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The Party System and the Politics of Party Merger and Power Contestation in Africa: Insights from Nigeria

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Abstract

African democracy is still evolving since it began to take root over twenty years ago. There have been various forms of party fission and fusion in the quest for the acquisition of state power. Evidence suggests that party merger in Africa is driven by an entirely different set of logic from mainstream rationalizations that underpin mergers in developed democracies. A major drawback of merger politics in Africa is the lacuna of ideological barrenness, which drives the continued penchant of the political elite to

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switch parties based on self-aggrandizing permutations. This paper offers insights into the party system and the underpinning motivation for mergers in African politics, namely, that they are essentially motivated by self-interest and driven by rational political calculations aimed at the capture of state power to further prebendal intentions. Using Nigeria as a case study, this paper evaluates the party system and provides *raisons d'être* for existing mergers. It further contends that unless ideology is brought to the front seat of party formation and organization, merger politics will remain a shifting ground of ad hocism designed for the capture of state power, and for the advancement of narrow politico-economic interests of select political elites.

Keywords: Opposition politics, ideology, party merger, democracy, party switching, Nigeria, Africa.

Introduction

African countries emerged from the ashes of colonial rule in the late 1950s and 1960s with fledgling democratic system that had prospects of consolidation. However, in the immediate post-independence period, the democratic progress was not only halted but reversed as authoritarianism replaced democracy across the continent. Thus, at a point in the political evolution of Africa as a continent, almost every country was under one form of authoritarian and unaccountable government or another. The pervasiveness of military rule in Africa is underscored by the estimate that since the 1960s and up to the 1990s, not less than 200 successful and failed coups d'état were recorded.[1] The major reason often cited by the rampaging military putschists in Africa was the failure of leadership and corruption.[2] The failure of leadership in Africa, in itself, could be linked to the mismanagement of the party system that underpinned democracy. The collapse of the party system in the immediate post-independence period could be linked to the contradictions that were thrown

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[1]   Yomi Kazeem, "What is a Coup? These 40 African Countries could Help Explain," (November 6, 2017), accessed October 7, 2018, https://qz.com/africa/1130009/what-is-coup-zimbabwe-joins-40-african-countries-that-have-had-coups/; Issaka K. Souaré, "The African Union as a Norm Entrepreneur on Military Coups D'état in Africa (1952–2012): An Empirical Assessment," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 52, no. 1 (2014): 69-94, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X13000785.

[2]   Staffan Wiking, "Military Coups in Sub-Saharan Africa: How to Justify Illegal Assumption of Power," The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, 1983, accessed October 7, 2018, http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:278002/FULLTEXT01.pdf; George Klay Kieh and Pita Ogaba Agbese, *The Military and Politics in Africa: From Engagement to Democratic and Constitutional Control* (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2004).

up due to the tendency of elites to engage in exclusionary politics through one-party system.

However, the change in Africa's political topography manifesting in the trajectory from one-party and military rule to democratic governance started gradually in the late 1980s and the 1990s. Thus, by 1999, the number of countries that had embraced multi-party constitutions had risen from 9 to 45 with further progress recorded since then.[3] In essence, therefore, military and unaccountable regimes, in their strict sense, are a rarity in contemporary Africa. In the wake of the current democratic dispensation, political parties were formed and through their instrumentality candidates for various elective offices were selected, constituents and electorates were mobilized, elections were contested, won and lost and governing coalitions were formed to carry on the task of governance. Interestingly, despite decades of democratic governance in Africa, democratic credentials are still not up to the minimum international benchmarks in many respects, namely internal party democratic practices, working party ideology, interparty dialogue and collaboration, party funding and discipline, and free and fair elections devoid of vote buying.[4] Some major ingredients of democracy, such as periodic elections, platforms for electoral contests among candidates and parties, transparent political processes, and independent electoral umpire are at various levels of entrenchment. However, African political parties lack clear-cut ideological master plans which are capable of offering electorates credible alternatives. This has led many analysts to adjudge the contributions of Africa's political parties in terms of deepening democratic consolidation as disappointing.[5] It partly explains the retreat of democratic culture in the internal affairs of most political parties, the multiplicity of political parties and the electoral fraud and violence that characterized elections held in Africa.

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[3]   Alex Thomson, *An Introduction to African Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[4]   Nicolas van de Walle and Kimberly Smiddy Butler, "Political Parties and Party Systems in Africa's Illiberal Democracies," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 13, no. 1 (1999): 14-28, https://doi.org/10.1080/09557579908400269; Vicky Randall and Lars Svåsand, "Political Parties and Democratic Consolidation in Africa," *Democratization* 9, no. 3 (2002): 30-52, https://doi.org/10.1080/714000266; Shola J. Omotola, "Nigerian Parties and Political Ideology," *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences* 1, no. 3 (2009): 612-634; Okechukwu Ikeanyibe, "Internal Party Democracy, Party Candidature, and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic," *Politics & Policy* 42, no.5 (2014): 769-804, https://doi.org/10.1111/polp.12094; Stuti Khemani, "Buying Votes Versus Supplying Public Services: Political Incentives to Under-Invest in Pro-Poor Policies," *Journal of Development Economics* 117 (2015): 84-93, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2015.07.002; E. Kramon, "Where Is Vote Buying Effective? Evidence from a List Experiment in Kenya," *Electoral Studies* 44 (2016): 397–408, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2016.09.006.

[5]   Randall and Svåsand, "Political Parties and Democratic", 32.

The classic idea behind opposition politics is that opposition parties afford the electorates ready alternatives to the incumbent party in addition to serving as watchdogs and critics of the policies of the government, checking the activities of public officials and holding them politically accountable as a prelude to fulfilling their office-seeking expectations.[6] But opposition parties in Africa do not approximate to these ideal specifications in terms of their role in consolidating democracy bearing in mind that a critical condition for the consolidation of democracy is the institutionalization of parties and party systems.[7]

The seeming incapacity of political parties to win electoral contests in order to dislodge a dominant party provides the rationale for coalition-building in the form of merger of parties. In this paper, we conceptualize party merger in terms of consensual fusion or integration of one or more political parties to form a bigger and stronger political entity. The major drawbacks of party merger essentially consist of identity loss or, at the very least, the dilution of the ideological distinctiveness of merged parties and the importation of sociopolitical "baggages" into the merged union which could have a detrimental effect on efforts to institutionalize a new culture and organization that are undoubtedly expected to be part of the new party. Scholars have pointed out that party mergers are more frequent in new democracies than in established ones due to the differences in the levels of party system institutionalization.[8] This is true of Africa's democratic system, which is characterized by a seemingly endless pattern of party coalitions, splits and mergers.

By focusing on Nigeria, the article interrogates party system and party merger within the context of power contestation and their overall implication for the consolidation of democracy. Between 1999 and 2006, opposition politics was practically dead in Nigeria. Its resuscitation followed the merger of several parties that metamorphosed into the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) in 2006 and the subsequent merger arrangement in 2013 that led to the establishment of a mega party, the All Progressives Congress (APC). The whole essence of merger politics is to introduce necessary robustness in political contests within

6   Kaare Strøm and Wolfgang C. Muller, "Political Parties and Hard Choices," in *Policy, Office or Votes? How Political Parties in Western Europe Make Hard Decisions*, ed. W.C. Muller and K. Strøm (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1-35; Agnes Ngoma Leslie, "Zambia and China: Workers' Protest, Civil Society and the Role of Opposition Politics in Elevating State Engagement," *African Studies Quarterly* 16, nos. 3-4, (2016): 89-106.

7   Randall and Svåsand, "Political Parties and Democratic," 34; Michelle Kuenzi and Gina Lambright, "Party Systems and Democratic Consolidation in Africa's Electoral Regimes," *Party Politics*. 11, no. 4 (2005): 423–446, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068805053211.

8   Dafydd Fell, "Merger and Takeover Attempts in Taiwanese Party Politics," *Issues & Studies* 53, no. 4 (2017): 1750010, https://doi.org/10.1142/s1013251117500102; Nicole Bolleyer, Raimondas Ibenskas and Daniel Keith, "The Survival and Termination of Party Mergers in Europe," *European Journal of Political Research* 55, no. 3 (2016): 642–659, https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12143.

democratic settings. Thus, its logic is encapsulated in the quest to advance political development through a political "marriage of convenience" for a variety of reasons which could range from consolidating ideology, expanding membership base, controlling the executive or the legislature, dislodging a dominant party to winning power.[9] In examining the terrain of opposition and merger politics in Nigeria, this paper found that the motive for merger is incongruent with dominant rationale for it in established democratic settings elsewhere. The major thrust and preoccupation of merger in Africa and particularly Nigeria is to capture power which in itself is driven by the imperatives of prebendalism.[10]

Problematizing and Theorizing Party System and Opposition Politics in Africa

The critical role of political parties in the democratic process is based on the ensembles of roles they perform which range from bridging the gap between the state and the civil society, aggregating public interests, integrating and mobilizing the citizenry, socializing and recruiting political leaders to organizing governmental activities for party in power.[11] The theoretical explanation of party system and opposition politics in Africa must begin from an in-depth appreciation of the nature of party formation and its pivotal role in the capture of state power and attendant accumulation of wealth among the elites. Salih has posited that the factors that influenced the emergence and consolidation of African political parties varied immensely from the experience of Western political parties.[12] The differences are located in their histories and circumstances, especially the impact of colonialism. The truncation of democratic development in Africa, in the 1960s and subsequently, contributed immensely in fossilizing party system and opposition politics in Africa. However, the "third wave of democratization" rekindled democratic culture in

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[9] Raimondas Ibenskas, "Marriages of Convenience: Explaining Party Mergers in Europe," *The Journal of Politics* 78, no 2 (2016): 343–356.

[10] Prebendalism refers to the conversion of privileged positions into instruments of acquiring and dispensing benefits, especially from the state, see Richard Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Wale Adebanwi and Ebenezer Obadare (Eds.), *Democracy and Prebendalism in Nigeria: Critical Interpretations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[11] Kuenzi and Lambright, "Party Systems,"; Sebastian Elischer, *Political Parties in Africa: Ethnicity and Party Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[12] M. A. Mohamed Salih, "Introduction: The Evolution of African Political Parties," in *African Political Parties: Evolution, Institutionalisation and Governance,* ed. M. A. Mohamed Salih (London: Pluto Press, 2003), 1-33.

the continent. The value of democracy over authoritarianism is that the affairs of the state are conducted in ways compatible with the interests and wishes of the people.[13]

The major challenge that democracy encountered in Africa was the transmutation of authoritarian regimes into democratic government which created artificial democratic structures. What these erstwhile authoritarian regimes did was to reconfigure their governance structure to accommodate certain key democratic ideals with implication for party system and opposition politics. Helgesen has noted that "strong and sustainable democracy is dependent on the existence of well-functioning political parties. … [as they are] crucial actors in bringing together diverse interests, recruiting and presenting candidates, and developing competing policy proposals that provide people with a choice."[14] Political parties are also relevant in nondemocratic political settings. As Salih has pointed out, "in competitive systems, parties are organized by politicians to win elections; in authoritarian systems, parties are organized to affect the attitudes and behavior of the population."[15]

Party formation in Africa has always been influenced by such factors as ethno-religious permutations, the cult of personalities and the overt or covert support of those in power at the period. Political parties in Africa metamorphosed from ethno-cultural groups and so, from their formation, they set boundaries on their aims and objectives, which were tailored to satisfy parochial, ethno-regional interests.[16] With a narrow mindset, in terms of goals and basis for solidarity, a majority of political parties in Africa lack national character to be able to offer valid alternatives. And yet, political parties are the dominant components of Africa's democracy and core platforms for electoral contests owing to the near absence of independent candidacy. In other words, in most African countries, the political parties are the only platforms through which aspiring candidates can compete for elective public offices.[17] Thus, there has been a constant need for party mergers to create a semblance of national party structure that can win elections across ethnic boundaries. This scenario has also thrown up weak and pseudo-opposition structures in most African political systems.

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[13]   Mathurin C Houngnikpo, *Africa's Elusive Quest for Development.* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

[14]   Vidar Helgesen, "Preface," in *Political Parties in West Africa: The Challenge of Democratization in Fragile States,* ed. Said Adejumobi (Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2007), accessed June 30, 2018, https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/political-parties-in-west-africa-challenge-of-democractization-in-fragile-states.pdf.

[15]   Salih, "Introduction," 3.

[16]   Ibid., 3.

[17]   Adejumobi, *Political Parties in West Africa,* 44.

Essentially, opposition politics is a fundamental attribute of democracy, although it could also be present in nondemocratic settings. Liberal-democratic theories recognize and assign certain roles to opposition politics such as serving in the interval between one election and the next as the formal, institutionalized watchdog to keep the ruling party in check and provide the electorates with choices, politically, ideologically and policy-wise.[18] In the context of liberal democratic theories, opposition politics bestows dynamism on democracy through the conferment of rights on "political and social actors to publicly criticize and challenge the government, its actions, and policies."[19] In other words, opposition politics constitutes a mechanism through which political actors jostle for state power as well as attempt to displace the incumbent government on account of its shortcomings.[20]

The essential characteristic of opposition politics is that it is the continuation of struggle for power between dominant and peripheral political parties after the conclusion and formation of a government. In other words, political parties which lost an election but mustered a reasonable percentage of popular votes and seats in the national legislature drive opposition politics. The whole idea of opposition politics is for political parties to engage in post-election activities, such as criticizing government policies and proffering alternative routes to good governance.[21] Thus, the vehicle that drives opposition politics is the political party and interfaced by the people. As a matter of fact, opposition politics confers the title of government-in-waiting on the party that has the next majority. But, the relevance and robustness of opposition politics is measured by how proactive it is in evolving counter-policy alternatives to address the shortcomings of government policies.

Our theory of coalition politics builds on the premise that the multiplicity of political parties in Africa's political arena and their relative incapacity to provide real competition to the ruling parties or offer credible alternative to the electorates led to mergers. Coalition building entails cooperative arrangements based on payoffs. The nature of payoffs could be the achievement of economies of scale or the reduction of uncertainty in electoral outcomes, both of which are

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[18] Adebayo Olukoshi, "Economic Crisis, Multipartyism and Opposition Politics in Contemporary Africa," in *The Politics of Opposition in Contemporary Africa,* ed. Adebayo O. Olukoshi (Stockholm: Elanders Gotab, 1998), 8-38; Eva Kolinsky, "Introduction", in *Opposition in Western Europe*, ed. Eva Kolinsky (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 1-7.

[19] Nathalie Brack and Sharon Weinblum, "'Political Opposition': Towards a Renewed Research Agenda," *Interdisciplinary Political Studies* 1.1, no. 1 (2011): 69, accessed October 17, 2018. http://siba-ese.unisalento.it/index.php/idps/article/download/ 17257/14767.

[20] Ludger Helms, "Studying Parliamentary Opposition in Old and New Democracies: Issues and Perspectives," *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 14, no. 1 (2008): 6-19.

[21] Ian Shapiro, *The State of Democratic Theory.* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

geared towards winning state power.[22] Several scholars have made important contributions to the development of coalition theories with regard to political competition and governance.[23] However, in addition to the parameters identified by Gamson as motorizing coalition such as the initial distribution of resources, payoffs or rewards, non-utilitarian preferences and effective decision point; and the bargaining parameter identified by Lupia and Strom, the environment and the nature of the state play a significant role in determining the nature of coalition.[24]

Although coalition building is dependent on the commonality of choices among opposition parties,[25] however, the interests of the leaderships of these parties determine the nature and trajectory of such coalitions. This is so because many of the opposition parties are essentially launched as vehicles for key individuals to win state power.[26] African opposition political parties are in this category. It must be appropriate to point out that democracy in Africa is not exactly as it is in developed countries where democratic governance has been in place for centuries. While developed democracies are anchored in institutionalized political pluralism, the African variant, although possessing the attributes of multipartyism, is akin to political monopoly. Certain environmental, socio-cultural and economic factors have interfered with, and dictated a modification of the ideal democratic tenets in the African political setting. These modifications make it difficult for the opposition groups to play the role assigned by liberal democratic theories.

There is also the "people angle" to opposition politics. The theoretical inference that may be drawn from the tenets of liberal democracy is the inevitability of the people in the emergence, institutionalization and consolidation of opposition politics. However, in Africa, low literacy level and pervasive poverty tend to blind the people to the relevance of opposition politics. Opposition politics thrives where a large percentage of the populace is aware of issues at stake. This knowledge enables them to make sense of the various ideological positions and policy preferences. An aspect of the "people angle" is the cynical perception among the people that all politicians are the same and therefore not capable of presenting real alternatives.

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[22] Heemin Kim, "Rational Choice Theory and Third World Politics: The 1990 Party Merger in Korea," *Comparative Politics* 30, no. 1 (1997): 83-100; Amrita Dhillon, "Political Parties and Coalition Formation," 2003, accessed June 30, 2018, http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/economics/staff/academic/dhillo n/publications/bookchapter1.pdf.

[23] William A. Gamson, "A Theory of Coalition Formation," *American Sociological Review* 26, no. 3 (1961): 373-382.

[24] Gamson, "A Theory"; Arthur Lupia and Kaare Strom, "Coalition Termination and the Strategic Timing of Parliamentary Elections," *American Political Science Review* 89, no. 3 (1995): 648–665, https://doi.org/10.2307/2082980.

[25] Francesco Cavatorta, "'Divided they Stand, Divided they fail': Opposition Politics in Morocco," *Democratization* 16, no. 1 (2009): 137-156.

[26] Olukoshi, "Economic Crisis, Multipartyism," 30.

The implication of this is the nonchalance of the electorates to party system as well as the prevalence of vote buying. Both of these dispositions, especially vote-buying, have undermined the relevance of opposition politics considering the influence of money in the face of poverty. Vote buying is all about the direct exchange of electoral support for rewards and material goods between voters and political patrons at the level of the individual or small group.[27] Jensen and Justesen have noted that the widespread poverty in Africa makes this exchange through vote-buying a more common political strategy during elections.[28] Thus, the prominence of vote buying in electioneering has redefined politics by creating a detrimental patronage system that undermines the freewill of the populace in making electoral choices, as well as vitiates the entrenchment of democratic tenets, and allows the perpetuation of pseudo-dictators and unaccountable leaders.[29]

In Nigeria, the distribution of material resources across the broad spectra of class formations has engendered indifference in the political behavior and electoral disposition of the people towards opposition politics generally.[30] The extreme fragmentation and fractionalization of the opposition has tended to weaken it. For instance, shortly before the 2003 general elections, there were 30 political parties. This number increased to 50 in 2007. As at the period of the 2011 general elections, there were 63 political parties, which were mutants of both the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and other major opposition parties. Expectedly, most of them failed to win any seat into either subnational or national legislatures since their registration by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).[31] Notwithstanding the merger arrangement that produced the APC and deregistration of some 31 political parties in 2012,[32] the

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[27] Simeon Nichter, "Conceptualizing Vote Buying," *Electoral Studies* 35 (2014): 315–327, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2014.02.008.

[28] Peter S. Jensen and Mogens K. Justesen, "Poverty and Vote Buying: Survey-based Evidence from Africa," *Electoral Studies*, 33 (2014): 220–232, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2013.07.020.

[29] Susan C. Stokes, "Political Clientelism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science*, ed. Robert E. Goodin 2013, accessed June 30, 2018, http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199604456.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199604456-e-031; Nichter, "Conceptualizing Vote Buying," 316-317.

[30] Michael Bratton, "Vote Buying and Violence in Nigerian Election Campaigns," *Electoral Studies* 27, no. 4 (2008): 621–632, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2008.04.013.

[31] Aduku A. Akubo and Adejo Umoru Yakubu, "Political Parties and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic," *Global Journal of Political Science and Administration* 2, no. 3 (2014): 79-108.

[32] Joseph Erunke, "INEC de-registers three more parties," *Vanguard,* December 22, 2012, accessed June 30, 2018, https://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/12/inec-de-registers-three-more-parties/.

current number of political parties in Nigeria is 91[33]. Thus, despite the anecdotal evidence that the masses were disenchanted with both the APC and PDP, and the obvious need for a "third political force" in Nigeria, the political elite could not broker a political coalition for the 2019 general elections. Thus, a total of 91 parties presented candidates for various positions across the country.

Interrogating the Party System in Africa:
Issues and Challenges

The contemporary democratic renaissance in Africa started in the 1990s when democracy was adopted on the continent. As Thomson observes, "from Tunisia to Mozambique, from Mauritania to Madagascar, government after government was forced to compete in multi-party elections against new or revitalized opposition movements."[34] Prior to this period, much of Africa was either under one-party regimes or the jackboots of authoritarian and unaccountable government. This was an aberration as African countries had started their independent national life with the apparatuses of democratic governance. However, these democratic institutions were soon dismantled and replaced with various forms of authoritarian regimes. Thus, party systems had existed in Africa prior to the new wave of democratization that swept across the continent in the 1990s.[35]

However, the third wave's expansion of democracy in Africa threw up new parties and different types of party systems with their own characteristics and consequences.[36] At the initial period, the retreating authoritarian regimes imposed political parties that won the first set of elections. The nature and characteristics of these parties included the lack of institutionalization, personalistic politics and internal factionalism.[37]

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[33] Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), "Political Parties," accessed June 30, 2018, https://www.inecnigeria.org/political-parties/.
[34] Thomson, *An Introduction to African Politics*, 228.
[35] Giovanni M. Carbone, "Political Parties and Party Systems in Africa: Themes and Research Perspectives," *World Political Science Review* 3, issue 3 (2007): 1-29.
[36] Renske Doorenspleet, "Political Parties, Party Systems and Democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa," in *African Political Parties: Evolution, Institutionalisation and Governance,* ed. M. A. Mohamed Salih (London: Pluto Press, 2003), 169-187.
[37] Oda van Craneburgh, "Power and Competition: The Institutional Context of African Multi- Party Politics," in *African Political Parties: Evolution, Institutionalisation and Governance,* ed. M. A. Mohamed Salih (London: Pluto Press, 2003), 188-206.

Table 1: The Nature of Political Regimes in Africa as at 1989

Authoritarian Regimes			Pluralist Regimes	
Military Regimes	**One-Party Regimes**	**Monarchies**	**Inclusive Multipartyism**	**Racial Oligarchies**
Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Ghana, Guinea, Lesotho, Liberia, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Sudan, Uganda	Algeria, Angola, Benin, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Comoros, Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Rwanda, São Tomé and Principe, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Tanzania, Togo, Zaire, Zambia	Morocco, Swaziland	Botswana, Egypt, Liberia, Mauritius, Senegal, Sudan, The Gambia, Tunisia, Zimbabwe,	South Africa, Namibia
N = 12	N = 28	N=2	N = 9	N = 2

Source: Alex Thomson, *An Introduction to African*, Giovanni M. Carbone, "Political Parties."

Since the early attempts at democratization, there has been some progress as several African countries have experienced some levels of democratic turnover with more or less an institutionalized party system.[38] According to Thomson, "more than 140 multi-party elections were held in the last decade of the twentieth century (compared with less than 70 competitive polls held in the three decades prior to this."[39] But this does not suggest that party system akin to what is obtainable in established liberal democracies has taken root. African political terrain is still characterized by inchoate party system where political affiliations are in constant flux, new political parties are constantly emerging and electoral contests are highly volatile.[40] In other words, the institutionalization of the party system in Africa is low with serious repercussions on key elements of democracy such as participation, representation, accountability and contestation.

The underlying basis for the low level of party system institutionalization can be located in the undifferentiated nature of the parties based on what van de

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[38] Rachel Beatty Riedl, *Authoritarian Origins of Democratic Party Systems in Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[39] Thomson, *An Introduction to African Politics*, 236.

[40] Noam Lupu and Rachel Beatty Riedl, "Political Parties and Uncertainty in Developing Democracies," *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no. 11 (2012): 1339–1365. DOI:10.1177/0010414012453445.

Walle has called "programmatic homogeneity"[41] in the manifestoes of various political parties. Thus, all the political parties tend to have the same set of programs with no basis for ideological uniqueness. This lack of ideological uniqueness makes parties to be less reliant on programmatic appeals as basis for voter mobilization. Across Africa, ideology, as a component of political mobilization strategies, appears to be in short supply in party systems and politics.[42]

Like most concepts in the arena of politics, ideology has both negative and positive attributes, mainly because of the competing epistemological and methodological disputations.[43] But in the various strands of the conceptualization of ideology, several areas of synergy or agreement are discernible. The specific attributes of ideology include beliefs, values, and ideals arising from or connected to the facts and incidences of life. These attributes are closely fused into a system that forms the basis for a social, economic or political philosophy, which ultimately stipulates, reconciles, arranges and harmonizes values and thus shapes the way a person or group thinks, acts, and understands the world.[44]

Ideology, as a social construct, is the organizing principle that binds like-minded individuals together in a group or groups for the pursuit of a common goal. It is not just the pursuit of goals that determines ideology; values and norms also play significant roles. It is values and norms that will ensure consistency in the strategies to be adopted in the pursuit of specified goals. Essentially, within the realms of party politicking, ideology performs three essential roles: it serves as a cognitive goggle for looking at society holistically; a template for fixing the developmental shortcomings of the society; and, a tool for managing conflicts, mobilizing electoral support, and legitimizing the quest for power.[45] The centrality of ideology as a driving force of politics led Nnoli to assert, "there can be no politics without ideology, and no ideology without politics."[46]

The problem of ideology in African politics is linked to the nature of its political evolution and the influence of such forces as ethnicity, class alliances and the forces of one-party system. Political party engineering into multi-

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[41] Nicolas van de Walle, "Presidentialism and Clientelism in Africa's Emerging Party Systems," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 41, no. 2, (2003): 304.

[42] Karen E. Ferree, "The Social Origins of Electoral Volatility in Africa," *British Journal of Political Science* 40, no. 4 (2010): 759–779, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0007123410000244.

[43] John Gerring, "Ideology: A Definitional Analysis," *Political Research Quarterly* 50, no. 4 (1997): 957-999; Michael W. Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum* (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004).

[44] John T. Jost, Christopher M. Federico and Jaime L. Napier, "Political Ideology: Its Structure, Functions, and Elective Affinities," *The Annual Review of Psychology* 60 (2009): 307–337.

[45] Omotola, "Nigerian Parties and Political Ideology," 614.

[46] Okwudiba Nnoli, *Introduction to Politics* (Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd, 2003), 177.

partyism was crafted through four major paths, namely, the broadening of the political space by reconfiguring former single parties that had dominated political life in many countries prior to the new era of democratization as in Angola, Cameroun, Zimbabwe; formation of new parties by politicians and technocrats who had already achieved public figure status like in Nigeria, Uganda, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya; establishment of new parties by civil society organizations and networks in countries like Ghana, Zambia, Zimbabwe; and conversion of liberation and guerrilla movements to political platforms including their pacifist integration into constitutional framework for involvement in governance as in Ethiopia, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa, Liberia.[47]

Since the democratic wave that birthed the present dispensation, most African countries dispensed with one-party system and embraced multi-party politics. Multi-partyism, which ought to have provided a platform for the robust thriving of ideologies, both in terms of idealistic appeal and as a basis for mass mobilization, became trapped in programmatic identicalness.

The Nigerian Context: the Party System and the Path to Re-Democratization

Both external and internal factors made re-democratization possible in Nigeria. Such external factors like the end of the Cold War, agreements among state elites, civil society and international agencies to embrace political pluralism, global support for democracy and the unpopularity of unaccountable government across the world motorized democratic rebirth. While recognizing the overarching impacts of the foregoing external factors, our attention will be centered on the internal dynamics that engendered re-democratization in Nigeria. Opposition to military rule was championed and sustained by alienated elites, civil society activists and various segments of the Nigerian masses. This opposition initially resulted in the political transition program and the presidential election of June 12, 1993 and later, the transition program that birthed the present democratic dispensation. The annulment of the 1993 presidential election by the military regime of Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993) and subsequent human rights abuses orchestrated by the military regime of Sani Abacha (1993-1998) catalyzed national and international coalitions for democracy. The death of Abacha and the emergence of Abdulsalami Abubakar as military head of state facilitated the re-democratization process.

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[47] Carbone, "Political Parties," 4-5; Raymond Suttner, "Democratic Transition and Consolidation in South Africa: The Advice of 'the Experts'," *Current Sociology* 52, no. 5 (2004): 755–773, https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392104045367.

The annulment of the 1993 presidential election led to the formalization of the institution of resistance through the instrumentality of civil society groups, especially the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) and ethnic militias, such as the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) and various militant groups in the Niger Delta.[48] However, it was the death of Abacha and Abiola in 1998 and the emergence of a group of 34 eminent Nigerians called G-34 that opened a new political chapter that ushered in the current democratic dispensation. Although it might seem that G-34 was motivated by the need to save Nigeria from dictatorship, it was really motivated by the political ambitions of its membership.[49] The motive of G34 was in line with Cavatorta's observation that opposition groups would force the incumbent for the purpose of opening up the political system for the realization of their political ambitions.[50] In terms of ideological leaning, the membership of this group was eclectic. In other words, the group was a constellation of men of different ideological persuasions.

The various frontline pro- and anti-military rule groups, including the G-34, People's Democratic Movement (PDM), NADECO, and ethno-national groups transformed into political parties and formed the nucleus of what later came to be known as the People's Democratic Party (PDP), All Peoples Party (later changed to All Nigerian Peoples Party and fused into the All Progressives Congress) and Alliance for Democracy (AD).[51] The lack of a sound ideological base in these parties haunted them but had more devastating impact on AD. A faction of AD later transformed to Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) and to the mega-coalition, the All Progressive Congress (APC).

Challenging the Constellation: The Politics of Merger and the New Spirit of Opposition

Early attempts at governments of coalition and accord

Party formation and consolidation in Nigeria have always relied on the twin-primordialism of ethno-cultural affinities and class alliances. Scholars

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[48] Abdul Raufu Mustapha, "Civil Rights and Pro-Democracy Groups in and Outside Nigeria," in *Nigeria during the Abacha Years (1993-1998): The Domestic and International Politics of Democratization*, eds. Kunle Amuwo, Daniel C. Bach and Yann Lebeau (Ibadan: Institut Français de Recherche en Afrique (IFRA), 2001), 145-183.

[49] Alex Ekwueme, "What Nigeria Lost by Abacha's Untimely Death - Well-thought out Provisions of the 1995 Constitution," 2005, accessed June 30, 2018, http://www.dawodu.com/ekwueme1.htm; Sebastian Elischer, "Do African Parties Contribute to Democracy? Some Findings from Kenya, Ghana and Nigeria," *Afrika Spectrum*. 43, no 2 (2008): 175-201.

[50] Cavatorta, "'Divided they Stand, Divided they fail'," 137-156.

[51] Elischer, "Do African Parties Contribute to Democracy," 193.

have observed that ethnicity, as a defining characteristic of Nigeria's social structure, has always played very crucial role in the origins and developmental trajectory of political parties.[52] Thus, the Nigerian political arena, from the parliamentary system of the first republic, to the presidential system of second to fourth republics is plagued with various forms of attempts by the elite to forge a united political force. The Nigerian political lexicon is filled with such concepts as pact, alliance, accord, coalition and merger, all of which depict collaborative attempts by the elites to share state power. These attempts had taken three forms: collaboration towards forming a government; pooling political resources to share governmental positions; and coming together to dislodge the party in power.

In the first republic's parliamentary system (1960-1966), there was a coalition government between the Northern People's Congress (NPC) and the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC). With the collapse of the coalition arrangement due to inter-regional rivalry and disagreement over the 1962 census figures, the election of 1965 was marred by electoral irregularities following desperate attempts to control the federal government through alliances and coalitions.[53] However, the coalition party, Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) of Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, was asked by the President, Nnamdi Azikiwe to form a government that was broad-based and national in character.[54]

In the second republic (1979-1983) Nigeria adopted a presidential system of government. The ethnic and class character of parties made it difficult for any of the then five major political parties to have clear majority in the National Assembly. Thus, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) and the Nigerian People's Party (NPP) reached an accord. The whole essence of the accord was for both parties to team up in controlling the National Assembly. The accord made it possible for NPN with its 36 out of 95 senatorial seats to produce the senate president and the NPP with its 16 senatorial seats, the deputy senate president. Also, in the House of Representatives, the NPP produced the speaker and the NPN, deputy speaker despite the fact that these parties controlled 17.4% and 37.8% of House seats respectively.[55] In the run-up to the 1983 general elections, the accord broke down leading to a realignment of political forces and political desperation that ultimately led to the demise of democracy in Nigeria until

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[52] Ukoha Ukiwo, "Politics, Ethno-Religious Conflicts and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 41, no. 1, (2003): 115–138; Adele L Jinadu, "Inter-party Dialogue in Nigeria: Examining the Past, Present and Future". Lead paper at the Inaugural DGD Political Parties Dialogue Series held at Bolingo Hotel, Abuja on October 4, 2011, accessed May 10, 2018, http://nairametrics.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/INTER-PARTY-DIALOGUE-IN-NIG.pdf.

[53] James O. Ojiako, *Nigeria: Yesterday, Today, and ...?* (Onitsha: Africana Educational Publishers Ltd, 1981).

[54] Ibid.

[55] Toyin Falola, *History of Nigeria* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999).

1999. The major reason that appeared to have motivated various political parties, in both the first and second republics, to attempt a coalition was the desire to win and share power rather than pursue people-oriented and developmental policies and programs.

What normally makes opposition parties to thrive is the existence of contradictions in the polity. It is often said that nobody changes a winning team. But, with poverty deepening progressively and insecurity bedeviling the country and reversing all socio-economic parameters since 1999, one would have expected a political revolution. But no such revolution took place in 2003, 2007 and 2011 when Nigerians went to the polls. In established democracies, there is an entrenched political activism that is people-driven. Contrariwise, political activism in Nigeria is elite-driven rather than mass-driven. Thus, the speculation of some analysts that the contradictions in the country ought to have had catalytic effect in redefining opposition politics tended to display limited understanding of the elite-driven and prebendal nature of Nigeria's political setting.[56]

Opposition politics and party merger

Since the take-off of Nigeria's fourth republic, opposition parties had made three major attempts at coalition. The first was the AD/APP alliance for the 1999 election; the second was the merger of several parties that metamorphosed into Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) in 2006 and the last was the merger that produced the APC in 2013. At the inception of the fourth republic, the first three political parties, by virtue of their electoral performance in the first set of elections, were the PDP, APP (later renamed ANPP), and AD. While the PDP recorded well-spread electoral fortune across Nigeria's geopolitical zones, the APP and AD were dominant in designated geopolitical zones, namely the north and southwest respectively. The similarity in their pattern of geopolitical dominance informed their eventual pact to present a joint candidate in the 1999 presidential election. That pact was aimed at pooling their strengths together to outperform the PDP.

The context of the APP/AD political pact could not be categorized as opposition alliance because in 1999 when the first general elections were

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[56] Abdulkadir Balarabe Musa, "Effective Opposition as an Antidote against Abuse of Power by the Executive in Nigeria," A Paper Delivered at the International Conference On Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects Organised by the Foundation for Good Governance and Development in Nigeria Held at Imperial College, London, South Kessington Campus on Saturday 25th, June 2005, accessed May 10, 2018, http://www.fggn.org/Conference/BalarabesPaper.pdf; Aborisade Olasunkanmi, "Opposition Politics in Nigeria: A Study of South West." *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, 10, No. 4 (2013): 154-158.

conducted, there was no dominant party per se. Unfortunately, the lessons of that alliance, which would have guided a more robust opposition politics, were not consolidated. It was sacrificed on the altar of ethnic rivalry and mistrust as both the ANPP and AD maintained a hardline stance of fielding presidential candidates from their respective geopolitical strongholds in subsequent elections.

The second attempt at coalition was in 2006 when the Alliance for Democracy, the Justice Party, the Advanced Congress of Democrats, and some other small parties merged and transformed into Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN). The central idea that seemed to have motivated the merger was to rekindle the dying embers of opposition politics in Nigeria. At that time, it seemed as if the PDP was on a deliberate political mission to transform the country into a one-party state. For instance, in the 2003 general elections, the PDP depleted the political fortunes of the ANPP and AD in both gubernatorial and National Assembly elections. It secured more than a quarter of the votes in 32 of the 36 states in the presidential election and particularly took over the South-west zone that was hitherto controlled by the AD by winning five of the six gubernatorial positions; 11 of the 16 senatorial seats and 38 of the 60 House of Representatives' seats.[57]

The 2006 merger that produced the ACN rekindled the fire of opposition politics with the objective being to take over the federal government. In pursuit of this objective, the ACN fielded the former Vice President of Nigeria, Atiku Abubakar as its presidential candidate for the 2007 presidential election. Although Atiku did not win the presidency, the party recorded success in the National Assembly elections in the South West with 6 Senatorial seats and 31 House of Representatives seats.

The regional pattern of ACN's victory in the 2007 general elections made the cultivation of alliances imperative if it must generate the kind of national muscle required to dislodge the PDP from power. Thus, for the 2011 elections, the ACN opened merger talks with the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC). The CPC was a splinter group from the ANPP whose emergence was due to irreconcilable elite differences. Unfortunately, the alliance did not materialize due to the unwillingness of the leaders of both parties to subsume their personal ambitions under more urgent national goals of creating robust opposition

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[57] Carl LeVan, Titi Pitso and Bodunrin Adebo, "Elections in Nigeria: Is the Third Time a Charm?," *Journal of African Elections* 2, no. 2 (2003): 30- 47; Jibrin Ibrahim and Idayat Hassan, "Nigerian Political Parties: From Failed Opposition Electoral Alliance to Merger: The March Towards the 2015 General Elections," 2014, accessed May 10, 2018, http://africanelections.org/Userfile/Nigeria%20Pol%20Parties%2002%281%29.pdf.

platform at the very least.[58] With six governorship positions, 17 Senatorial seats, and 67 House of Representatives seats after the 2011 general elections, the ACN became the face of opposition.

Although the ACN was visible in the public consciousness since its merger due to its improved electoral fortunes and quick reaction to the contradictions of governance in the country, its political capacity to overthrow the PDP, electorally, was inadequate, thus raising the issue of broad-based merger. The strong showing of the CPC in the 2011 presidential election, where it polled 31.98% of the votes cast as against PDP's 58.89%, ACN's 5.41% and ANPP's 2.40%, put it in a strong position politically.[59] Another political advantage of the CPC was that its strength lay in the Northern states and it used it to neutralize the influence of the PDP there. The PDP managed to win the required 25% in most of the 16 main northern states.

Preparatory to the 2015 general elections, five opposition political parties, namely ACN, CPC, ANPP, a splinter of the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) and the Democratic People's Party (DPP) engaged in merger talks, which they concluded in July 2013. This represented the most ambitious party merger since Nigeria's independence and democratic experience. The merger produced a new opposition party called the All Progressives Congress (APC). The APC is interesting in several respects: firstly, the same set of political elites who had attempted, unsuccessfully, to pool their strength together in previous elections were behind it. Secondly, the new party was able to share party positions among the constituent parties successfully. This aspect had constituted the biggest challenge to merged parties in the past. Thirdly, the APC attracted PDP state governors and members of both chambers of the National Assembly, thus diminishing PDP's majority status in the National Assembly. A total of five PDP state governors, 11 senators and 37 members of the House of Representatives defected to APC to swell its membership, especially in the National Assembly.[60] The creation of APC resuscitated the prospects of opposition politics and rekindled hopes of real political choices in the Nigerian polity.

Alliances and mergers in Nigerian politics have always been a thorny issue and often pitted the elites against themselves. In the country's first and

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[58] Chioma Gabriel, "How Personal Ambition Ruined ACN/CPC Planned Alliance," *Vanguard,* February 26, 2011, accessed May 10, 2018, https://www.vanguardngr.com/2011/02/how-personal-ambition-ruined-acncpc-planned-alliance/.

[59] Agaptus Nwozor and Segun Oshewolo, "Election Governance and Consolidation in Nigeria: An Assessment of the 2011 and 2015 Presidential Elections," *University of Uyo Journal of Humanities* 21, no. 2 (2017): 387-410.

[60] Festus Owete, "Nigeria: Why 11 PDP Senators Defected to APC, Five More May Defect," *Premium Times,* January 29, 2014, accessed May 10, 2018, http://allafrica.com/stories/201401291736.html; Nwozor and Oshewolo, "Election Governance and Consolidation," 403.

second republics, alliances were not deepened enough for them to be institutionalized. Thus, they failed to provide credible alternatives to unseat the incumbents or add buoyancy to opposition politics. Generally, the undoing of such alliances consisted mainly of intra-and inter-elite squabbles about the sharing formula for party and other positions. This was the undoing of the proposed alliance between the ACN and ANPP and another between ACN and CPC in the period before the 2011 general elections. For instance, in a letter dated 28 January 2011, which suspended merger talks between ACN and CPC, the then Chairman of the ACN, Bisi Akande accused the CPC of not demonstrating "sufficient seriousness and political will to forge a workable electoral cooperation."[61] Another factor that undermined earlier attempts at mergers and alliances was the impatience of the elites in taking over power. Once the electoral attempt to take over power failed, the entire edifice of opposition crumbled with many of the elite running back to the winning party for re-assimilation. This lack of ideological fixity accords with the prebendal nature of Nigerian politics.[62]

Since the 2015 general elections, the Nigerian polity has been in a state of flux with defections from and to both the APC and PDP. Apart from the burgeoning mass disenchantment with the Buhari administration due to non-delivery on his campaign promises, four recent events appear to signpost a litmus test for the continued electoral dominance of APC, namely the plan by some 19 small parties to merge into a "third force", defection of Atiku Abubakar from APC to PDP, and a letter written by Olusegun Obasanjo to President Muhammadu Buhari which advised him not seek a re-election in 2019 and also called on well-meaning Nigerians to form a coalition movement to redeem the country as APC had demonstrated incapacity to undertake the task of fruitful governance. As he put it, "we need a Coalition for Nigeria, CN. Such a Movement at this juncture needs not be a political party… [but] a coalition for democracy, good governance, social and economic well-being and progress. [A] coalition to salvage and redeem our country."[63] The fourth is the mass defection from APC by some governors and incumbent members of the National Assembly.

Nigeria's socio-economic condition has witnessed tremendous deterioration since 2015. At inception, President Muhammadu Buhari clearly set his major agenda as fighting corruption, solving Nigeria's security

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[61] Sahara Reporters, *"Why ACN/CPC Merger Talks Failed -Bisi Akande,"* 2 February, 2011, accessed June 30, 2018, http://saharareporters.com/news-page/why-acncpc-merger-talks-failed-bisi-akande.

[62] Olukoshi, "Economic Crisis, Multipartyism," 31.

[63] Olusegun Obasanjo, "Obasanjo's Letter to Buhari: The Way Out: A Clarion Call for Coalition for Nigeria Movement," January 24, 2018, accessed May 30, 2018, http://punchng.com/full-letter-obasanjo-writes-buhari-asks-president-to-halt-2019-ambition/.

challenges, tackling unemployment, diversifying the economy, boosting the living standards of Nigerians and rolling back poverty.[64] Undoubtedly, Nigeria's declining macroeconomic fundamentals in terms of inflation and depreciated currency have eroded people's purchasing power and translated into general hardship for them. According to an overview on the Nigerian economy by the African Economic Outlook, the inflation rate rose from 9.1% in 2015 to 15.7% on average in 2016 coupled with recession and massive decline in the manufacturing sector, all of which led to "an estimated 272 firms shutting down and industrial capacity utilisation dropping significantly from 51.4% in 2015 to 35.4% in 2016."[65]

It is against the foregoing backdrop of economic hardships in Nigeria that opposition to APC is being mobilized. For instance, the preliminary discussions among small political parties to merge into a mega party as a "third force" were dictated by the seeming failure of APC. In the same vein, Atiku Abubakar's reason for decamping from APC was due to the inability of the party to manage elite expectations and those of the masses. Instructively, his key grouse was the nepotic and clannish bent of the Buhari administration and the alienation of the elites from the other groups that merged to form the party.[66]

Another critical event threatening the root of the APC was the letter written by Obasanjo in January 2018. Apart from drawing attention to the many shortcomings of the APC government such as failure to deliver on its promises, its clannish and nepotistic inclinations, lack of political will to deal with the menace of herdsmen and the prevalence of hopelessness, hunger, and despair, Obasanjo advised Buhari not to run for a re-election in 2019.[67] Of course, it would take more than a letter to dissuade Buhari and his key supporters not to contest the 2019 presidential election.

The recent trend in Nigerian polity points to the consolidation of two dominant parties. Despite the widespread belief that neither PDP nor APC could rescue Nigeria and the mainstream thinking that a third political force is required to give Nigerian electorates an array of choices, marginalized incumbent political elite have not seriously embraced new merger talks. As a

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[64] Manji Cheto, "The Buhari Administration at Two: Nigeria under the APC," *The Republic,* April 16, 2017, accessed May 25, 2018, https://www.republic.com.ng/aprilmay-2017/buhari-administration-two/.

[65] African Development Bank, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, UnitedNations Development Programme, *African Economic Outlook 2017,* (2017), accessed June 30, 2018, https://www.undp.org/content/dam/rba/docs/Reports/African_Economic_Outlook_2017_EN.pdf, 282.

[66] Niyi Odebode and John Alechenu, "Atiku's Exit: Panic in APC as Mass Defection Looms," *Punch,* November 25, 2017, accessed June 15, 2018, http://punchng.com/atikus-exit-panic-in-apc-as-mass-defection-looms/.

[67] Obasanjo, "Obasanjo's Letter to Buhari", n.p.

matter of fact, a recently formed party, People's Trust (PT), which is showcased as a mega party cannot be regarded as a product of merger. The new party is made up of various groups that were, hitherto, not politically inclined. As Naseer Kura, the National Secretary of PT, asserts, "we are progressing towards gradual transformation; from a social movement to a political movement that might metamorphose into a political merger."[68] According to INEC sources, there are 91 registered political parties including People's Trust.

The multiplicity of parties in Nigeria implies that its polity is still characterized by a divided opposition. This way, it becomes impossible to pool resources together to displace the incumbent. The Nigerian political arena is still replete with ambitious politicians creating their own political parties to advance their personal political agenda. Democracy is not only measured by the quantity of competitors alone but also by their quality as well as the alternative policy choices and leadership options they present to the electorate. The current spate of party switching is what may be regarded as "big man decampment" which indicates that rather than political parties being channels of leadership recruitment, they serve as platforms for the pursuit of the ambitions of political elites.[69]

In recent times, almost the same set of politicians that decamped from PDP in 2013 to help form APC and thus cause PDP to lose the 2015 presidential election switched their allegiance back to PDP. According to reports, three governors, over 15 incumbent senators and 36 members of the House of Representatives have already decamped.[70] The implication of recent political events is that the institutionalization of the party system is taking some form, but is still characterized by a "big man" syndrome. In other words, electoral competitions are still driven and determined by issues related to personalities rather than ideas. Thus, there is no clear-cut ideological master plan by any political party upon which to judge them in the task of reconstructing the state. What is seen is ad hoc publicity of issues that currently appear to be of interest to frontline elites and informed masses.

Conclusions

In Africa, opposition parties were created with the mentality akin to setting up a business enterprise with political profit in mind. Thus, opposition

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[68] Leadership (Newspaper), "2019: Obasanjo, Umar, Ojukwu, Others Form Mega Party," 5 October 2018, accessed June 15, 2018, https://leadership.ng/2018/10/05/2019-obasanjo-umar-ojukwu-others-form-mega-party/.

[69] Randall and Svåsand, "Political Parties and Democratic," 42.

[70] Levinus Nwabughiogu, "Gale of Defection Hits APC as 36 Reps Dump APC to PDP," *Vanguard*, 24 July 2018, accessed June 15, 2018, https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/07/breaking-gale-of-defections-hit-apc-as-36-reps-dumb-apc-for-pdp/.

parties tend to be "closely identified with the party founder or current leader rather than with a political program and lack elaborated organizational underpinnings."[71] Flowing from the above, that is, that opposition parties are used as vehicles to advance personal political ambition among the country's elites, it has been difficult to build stable and enduring coalitions that have the capacity to deepen and improve democratic credentials in the African continent.[72]

Another character of the party system in Africa is the unusually large number of political parties with no known ideological leaning. Kuenzi and Lambright have contended that party fragmentation as manifested in a large effective number of parties has created governability problems in African democracies in terms of managing them.[73] In Nigeria, there are currently 91 registered political parties. Interestingly, only APC, PDP and APGA have representatives in the National Assembly with a few handfuls of other parties commanding insignificant membership in Houses of Assembly at the state level. The unusually large number of opposition parties presupposes fractionalization and fragmentation of the opposition with the result that they are incapable of carrying out the real role of providing a political counterweight to the incumbent party.[74]

There is also the tendency of disenchanted politicians or those edged out in the power game to take solace in forming their own political parties. It is for this reason that many opposition parties "turn out to be little more than small and transient coteries behind aspiring individual politicians."[75] The moment they vie for positions and lose, the parties naturally fizzle out of existence. The alliance between the AD/APP, which was for the purpose of winning the 1999 presidential elections, fizzled out when they lost the election.

While the merger that produced the APC succeeded in winning the majority in the National Assembly as well as the presidency, it is not yet the eureka moment for party consolidation in Nigeria. There is mass disenchantment due to the disconnect between the campaign promises that APC made and the actual indices of achievement by the Buhari government. Available economic indices indicate the erosion of the living standards of the masses and widespread poverty. The poster child of the Buhari government, which is its fight against corruption, has been sorely faulted by Obasanjo as a

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[71]   Randall and Svåsand, "Political Parties and Democratic," 38.
[72]   Michael Wahman, (2012). "Democratization and electoral turnovers in sub-Saharan Africa and beyond," *Democratization* 21, no. 2 (2012): 220–243, https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2012.732572.
[73]   Kuenzi and Lambright, "Party Systems," 424.
[74]   Gabrielle Lynch and Gordon Crawford, "Democratization in Africa 1990–2010: An Assessment," *Democratization* 18, no. 2 (2011): 275–310, https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2011.554175.
[75]   Randall and Svåsand, "Political Parties and Democratic," 32.

result of Buhari's "culture of condonation and turning blind eye" to "errant members of his nepotic court" and by Matthew Kukah, a Catholic Bishop, as turning "governance in Nigeria [into] a criminalized enterprise."[76] Thus, while the masses want a "third force" political party, the disenchanted elite in APC have rather opted to decamp to PDP rather than mobilize a new political platform.

Perhaps, the first step in ensuring political development that will enthrone an enduring political system in Nigeria is taking the issue of ideology in parties more seriously. What ideology will help to do is to imbue the elite with political discipline necessary to institutionalize authority and develop structures of power based on certain shared rules.[77] In that way, merger politics will ensure political development, which in itself will disavow prebendalist and clientelist inclinations and spawn the quest to acquire power peacefully and to deploy power to empower the powerless by implementing the masterplan of the party.

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[76] Olusegun Obasanjo, "Obasanjo's Letter to Buhari," n.p; Vanguard, "Governance in Nigeria is a Criminalized Enterprise," 31 January 2018, accessed May 15, 2018, https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/01/governance-nigeria-criminalized-enterprise-kukah/.

[77] Larry Diamond, "Foreword," in *Democracy and Prebendalism in Nigeria: Critical Interpretations,* eds. Wale Adebanwi and Ebenezer Obadare (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), VII-XIII.