structure electoral choice and as institution for the conduct of government business set them apart from other social organization and/or interest groups.<sup>11</sup>

Aside functioning as instrument for citizens' mobilization, socialization and vehicle for nurturing political leaders and their presentation to the electorate in the context of elections, parties are also veritable platform for harnessing and aggregating of diverse opinions within society. As Dahl notes, parties are the most important platform through which the objectives of citizens' political participation translate into tangible and concrete reality.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the institution of political parties is central to democratic process because parties serve as the linchpin in democracy as it function as the institution that connect the electorate and their respective

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8 H.A. Saliu and A.A. Muhammad, 'Growing Nigeria's Democracy through viable Political Parties', in Saliu, H.A; Jimoh, I.H, Yusuf, N and Ojo, E.O. (Eds.), *Perspectives on Nation-Building and Development*, (Lagos and Ilorin: Concept Publishers for Faculty of Business and Social Sciences, University of Ilorin, 2008), p. 153; A.M. Ashafa, 'The Dynamics of Inter-Party Relations in Nigeria's 4th Republic', in JEGA, A.M; Wakili, H. and Ahmed, M. (Eds.), *Democracy and Democratization in Nigeria, 1999-2001*, (Kano: Center for Democratic Research and Training, 2002), p. 14.

9 B. J. Adele, 'Political Parties and Democracy in Nigeria', (Lagos: Ijede Commercial Enterprises, 2001), 35.

10 I. Sani, 'Political Parties and Governance in Nigeria: Explaining the Misfortune of the Fourth Republic', *Mambayya House Journal of Democratic Studies*, Vol 4, December, 2012/2013, p. 24.

11 A. Jinadu, 'Inter-Party Dialogue in Nigeria: Examining the Past', Party Dialogue Series held at Bolingo Hotel, Abuja, October 4, 2011, p. 1.

12 R.A. Dahl, 'Democracy and its Critics', (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 13-23.

representatives. In that sense, the institution of political party becomes inseparable from the ideal of modern democracy and the operation of democratic system.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, the significance of political parties to democracy is sacrosanct because the whole question of competition and representation that underpin the operation of democratic system is only possible within the context of the existence of political parties and the inherent tradition of party competition for power. Thus, it is the option of choice that parties offer to the people through their open and structure competition for power that enhance the global visibility and acceptability of democracy as the most cherished form of governing modern state. The issue of choice and the rule base competition for power that the institution of political party makes possible was what informed Anifowoshe position that;

Democracy exists where the principal leaders of a political system are selected by competitive elections in which the bulk of the population have the opportunity to participate. As a matter of fact, the condition of the parties, in a political system, is the best possible evidence of the nature of any democratic regime.<sup>14</sup>

What is implicit from the above position, is that the level of party institutionalization, cohesion and social base, determines the degree of its viability. In the same vein, the degree of viability of political parties operating within a political system determines the extent of the growth and sustenance of the system.<sup>15</sup>

In general term, and as already highlighted above, political parties are central to the operation of modern democratic system as the existence of viable political parties and the operation of vibrant party system are at the heart democratic state. In literal and phenomenal terms, political parties provide political education, screen candidates and aid the simplification of the political choice of the electorates by providing them with discernible political/electoral alternatives. Parties aggregate and articulate the interests of the people, aid popular mobilization, help in the organization of social forces, and serve as the bridge between the people and their political representatives. Parties also aid in the development and promotion of policy alternatives, provide the avenue for the peaceful change of government and help in the formulation, aggregation and expression of public opinion and interest.<sup>16</sup>

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13 H. Mohammed, 'Introduction: The Dilemmas of Political Parties in Nigeria', in Mohammed, H. (Ed.), *The Patterns and Dynamics of Party Politics in Nigeria's Fourth Republic*, (Kano: Bayero University Press, 2017), p. 1.

14 R. Anifowoshe, 'Political Parties and Party System in the Fourth Republic of Nigeria: Issues, Problems and Prospects', in Olurode, L. and Anifowoshe, R. (Eds.), 2004, p. 59.

15 H.A. Saliu and A.A. Muhammad, 'Growing Nigeria's Democracy through viable Political Parties', 2008, p. 155.

16 For insightful discussion on the roles of political parties in democracy see; H. Mohammed, 'Introduction: The Dilemmas of Political Parties in Nigeria', 2015, p. 3; H.A. Saliu and A.A. Muhammad, 'Growing Nigeria's Democracy through viable Political Parties', 2008, 155-157; A.T. Okosi-Simbine, 'The impact of more Parties on the Democratic Project', in Saliu, H.A. (Ed.), *Nigeria under Democratic Rule, 1999-2003, Volume 1*, (Ibadan: University Press Limited, 2004), pp. 85-86; J. Lapalombara and J. Anderson, 'Political Parties', in Hawkesworth, M. and Kogan, M. (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Government and Politics, Volume 1*, (London and New York: Routledge Publishers, 2001), p. 393.

According to Mohammed classical works on political parties within the context of political theory started with the work of David Hume, "*Of Parties in General*" (1742), followed by that of Edmund Burke (1770).<sup>17</sup> Other works that focus on theorising about political parties and its indispensability in democratic process were developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by political sociologists notably Michels, Weber and Duverger. Given the centrality of political parties in democracy, there exist different perspectives in theorising about the purposes, objectives and dynamics of parties in liberal democracy. There are theories that focus on the organization of political parties and those that deal with democracy as a political system and the role of parties in the evolution, sustenance and consolidation of democratic institutions, politics, practices and process.<sup>18</sup> Of the theoretical perspectives through which the institution of political parties have been explain and discuss; the Behavioural/Rational Choice theory; Group/Coalition theory and Institutional theory remain pre-eminent.

Behavioural theory focus on competitive party behaviour under specific organizational and institutional conditions. The behavioural explanation represent an attempt to move beyond doctrinal or formal party program analysis into the area of political behaviour of political actors notably those that operate within the institution of political parties.<sup>19</sup> The central assumption of behavioural theorists is that party leaders are rational actors/agents whose actions and behaviour are determined by how they could get maximum support to secure votes, form government and determine the course and outcome of public policy.<sup>20</sup> Contrary to the focus on the behaviour of political actors, institutional theories pay attention to the degree of institutionalization of political culture and democratic norms in political parties. Some strands of institutional theory focus on the role of informal institutions in influencing the role of political parties, while others discuss the level of institutionalization of political parties as an important yardstick for the understanding of party system in democracy.

In more nuance departure from the focus of the behavioural and institutional theories, the underlying assumption on which the group/coalition theories of political parties explanation hinges revolves around unravelling how groups coalesce and form a political party.<sup>21</sup> The position of group theorists is that groups are very central to the formation of viable political parties and the attainment of the objective of popular participation in governance through representation. The notion is that political parties are formed largely because of the membership shared interest and

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17 H. Mohammed, 'Introduction: The Dilemmas of Political Parties in Nigeria', 2017, pp. 3-4; D. Hume, 'Essays Moral, Political and Literary, Edited and with a Forward, Notes and Glossary by Eugene, E. Miller, with an appendix of variant readings from the 1889 edition by T.H. Green and T.H. Grose, Revised Edition, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987).

18 Mohammed, 'Introduction: The Dilemmas of Political Parties in Nigeria, 2017, p. 4.

19 S. Neumann, 'Towards a Comparative Study of Political Parties', in Neumann, S (Ed.), *Modern Political Parties*, (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1956), pp. 395-421.

20 For detailed discussion on the assumptions and positions of the behavioral theorist of political parties see, K. Strom, 'A Behavioral Theory of Competitive Political Parties', *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 34, No. 2, 1990, pp. 565-598.

21 N. Kelly and S. Ashiagbor, 'Political Parties and Democracy in Theoretical and Practical Perspectives, (Washington, D.C: National Democratic Institute, 2011), p.3.

motivation to compete for political power with the intention of forming government and the utilization of the instrument of political parties to advance group's interests in the course of the formulation and implementation of public policy. Proponents of group theory are of the view that the formation of coalition around shared interest is central to the viability of political party. In the same vein, the formation of coalition is also important in the context of electoral contest and the attempt of political parties to capture political power through the formation of government.

In this regard, political parties can engage in pre-election and post-election coalition formation. There are at least two central objectives that drive the formation of coalition. The first been that it encourages the sharing of the cost of candidacy while the second relates to the expectation that coalition has the potential to improve the chance of electoral victory of partners (political parties/groups) in the coalition at the poll.<sup>22</sup> The two instances of coalition formation have been witnessed in the history of party politics in Nigeria. Pre-elections alliances were formed by select Nigerian political parties in the run up to the conduct of the 1964-65 general elections and the transitional elections of 1999 in the first and fourth republics respectively. As it relates to post-election coalition directed at having parliamentary majority to govern, the Northern People's Congress, NPC and the National Council of Nigerian Citizen, NCNC formed governing alliance that was operational from 1959 to 1963, while the NPC was in alliance with smaller parties to form governing coalition from 1963 up till the collapse of the First Republic in 1966.<sup>23</sup>

### **Political Parties, Party Politics and Africa's Transitional Democracies**

Given their nature as a social organization, political parties to a large extent do reflect the social and economic context in which they operate and within which they are grounded. To this end, it becomes important to understand the social basis of political parties in order to have a better appreciation of the nature and dynamics of political party as an important social organization and its centrality to the working of democratization in both mature and transitional democracies.<sup>24</sup> Informed by the above position, Adejumobi and Kehinde aver that knowledge of the social environment within which political parties operate and elections are held is critical for an insightful understanding of the capacity, activities and inherent limitations of parties and the dynamics web of party politics.<sup>25</sup> Being the vehicle for the articulation and aggregation of social interests within the polity, the institution of political parties is by far the most important custodian of democracy. So central

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22 Mohammed, 'Introduction: The Dilemmas of Political Parties in Nigeria, 2017, p.5.

23 A. Joseph and S.O. Wilson, 'Political Parties and Inter-Party Conflict in Nigeria's Fourth Republic', in Mohammed, H. (Ed.), *The Patterns and Dynamics of Party Politics in Nigeria's Fourth Republic*, (Kano: Bayero University Press, 2017), p. 125.

24 M. Chege, 'Political Parties in East Africa: Diversity in Political Party Systems' Report prepared for the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) as part of its global Programme on Research and Dialogue with Political Parties, (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2007), p. 21.

25 S. Adejumobi and M. Kehinde, 'Building Democracy without Democrats? Political Parties and Threats of Democratic Reversal in Nigeria', *Journal of Africa Election*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2007, p. 104.

are the roles of party as the bridge that connect the regime and civil society that both democracies (developed and emerging/transitional) and non-democracies cannot do with them.<sup>26</sup> The emergence of political parties as distinct social organization devoted to the articulation and aggregation of social interests in Sub-Saharan Africa is attributable to and an important imprint of colonial rule. Thus, political parties, party system and party pluralism came to limelight in Sub-Saharan Africa in the final phases of colonial rule, on the eve of independence and/or the late 1950s and 1960s depending on the region, colonial rulers and the dynamics of anti-colonial struggle as the case may be.<sup>27</sup> In the height of anti-colonial struggles liberation movements and nationalist organizations were formed and many of these movements/groups metamorphosed to political parties in the twilight of colonial rule. With the movement to formal political independence other political parties were also formed to contest in the national elections that ushered former colonies in Sub-Saharan Africa into independence especially in countries that follows the constitutional conference route like Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Uganda among others.<sup>28</sup> For former colonies that fought wars of national liberation like Angola, Mozambique, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Guinea Bissau among others the different liberation movements also transformed into formal political parties and becomes the inheritor of state power.

The colonial context within which political parties and party politics in Sub-Saharan Africa emanated from largely informed the nature of parties' organization, structure, and cohesion. This also impacted on the nature of the relationship between the state, ruling regimes and opposition parties as well as between parties and civil society in many states in Africa. Indeed as Sklar notes, many of the parties formed at independence were ethnically inclined, thus they strive to secure power in section of the country where they have much followers by appealing to ethnic and other primordial sentiments.<sup>29</sup> The political parties that came to inherit political power exploited state resources, political and administrative instruments to enhance their power of mobilization and control. Thus, the parties that gained power immediately after independence in many states on the continent soon muzzled opposition parties out of the political space and instituted a one-party dominance and/or one-party dictatorship.<sup>30</sup> This coupled with military coups that swept through the continent in late 1960s and early 1970s nearly extinguished the fire of multiparty democracy instituted in the decade of independence. In so far as the discourse on political party

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26 SB. Kura, 'Contemporary African Political Parties: Institutionalisation for the Sustainability of Democracy', *Journal of Africa Election*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2007, p.42; N. Van De Walle and KS. Butler, 'Political Parties and Party Systems in Africa's Illiberal Democracies', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 1999, pp. 14-15.

27 GM. Carbone, 'Political Parties and Party Systems in Africa: Themes and Research Perspectives', *World Political Science Review*, Vol. 3, Issue 3, 2007, p. 1

28 SB. Kura, 'Contemporary African Political Parties: Institutionalisation for the Sustainability of Democracy', *Journal of Africa Election*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2007, pp. 52-53.

29 RL. Sklar, 'Political Science and National Systems: A Radical Approach', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1967, p. 6.

30 PA. Nyong'o, 'Institutionalization of Democratic Governance in Sub-Saharan Africa', *ECDPM Working Paper*, No. 36, 1997, Maastricht: ECDPM, p. 7.

before and in the decade of independence is concern, three different typologies can be identified. These are parties established before independence, parties that emerged from liberation movements and parties established by military regimes.<sup>31</sup>

Following the 'Third Wave' of democratization that swept through Sub-Saharan Africa in the late 1980s and early 1990s and the return to multiparty process that it engendered has spurred a spike in the numbers of political party officially recognized across states on the continent. The reintroduction of multiparty democracy was good for democratic development as this has aided inter-party interaction and enhance popular participation in the democratic and governance process. However, it need to be noted that Africa's multiparty process since the 'third wave' have been faced with mirage of problems. These largely emanated from the lack of credible constitutional, legal, political, institutional and administrative reforms on which the growth of multiparty system will be anchored.<sup>32</sup>

In the post-third wave period, van De Walle and Butler note that three types of parties are identifiable in Africa's emergent democracies. First on the list are those parties that survived the transition from the single party period to the multiparty era and still continue to play prominent role in politics in their respective countries. A typical example been the United National Independence Party, UNIP in Zambia and the Kenya African National Union, KANU in Kenya. The second in the categorization are what the duo referred to as historic parties. These are political organizations that have existed for decades entered a period of dormancy only to re-emerge at the dawn of the third wave. The third are the new parties that emerged in the course of the third wave of democratic transition on the continent. This category of parties are the largest as far as party that partake in the democratic process in Africa from the 1990s onward is concern. The People's Democratic Party and All Progressive Congress in Nigeria, the National Democratic Congress and New Patriotic Party in Ghana and the Cowrie Force for an Emerging Benin and Benin Renaissance in Benin Republic to give but few examples.<sup>33</sup>

Decades after the return to multiparty democracy a semblance of party system is discernable across emergent democracies on the continent. This system can be discussed along three major themes which are: the number of parties, the degree of polarization and the structure of competition. As it relates to the number of parties most democracies across the continent do have large number. While this might not be a necessary indication of crisis of governability however fragmented opposition and high degree of polarization undermine the capability and capacity of the parties to compete effectively with ruling party in a way that they can offer credible alternative to the electorate. This bring in the need for coalition, alliance formation and/or merger. However, given the nature of competition among parties

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31 Kura, 'Contemporary African Political Parties: Institutionalisation for the Sustainability of Democracy', 2007, p.54

32 Kura, *Contemporary African Political Parties*, 2007, p. 56.

33 N. Van De Walle and KS. Butler, 'Political Parties and Party Systems in Africa's Illiberal Democracies', Vol. 13, No. 1, 1999, pp. 19-21.

and the dynamics of party politics berthing a workable, viable and credible alliance and/or merger between and among parties in opposition require a high level of commitment, dedication and balancing of interest, features that are not easy to come by among party leaders/handlers in Africa's transitional democracies.

### **Political Parties, Alliance Formation and Party Merger in Nigeria's Democratic History**

In the discussion of alliance formation and/or merger of political parties, the tendency is that the two are often conflate as meaning the same or at best as related political occurrence. In fact, given the relative occurrence of party merger, the tendency is that political scholars often adopt ad-hoc explanation which mostly draw heavily from the discussion of alliance formation.<sup>34</sup> To start with, it is important to note that merger of political parties did not equate with the formation of pre-election or post-election alliance. While parties in alliance maintain their separate identities, symbols and organizational structure, political parties in merger arrangement must collapse their structures, shed their previous identity and symbols for new identity, symbols and structure as part of the requirement of merger. Thus parties' merger in contextual, legal and literal terms is different from alliance. Rather than been a temporary working arrangement which alliance connotes, merger contemplates a union in which two or more political parties merge to become one. By so doing, the parties in merger arrangement lose their registrations, shed their identities and collapse their previous organizational structures for new one.<sup>35</sup>

Borrowing heavily from industrial organizational literature and economics explanation, Godbout and Belanger conceive of party merger as the horizontal integration of two different firms. In this wise, Godbout and Belanger notes that:

Parties are organization competing over an electoral market, where political activists are assumed to be shareholders, party leaders correspond management, and the output offered to both voters and activists are public policies. The acquisition of market power is usually the first motive for merger in a market economy. The argument is that horizontal mergers augment market concentration, which in turn increases market power and profitability. In the case of party mergers, the market power corresponds to the pool of supporting voters, and an increase in profitability is perceived as an increase in electoral support.<sup>36</sup>

The takes from Godbout and Belanger, explanation are many but the most important relate to the fact that internal and external issues such as personalities of

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34 J. Godbout and E. Beranger, 'A Theory of Party Merger', Paper Presented at the Canadian Political Science Association Meeting, Ontario, June 2-4, 2005.

35 H. Kim, 'Rational Choice Politics and Third World Politics: The 1990 Party Merger in Korea', *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 30, pp. 83-100.

36 Godbout and Beranger, 'A Theory of Party Merger, 2005, p.1.

leaders in merger talk, need for leadership change, shifting alliance configuration, realignment of forces and policy choices among other can encourage and stimulate interest that will result in the collapse of the previous structures of two or more parties and the formation of a new one.<sup>37</sup> Of course, the urge to collapse the structures of existing parties through merger will be propelled by the realization of some core objectives. Highly important is the expectation that merger will help in the formation of a new bigger party through the collapse of previous ones. The expectation that the collapse of the pre-existing structures of the parties in merger arrangement and the emergence of a new, unified and viable party will increase the electoral prospect of the concern groups in electoral competition with the others also represent a central objective that merger is expected to facilitate.<sup>38</sup>

The formation of alliance across party divide by assemblage of parties as strategy directed at winning electoral majority is steep in Nigeria's electoral history. In the same manner the formation of post elections alliance with the intent of achieving a governing coalition is also not a new phenomenon. Indeed, the formation of post-election alliance with the objective of assembling a governing coalition represent the common interest that propelled the NPC/NCNC after the conduct of the 1959 general elections that ushered Nigeria into political independence.<sup>39</sup> In the same wise, pre-election alliance formation was a defining issue and electoral strategy of parties in the conduct of the first post-independence general elections of 1964 and the Western regional election of 1965. Preparatory to the election, the Northern People's Congress, NPC had entered into alliance talk with assemblage of smaller regional parties in the Western, Mid-West and Eastern regions. The pre-election alliance agreement led to the formation of the Nigerian National Alliance. Having break rank with its previous governing alliance partner of the 1959 era, the National Council of Nigerian Citizens entered into alliance with the remnant of the Action Group, Northern Elements Progressive Union, NEPU; United Middle Belt Congress and other smaller parties in Northern Nigeria to form the United Progressive Grand alliance, UPGA. At the final tally the NNA alliance triumphed in the general elections of 1964 polling 201 parliamentary seats that gave the alliance overwhelming majority to form the national government at the Centre.<sup>40</sup>

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37 *ibid*

38 Godbout and Beranger, 2005, pp. 5-7.

39 Joseph and Wilson, 'Political Parties and Inter-Party Conflict in Nigeria's Fourth Republic', 2017, p. 125; G.M. Brown and J. Iseolorunkanmi, 'Political Parties and Party System in Nigeria', in Ajayi, R. and Fashagba, J.O. (Eds.), *Understanding Government and Politics in Nigeria*, (Omu-Aran: Department of Political Science and International Relations, Land Mark University, 2014), pp. 233-253; E.E. Osaghae, 'Crippled Giant: Nigeria since Independence', (London: Hurst and Company); R.L. Sklar, 'Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation', (New Jersey: Princeton University Press).

40 M.B. Hassan and K.O. Lamidi, 'The Ruling Party and Reaction to Opposition Parties in Nigeria Politics: Matters Arising', in Mohammed, H. (Ed.), *The Patterns and Dynamics of Party Politics in Nigeria's Fourth Republic*, (Kano: Bayero University Press), p. 151; Osaghae, 'Crippled Giant: Nigeria since Independence', 1998, pp. 42-46; N.I. Nwosu, S.O. Oyedele and J.O. Olaniyi, 'An Introduction to Constitutional Development in Nigeria', (Ibadan: Sunad Publishers, 1998), p.55; B.J. Dudley, 'An Introduction to Nigerian Government and Politics', (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1982).

Although the switch to presidential system of government from the second republic onward reduce the urge for the formation of governing coalition, yet the coalescing of interested parties and the formation of governing alliance at the national assembly by party with the largest number of parliamentary seats with other parties becomes essential for ease of governance. In this wise, after the conduct of the transitional elections of 1979 that returned Nigeria back to democratic rule, the National Party of Nigeria, NPN made alliance overtures to the Nigerian People's Party, NPP. Both formed post-election governing alliance that gave the NPN the needed parliamentary majority support at the National Assembly. The 1979-1983 alliance between the NPN and NPP represents a repeat of NPC/NCNC governing coalition of the First Republic.<sup>41</sup>

In the Fourth Republic there are instances where political parties engaged in the formation of pre-election alliance. For instance, as the 1999 presidential election run closer, the then All People's Party, APP and then Alliance for Democracy, AD entered into alliance. On the basis of the agreement the AD produced the alliance presidential flagbearer in person of Chief Olu Falae while the APP pick the vice president slot and put forward Umaru Sinkafi. Likewise the AD entered into alliance with the PDP the term of which was to support the re-election bid of former president Obasanjo in the 2003 general elections by not presenting a candidate for the election. In return, the PDP was expected to protect the interest of the AD and ensure the re-election bids of the party's governors in the six south-western states. Attempt at negotiating pre-election coalition involving the AD, ANPP and a breakaway faction of the PDP in the period toward the conduct of the 2007 general elections failed to materialize. In the same wise, talk to forge a united front through a pre-election alliance arrangement between then Action Congress of Nigeria, ACN and the Congress for Progressive Change, CPC toward the 2011 general elections was dead on arrival.

Most of the alliances that have been negotiated in Nigeria under the Fourth Republic hardly produced the desired outcomes. Although those that manage the affairs of opposition parties understand the importance of pulling of resources and strength together through the formation of alliance and merger as the case maybe, however, number of factors often militate against the success of efforts at crafting virile, viable and enduring coalitions. Notable among these factors are; the exploitation of ethno-national and religious cleavages that is rooted in Nigeria's experience at party management and party politics. The clash of interest and conflicting ambitions of political elite that are expected to manage the process of alliance formation and its maintenance and their inability to find agreed modalities for accommodating conflict interests and aspirations serves as potent clog in the wheel of the success of evolving durable alliance. The failure of alliance partners to agree on procedure for apportioning cost and benefits associated with management of sustainable alliance also contribute to failure of past efforts at coalition building in Nigeria. Of course the hostile attitude of ruling party to efforts at forging alliance by opposition parties

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41 E. E. Osaghae, 'Crippled Giant: Nigeria since Independence', 1998; R. Joseph, 'Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The rise and fall of the Second Republic', (London: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

and the utilization of all possible means to scuttle the success of opposition parties' efforts at coalition formation is also a significant drawback.

While, the formation of alliance for electoral battle was not new, yet the collapsing of the structures of previously existing political parties to form an entirely new party was a relatively novel idea in Nigeria politics. Given the intrigues that often characterize party politics in Nigeria, the success recorded by the opposition parties in the merger talk represent a new direction not only in party politics but also in national politics and governance process. Notwithstanding numerous hiccups that are both internal to the process and those externally induced, the successful conclusion of the merger talk between the major opposition parties in 2013 and the emergence of a new opposition party, the All Progressive Congress APC represent an important political milestone in the anal of party politics in Nigeria. With the emergence of the APC, the opposition elements in Nigeria were able to pull resources and strength together to confront the then ruling PDP in the 2015 general elections. The overarching objective been the defeat of the ruling party especially in the presidential election and gain the control of power at the national level.

Although, the formation of alliance by interested parties and the merger of the structures of at least two previously existing parties is a political issue, yet there are legal and constitutional issues that surround the process and are important to the formalization of merger of political parties. As it relates to constitutional rules that guide the formalization of parties' merger, the 2010 Nigerian Electoral Act states steps that must be fulfil before merger of parties and the registration of the product of the merger can be said to take legal effect. Section 84 (1) of the Act provides that:

Any two or more registered political parties may merge on approval by the Independent National Electoral Commission following a formal request presented to the Commission by the political parties for that purpose.<sup>42</sup>

Following the presentation of formal request, the political parties intending to merge shall each give to the Independent National Electoral Commission 90 Days' notice of their intention to do so before the general election. Thereafter a written request for merger shall be sent to the Chairman of the Commission and shall be signed jointly by the National Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer for the time being of the different political parties proposing the merger and shall be accompanied by:

- (a) A special resolution passed by the national convention of each of the political parties proposing to merge, approving the merger;
- (b) The proposed full name and acronym, constitution, manifesto, symbol or logo of the party together with the addresses of the national office of the party resulting from the merger; and

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<sup>42</sup> Federal Republic of Nigeria, 'Electoral Act, 2010 as Amended', (Abuja: Federal Government Printer, 2010), Section 84 (1).

(c) Evidence or payment of administrative costs of N100, 000.00 or as may be fixed from time to time by an Act of the National Assembly.<sup>43</sup>

### **The Formation of the All Progressive Congress and Opposition Struggle for Power in the 2015 General Elections**

At the inception of the present Fourth Republic three political groups, Alliance for democracy, AD; the All People's Party, APP and People's Democratic Party, PDP were the officially registered political parties that contested the transitional elections of 1999. Rather than aiding the promotion of virile electoral competition the liberalization of party formation which resulted in the registration of many political parties starting from 2003 undermining viable competitive party politics. This is because many of the political parties registered existed merely in name without adding much value to the engendering of electoral competition.<sup>44</sup>

From the transitional elections of 1999 up till when it lost at the national level in 2015, the PDP was a behemoth as it had fist like grip on the nation's political space.<sup>45</sup> Having won presidential election with 62.8 percent of total votes cast, 20 states governorship positions, 63 senatorial seats and 214 House of Representatives seats, and having the control of many state houses of assembly, the PDP emerge not just as a governing party but as a dominant party. The PDP consolidated its grip on power in the 2003 general elections as it increased its percentage of total votes cast, won 30 states governorship positions and retains its majority in both houses of the national assembly and state house of assemblies under its executive control. The pattern of PDP dominance of the political space continued with the conduct of the 2007 and the 2011 general elections.<sup>46</sup> With the benefit of hindsight it can be safely argued that opposition parties in Nigeria failed to credibly perform the role expected of viable oppositions in a democracy. There are many issues informing this failure, however, the weak institutional base of opposition parties, inability to forge a common united front, ethno-national and religious considerations and crass culture of political opportunism among other are pre-eminent. However, this change with the successful conduct of the merger talks that herald the formation of the APC and the official registration of the party by the electoral umpire, INEC.

Activities directed at the formation of a united opposition front that will have the national outlook, reach, clout and resources to confront the ruling PDP in the 2015 general elections was extensive and far reaching. After having held extensive intra-party and inter-party consultations, partners in merger arrangement on the 6<sup>th</sup>

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43 *ibid*

44 M.B. Hassan and K.O. Lamidi, 'The Ruling Party and Reaction to Opposition Parties in Nigeria Politics: Matters Arising', 2017, p. 153.

45 O. Olowojolu, 'The rise of Opposition Political Party in Nigeria: Case Study of the All Progressive Congress', *International Journal of Politics and Governance*, Vol. VI, No. 6.4, 2015, p. 6.

46 M.B. Hassan and K.O. Lamidi, 'The Ruling Party and Reaction to Opposition Parties in Nigeria Politics: Matters Arising', 2017; J.S. Omotola, 'Elections and Democratic Transitions in Nigeria under the Fourth Republic', *African Affairs*, Vol. 109, No. 437, pp. 535-553.

February, 2013 announced the formation of the All Progressive Congress (APC). The partners in the new mega party are Nigeria's leading opposition parties namely; the Action Congress of Nigeria, ACN; the Congress for Progressive Change, CPC; the All Nigeria Peoples Party, ANPP and a faction of the All Progressives Grand Alliance, APGA.<sup>47</sup> Having met all the requirements for the formalization of the union and its registration before the law as stipulated in the Electoral Act, 2010 as amended, the electoral umpire, INEC approved the merger of the parties and subsequently endorse its registration as the All Progressive Congress on 31<sup>st</sup> July, 2013.<sup>48</sup>

Given the stories of failed attempts at presenting united front to successive ruling parties in Nigeria's democratic history, the success of the merger talks between the coalition partners represents a significant political, constitutional and historical milestone. Not to disappoint Nigerians and watchers of the Nigeria political scene, the new party hit the ground running. Not only did it becomes the vocal critic in Chief of the ruling regime, the APC also engage in aggressive drive to gain membership and engage in extensive mobilization of Nigerians as the 2015 general elections draws nearer. The APC was given a shot that boost its fold when disgruntled elements from within the ruling PDP openly decamped to the opposition side. Those that defected from the ruling PDP to the APC were 5 governors, 49 members of the House of Representatives, and 11 senators.<sup>49</sup> The gale of defection reached a climax when the then Speaker of House of Representatives, Honourable Aminu Tambuwal and former Vice President Atiku Abubakar announced their decamping to the opposition APC.<sup>50</sup> While the defection occurred after the formalization of the merger process, yet the caliber of those involve impacted positively on the opposition front as it boost the confidence of those in the APC and reassure them that with the commitment of requisite efforts the ruling party can be defeat in a free, fair and competitive elections come March 2015.<sup>51</sup>

As the election draws nearer, those responsible for the management of the opposition APC electoral campaign maintain their gaze on the bigger picture i.e the need to ensure the electoral victory of the party at the poll. The party and its leading figures did all that is humanly possible in terms of mobilization and outreach to the electorate selling the policies and programmes that the APC if voted into power at the federal level intends to implement. At the dawn of the national elections it becomes clearer that opposition victory and possibly the defeat of the incumbent ruling party might actually occur for the first time in Nigeria's democratic history.

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47 The Nation, 'APC's bumpy Journey to Power', (Lagos, Nigeria, May 29, 2015); Newswatch Times, 'Party Merger: How APC broke 50 Years Jinx in Nigerian Politics', (Lagos, Nigeria, April 12, 2015).

48 M.B. Hassan and K.O. Lamidi, 'The Ruling Party and Reaction to Opposition Parties in Nigeria Politics....', 2017, p. 155.

49 J. Ameh and O. Fabiyi, '37 PDP Reps Defect to APC', Punch Newspaper, (Lagos, Nigeria, Thursday 19th December, 2013), pp. 2-3.

50 A.J. Jiddere, 'The Politics of Party Defection, Cross Carpeting and the Democratic Process in Nigeria', in Mohammed, H. (Ed.), *The Patterns and dynamics of Party Politics in Nigeria's Fourth Republic*, (Kano: Bayero University Press), p.181.

51 Vanguard, 'Defection of 5 Governors Shocking-Tukur', Vanguard Newspaper, (Lagos, Nigeria, Thursday 28th November, 2013), pp. 1 and 5.

After initial three weeks extension, Nigerians went to the poll on 14th March, 2015. At the exit of the poll, the APC came out triumph defeating the PDP in the contest for the Presidency. The candidate of the APC General Muhammadu Buahri and his running mate Professor Yemi Osibanjo polled 15, 424, 921 votes against the incumbent President Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan and his running mate Architect Namadi Sambo of the PDP that polled 12, 853, 162 votes. The APC also secure simple parliamentary majority in both houses of the national assembly. The APC won 214 seats in the House of Representatives and 60 seats in the Senate. These approximate to 59.4 percent and 55.04 percent respectively. The PDP loses the parliamentary majority that the party has enjoy since 1999 as it won 138 seats at the House of Representatives and 49 seats at the Senate. These figures translate to 38.3 percent and 44.95 percent respectively. The opposition party electoral victory granted Nigeria alternation of power (electoral turnover) that have eluded the nation's in all its years of democratic history.

Number of factors aided APC electoral victory and the most significant of these includes: the successful conduct of a rancor free primary to pick the party presidential candidate; the perceive credibility of the opposition candidate in the court of public opinion; the North/Southwest alliance as represented in the APC ticket; the issue based campaign by the APC; the success of the party to rally round its flagbearer and the prevention of crack in the rank of the opposition alliance after the politicking of the presidential primary and the opposition calmness in the face of overt provocation by the ruling PDP. Aside these, the ruling PDP also unwittingly aided the electoral victory of the APC through some of its actions and inaction especially as it relates to issues of corruption; the poor handling of Chibok girls abduction by the Boko Haram terrorist group; the unrestrained campaign of calumny mounted against the opposition notably the numerous attacks on the personality of General Buhari (Rtd.); the appeal to ethnic and religious sentiments by the handlers and managers of former President Jonathan campaign organization. It is also important to acknowledge the INEC enviable management of the electoral process, and more importantly the success of the computerization process and deployment new technology (PVC and Card Reading Machine).

Against all odds and contrary to the trepidation that pervades the political space in the period leading to the conduct of the 2015 general elections, Nigerians and relevant institutions and stakeholders conduct themselves relatively well. The electoral defeat of the incumbent ruling party and the willingness of President Goodluck E. Jonathan to concede defeat without bitterness was an important milestone for Nigeria. The defeat of the PDP marked the first time that a ruling party will be remove from power through peaceful electoral process. The alternation of power that this peaceful change engendered represent the achievement of an important requirement (electoral turnover) for democratic consolidation in democratization literature. The electoral turnover was also significant because it was not restricted to the political executive as there also occurred parliamentary turnover given the simple

majority achieved by the APC in both houses of the national assembly. The turnover was significant given that it represents the first in Nigeria's fitful electoral history.

## **Conclusion**

The period between 2011 and 2015 was eventful in Nigeria especially as it relates to party politics, governance and the advancement of the nation's democratic process. In May 2011, a minority from the Niger Delta, Nigeria's oil producing region that have suffered marginalization in the scheme of power politics in Nigeria was sworn-in as the president of the republic after having won fairly at the poll. In January, 2012 Nigerians were unanimous and vocal in the expression of their rejection of the subsidy removal policy of President Jonathan and the ruling PDP. The rejection of the policy was massively aided by social media advocacy and youth inspire protest. In February, 2013 leading opposition parties commenced talks aim at crafting a formidable front against the ruling PDP in preparation for the 2015 general elections. The alliance talks was successful despite skepticism from all quarters that the coalition might not see the light of the day. The skepticism of Nigerians, and keen watchers of the nation political scene was informed by the nation's history of failed attempt at alliance formation.

Notwithstanding the doubts and obstacles, the merger process was a success. After the fruitful conclusion of their merger talks, the structures of the ACN, ANPP, CPC and faction of APGA that was part of the agreement were collapse. The collapse of the old parties gave rise to the emergence of the new opposition party, the All Progressive Congress, APC. While the PDP was embroiled in bitter internal bickering, the APC was able to maintain internal unity despite the fragility of its structure. The opposition APC was also successful in the performance of the role of opposition right after its formation and give Nigerians the semblance of a viable alternative. As the 2015 general elections approaches the APC strive to maintain its composure even in the face of provocations. At the exit of the poll, the APC came out victorious defeating the ruling party, the first time in Nigeria's electoral history. The defeat and the peaceful change of guard represent the first instance of electoral victory represent the first peaceful democratic alternation of power in Nigeria.

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