

Democratic continuity or discontinuity: The People's Democratic Party at inception of the Fourth Republic, 1998-2007

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ABSTRACT: This research is on the fundamental role that political parties play as regard to their entrenchment of democratic tenets in Nigeria. It examines the People's Democratic Party (PDP) as one of the dominant political platforms that emerged at the inception of the Fourth Republic. The study concentrates on the first eight years (mandate) of the party in office to examine the posture of the PDP at this crucial stage of the country's return to civil rule. It is vital against the backdrop of disappointment being expressed by the citizenry about the roles of political parties in Nigeria, especially on the serious decline in attaining good governance. The situation has left many citizens in a state of destitution and complete hopelessness in the destiny of the country. This is similar to the situation at the return to democracy in 1999 when many were not only dismissive about the transition program but had lost trust in the ruling class. The research adopts the use of primary and secondary sources with a qualitative method of data gathering and analysis. All available sources have been subjected to critical cross-examination, and the results of the work have shown that in spite of the challenges, the PDP, through its platform and activities, awakened the spirit of democratic fervour in Nigeria. However, with time, the same party led others in truncating the journey toward nurturing an enduring democracy with a myriad of undemocratic practices that posed a threat to the system in Nigeria.

Keywords: Democracy, elections, national integration, transition.

INTRODUCTION

The role of political parties in strengthening the tenets of democracy has been an area of interest among numerous scholars. It has equally been particularly underscored across the various fields in the humanities as a veritable tool in nurturing democracy and for reaping the associated gains of good governance. With particular reference to Nigeria, the search for strong political platforms that can harness the huge potential in the different regions of the country for development and the common good of all citizens is far from being over.

With the lifting of the ban on political parties and political activities in 1998, the general democratic enthusiasm among many citizens across the country appeared to have been eclipsed by the years of military and authoritarian rule. In fact, many were sceptical about

the military-led transition program as they saw it as just another deception of the men in uniforms. This fear stemmed from the experience of the past. However, many politicians under the platform of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) successfully stimulated the democratic interests in the country through the party's national posture (national spread), nationwide mobilisation of its membership base and the strategy of zoning/rotation in which both elected political offices and party offices were allocated to the different geopolitical zones in the country.

To achieve the objective set out, this study begins with an assessment of the processes and the activities that created the environment for the evolution of the PDP. It rightly commences from the death of General Sani Abacha,

Abacha, which gave rise to a series of key developments undertaken to work out the modalities for returning the country to democracy. One of such important events was the registration of political parties in order to usher in the Fourth Republic.

Out of several political associations that submitted requests to be registered, only three, Alliance for Democracy (AD), All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) and People's Democratic Party (PDP) scaled through. Hence, this paper examines the evolution of the PDP and its preparation for the presidential election of 1999, followed by the period it successfully took over the reins of authority from the military. It is necessary to start the study before the General Elections because that will contribute to our understanding of the background from which the party emerged and further enable us to appraise the PDP's early period of sojourn in power.

Background to the return of democratic rule in 1999

As already hinted above, the march toward returning the country to democracy began straightaway with the annulment of the presidential election of June 12 1993. Various pro-democracy groups, civil society organisations, human rights activists, the media and the international community started mounting pressure on the military junta to do the right thing by announcing M.K.O. Abiola as the winner of the annulled presidential election. Prominent among these groups included Civil Liberty Organisation (CLO), the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR), the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) and the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). In addition to the demand for the return of the military to the barracks, their demands also bothered on the respect for human rights and freedom of speech, which were scarce under the military (Hassan, 2023). These continued even when General Babangida relinquished power to an interim administration under the leadership of Chief Earnest Shonekan. It was a transition that only lasted for a brief period since the military seized power again in a bloodless coup on 17th November 1993, led by General Sani Abacha. After ruling the country for over four years, in very strange circumstances, he was confirmed dead on 8 June 1998 (Danjibo and Ashindorbe, 2018; Fayemi, 2023).

The implication of this sudden death was the emergence of General Abdulsalami Abubakar to fill in the vacuum. His emergence put to an end the lifespan of the 1995 Constitution and the five political parties already created under Abacha that had "unanimously" adopted him as their sole candidate for the transition program that was clearly going to witness him handing over power to himself. General Abdulsalami also terminated the transition program under Abacha so as to give a fresh start and credibility to the process. This was followed by

the cancellation of the March 1997 Local Government Council elections and that of December 1997 State Assembly elections (Duniya and Njoku, 1998; Galadima, 2014).

Subsequently, the new government embarked on a vigorous transition program, which set in motion the activities for the return of power to civilians. This has earned it the accolade of being the shortest transition program in the country's history (Danjibo and Ashindorbe, 2018). Another departure from the past (although a continuation from the Second Republic) was the rule set by the government, which ended government funding for political parties and also forbade political parties from receiving funds from abroad (Jega, 1998). This, in itself, was essential to the system as the parties were supposed to grow outside government control, unlike what was obtained during Babangida; it also set out to free parties from having their internal affairs manipulated by foreign donors to the detriment of the interests of Nigeria and Nigerians.

The formation of the People's Democratic Party (PDP)

For the PDP, its foundation is traceable to the famous group known as G34, which eventually transformed to a political party on 19 August 1998. Membership of the G34 was composed of diverse elites across different parts of Nigeria and from all walks of life. Dr. Alex Ekwueme was at that time the head of the G34 group, who were basically those denied registration by General Sani Abacha during his self-succession efforts. They went into alliance with some members of existing political platforms that included: the People's Consultative Forum (PCF), the All Nigerian Congress (ANC). These were not in opposition to Abacha's candidacy but did not work with him. There was also the Social Progressive Party (SPP), a collection of politicians across the country; the New Era Alliance (NERA) and the People's Democratic Movement (PDM), which was made up of ardent loyalists of retired General Shehu Yar'Adua. In essence, most of these were existing political platforms that were at the level of transforming into political parties, but the then government with its own brand of political transition program, truncated their struggle to be in the arena (Malachy, 2013; Simbine, 2014). This image above shows that the PDP emerged from the remains of years of commitments to the restoration of democracy in the country with a blend of different political flavours – conservative, radicals and progressives. It also had representatives across different segments of the Nigerian society, thereby providing a common ground for crossbreeding of ideas and collaboration, which was a necessary condition for national integration.

The ability of these different groups and individuals to harness their numerous interests into a broad national

value was what produced the largest national political party in the history of Nigerian politics (Malachy, 1998). More so, these leaders were a composition of pragmatic men and women from varying backgrounds with different political views that had not interacted with one another, but because they appreciated the enormous task of uniting the country, they buried their past differences and forged a common political platform. Parts of their statements after agreeing to merge into a single political party showed their understanding of the issues that had bedevilled the Nigerian state:

civilian politicians, at this stage of our struggle for democracy, human rights and social justice cannot afford the luxury of ideologically divided small parties...those involved in the consultations are convinced that what is required for the decisive battle for democracy is a national, broad-based and formidable political party...to retrieve and restore democracy in the country all patriotic citizens must come together to rebuild the foundations of civil society (Orolua, 1998a).

This national outlook of the party, right from its creation, was one of its selling points and the instruments for fanning the flame of democracy across every nook and cranny. After the official launching of the party, the next significant event in its history was the maiden rally held on September 1, 1998, in the Federal Capital Territory. One of the aims of the rally was to present the party's manifesto, constitution, flag and symbol to the nation. At this rally, the Protem National Leader Dr. Alex Ekwueme told Nigerians that "the formation of the party was done to give Nigerians the desired political direction towards a sustainable and durable democracy" (Dunia *et al.*, 1998). What was important from this address to Nigerians was the fact that the leaders demonstrated that the party was for the people (Nigerians) and the interests of all citizens were the object of this new political force. To give nationwide acceptance and followership to the party, prominent politicians who were in attendance spread across gender and different cultural backgrounds.

With the commitment of the Head of State to end the transition program on May 29, 1999, he told the election commission (Independent National Electoral Commission) that the date remained sacrosanct and therefore, two weeks were given for it to come up with guidelines and a timetable for political party formation and registration (Abdulrahman, 1998). Consequently, the commission started its major task in this regard by scheduling a meeting on August 19 1998, with all national political associations that wished to be registered to participate in the elections ahead. Representatives of these associations, particularly the chairmen and secretaries, were in attendance for closer interaction with the view to acquaint all stakeholders with the responsibili-

ties ahead. This was followed by the release of guidelines for the registration of parties. Very central to the government's demands were the national outlook of the party in terms of membership and the allocation of party positions that must also be evenly spread across the regions of the country. For a party to qualify, it was mandatory to have its head office in the Federal Capital Territory and also maintain a functional office in at least 24 states of the Federation (Orolua, 1998b). For the PDP, its presence was felt in every ward of the federation right from the inception, and this spurred the interests of many at the grassroots concerning the political process that was emerging.

The PDP was given probationary registration along with eight other parties pending their performance at the local government elections planned for December 1998. The justification for this was that the 1999 Constitution made it clear to all parties that their major ground for qualification to be registered was their ability to have nationwide coverage of two-thirds of the states of the federation. These other parties included Movement for Democracy and Justice (MDJ), Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), United People Party (UPP), United Democratic Party (UDP), National Solidarity Movement NSM) and Democratic Advanced Movement (DAM) (Dunia and Orolua, 1998).

At the end of the local government contest of 1998, the results showed that only three out of the nine parties that had been given provisional registration were qualified for final registration. This decision was taken by the electoral body on 14 December 1998. Those successful parties, along with the PDP, were the Alliance for Democracy (AD) and All Peoples Party (APP). Consequently, the Chairman of the electoral body gave the verdict thus:

"...the APP and the PDP fulfilled the conditions for final registration of political parties as stipulated in paragraph 10(3) of the guidelines. While all the other parties did not obtain up to 5 per cent of the total votes cast in at least 24 states, one of them was, however, granted final registration along with the PDP and APP by virtue of paragraph 12(2) of the said guidelines" (Adekunle, 1998).

The other party alluded to here is the AD. It was granted final registration as a control mechanism to stop the country from falling back to centrifugal politics that the new system was clearly working to destroy. Table 1 gives a full picture of the electoral performance of the PDP in the local government elections that made it scale through the registration hurdles without difficulty.

CONSTITUTION AND MANIFESTO OF THE PARTY

First, the party's motto clearly highlighted that it was

resting on the three pillars of Justice, Unity and Progress. It was a clear reflection on the journey to restoring civil rule in the country, especially with the issue of injustice in the days of military rule. Nigerians were all aware of injustice at the polls and in other areas of life. Similarly, in an attempt to project its national outlook, the two following words were lifted directly from the words on the country's Coat of Arms (Unity and Faith, Peace and Progress). More so, the preamble of the manifesto was a demonstration of the party's leaders being in full knowledge of the nation's attempt at building a united country throughout history. Therefore, it stated that:

We of the Peoples Democratic Party of Nigeria, conscious of our historic mission to build a modern democratic state founded on justice, equity and fair play; realising the need to i. make a fundamental break with past mistakes in order to realise the optimum potentials of the country; ii. Build a qualitatively better society based on the principles of democracy, human rights and social justice under the rule of law; committed to i. restructuring Nigeria in the spirit of true federal and responsible tiers of government, so as to achieve a just and equitable society ii. Resolving such fundamental issues as proper devolution of power between the three tiers of government, the covenant is as follows: i. Indivisibility of the Nigerian polity. We affirm our belief in the unity of Nigeria under the Federal System of Government. We shall therefore, continuously promote political tolerance, accommodation and compromise, religious harmony, as well as inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic accommodation and co-operation. ii. The party shall also promote geopolitical balancing as a fundamental principle of power sharing in the country, in line with the principle of federal character. iii. The party shall uphold the principle of power rotation in our polity at all levels (PDP Manifesto, 19998).

In clear terms, what these words of the preamble meant was that the founders of the PDP were in full knowledge of the difficulties that the nation had experienced and the need to build a nation on the principles of democracy guided by the rule of law. National integration was a major agenda and was vividly articulated. Similarly, the chosen colours of the party's flag were green, white and red. This symbolised freedom, democracy, peace and harmony and the rule of law, which were the fundamental principles of the party (Dunia *et al.*, 1998). Again, the reason for choosing more than one colour can be seen to depict Nigeria as a country with a varied group of people that form a beautiful country, hence the need to integrate them to build a great country.

Section 2 of the preamble of the party's constitution demonstrated the endeavour by the founders of the party to harness all human resources for national development, regardless of one's background, so long as such persons were bona fide citizens of Nigeria. It states thus:

a. to bring together all patriotic and like-minded Nigerians into a single formidable political party, capable of organizing and making productive the labour and energy of the people; b. to work together under the umbrella of the party for speedy restoration of democracy, the achievement of national reconciliation, economic and social reconstruction and respect for human rights and the rule of law (PDP Constitution, 1999).

This intention was appropriate, especially in an atmosphere already riddled with years of sectionalism. To begin the job of national integration without first offering assurance to a divided country was to move in the wrong direction. Therefore, these opening lines rightly unlocked the party to the generality of the country.

Most of the reviewed literature has shown consensus among scholars that Nigeria's problem is not its diversity. In fact, diversity has been described as a strength in disguise in addition to its several unexplored, abundant natural resources. What this means is that the multi-cultural environment of the country has resulted in conflict because of the inability of the country's leaders to manage it well for national development. Hence, article 6 (sections 1, 3 and 4) of the constitution further consolidates on the search for national cohesion through the provision of a level playing ground for citizens. It projected from the outset to use open open-door policy by emphasising that:

The party shall be a democratic organisation and shall pursue its objectives without regard to race, creed, ethnic affiliation, gender or age. The party shall contest all elections in Nigeria and shall, for that purpose, draw its support from all sections of society. The party, while striving for maximum unity of purpose, shall respect the linguistic, cultural and religious diversity of its members (PDP Constitution, 1999).

This was implemented in the membership of the party and its national presence; no local government or ward was excluded, thereby allowing citizens to be registered within their communities without having to go to another place. This also made members within a particular locality take ownership of the party within their vicinity, and through this, the fear of feeling estranged was reduced drastically.

Party membership and structure

At inception, the party worked as a national party in principle and practice. Having seen its constitution and

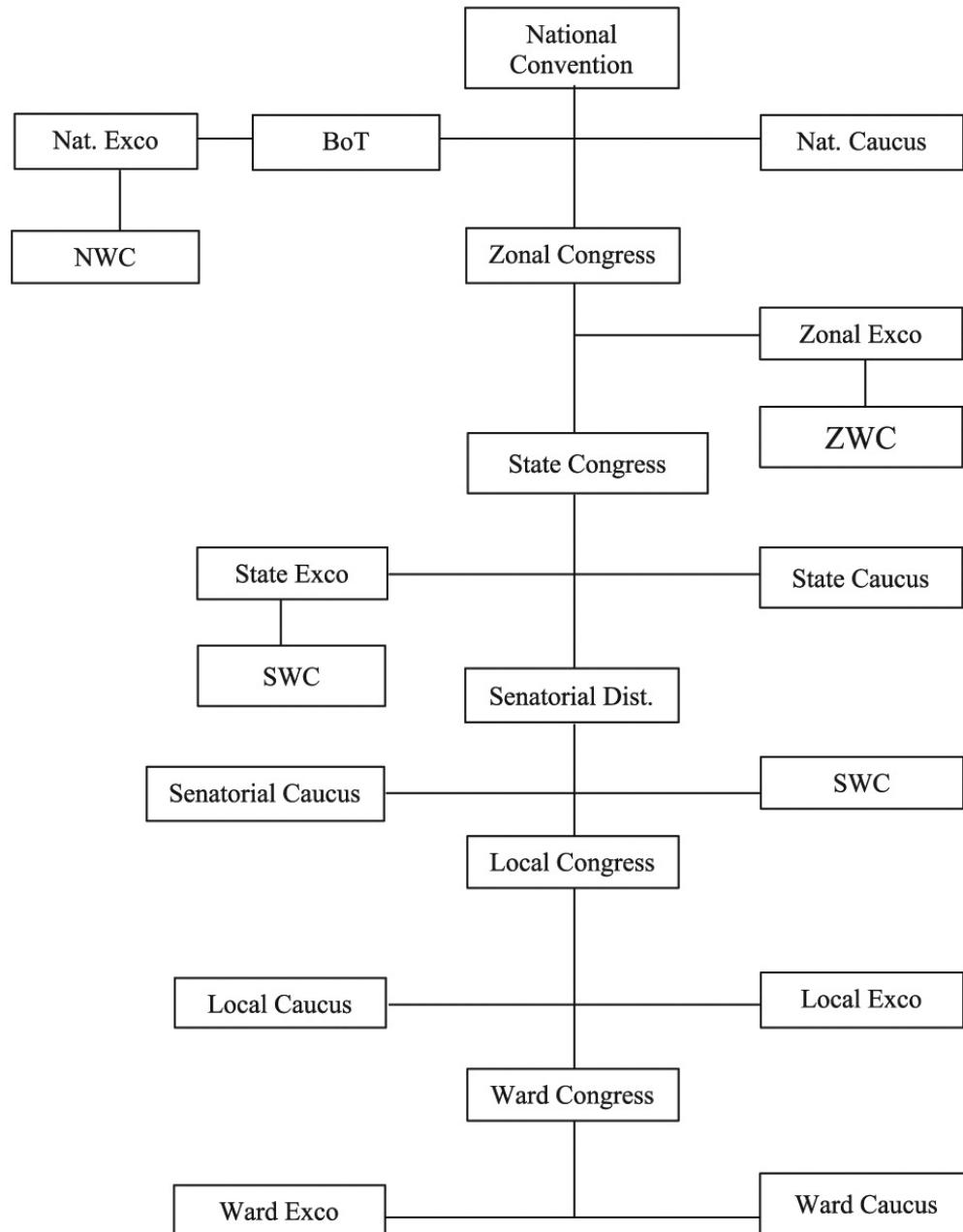


Plate 1. Organs/leadership structure of the PDP. **Keys:** PDP = Peoples Democratic Party; BoT = Board of Trustees; NWC = National Working Committee; ZWC = Zonal Working Committee; SWC = State Working Committee. (Source: Katsina, 2016: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2158244016651910>).

manifesto, which aligned with the conditions set by INEC, it was also national in terms of its physical presence across the states, local governments and wards delineated by the country's constitution (1999). Membership of the PDP was open to all Nigerians who were not below the age of 18, provided they pledged to abide by the Constitution of the party. Registration was at ward level (that is, ward of origin or ward of residence), and in case an application by any individual to join the

party was considered not accepted, such was subject to consideration by the next higher organ of the party. Having joined the party voluntarily, members were also free to leave at their own choice. But if they decided to rejoin, such members would have to reapply and wait for a probationary period of one year except given a waiver by the National Working Committee. Nonpayment of subscription fee for a period of six months was also a reason for a member to lose his/her membership (PDP

Constitution, 1998).

Because of the desire never to segregate against any social class, the cost of each membership card was put at one hundred naira. This automatically made access to the party easier for intending members. This national status was further boosted on 3 November 1998 with the production of sixty million membership cards (Dunia, 1998a).

Citizens of Nigeria residing in any country of the world with which Nigeria had diplomatic relations were qualified to form a chapter in that country, provided that they were not less than fifty in number (PDP Constitution, 1998). For administrative convenience, the PDP was administered at the following levels: a) Ward, b) Local Government Area, c) Senatorial District, d) State, e) Zonal Level and f) National. There was also room for some informal units for the purpose of elections, which included the: a) State House of Assembly Constituency, b) Federal Constituency and c) Senatorial District. Organs of the party also functioned in a graduated form from the Ward Executive up to the National Convention, with each subordinated to the higher organ, and all to the National Convention (PDP Constitution, 1998) (See Plate 1).

CAMPAIGNS AND ELECTIONS

On 6 August 1998, the Provisional Ruling Council (PRC) abolished the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON), which had been set up by General Abacha. It was followed by the establishment of a new electoral body, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), to oversee the new election process. The commission started with 14 members that included Justice Epraim Omokuse Akpata as the first chairman and members such as Mrs. Fati Mu'azu, Alhaji Usman Ladan Baki, Alhaji Shehu Musa, Chief (Mrs.) Janet Omotola Ajayi, Alhaji Gambo Gubio. Others are Professor Shehu Galadanci, Mr. Moshood Oluwale Ojikutu, Chief Lawrence Nworokwu, Mr. Ignatius Kogbara, Chief (Mrs.) Elizabeth Ivase, Mr. Okpo Sam Kaiso Okpo, Mrs. Ifeyinwa Mary Obegolu and Alhaji Adamu Bawa Mu'azu who served as the secretary (Zakka and Andrew, 1998).

Party Primary Election

Due to the clamour for power shift from the North to the South, the PDP reached a conclusion and zoned the position for the President to the Southern Region with the open clause left to the southerners to decide which of its part was to produce the President (Ibrahim, 1998).

Therefore, eminent Nigerians from the Southern parts of the country that contended for the party's top position included Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, Chief Philip Asiodu,

Dr. Alex Ekwueme, Chief Don Etiebet, Chief Jim Nwobodo, Chief Richard Akinjide, Chief Tonye Graham-Douglas, Senator Francis Ellah and Chief Meredith Adisa Akinloye. In the end, only seven of them were successfully cleared by the party for its primary election. The winner (Chief Obasanjo started his campaigns when he made known his intention to the nation on 3 November 1998 with these words: "By this declaration, I do not see myself as the anointed nominee of any particular group or individuals. Rather, I will seek the mandate through the party, which is as national as any Nigerian organisation ought to be" (Adeoti and Obassa, 1998). This statement, apart from the fact that it reiterated the national essence which the party possessed at the beginning and served as its major selling point, was also a reply to many assumptions held by some Nigerians regarding his candidature. Prominent Yoruba people, in particular, did not see him as their choice but rather, a Northern candidate being imposed on the nation. But this insinuation early on demonstrated the efforts by the stakeholders of the party to enshrine the spirit of national integration by conceding the position of the President to someone from the same region as the acclaimed winner of the 1993 election that was annulled – Chief M. K. O. Abiola. The fact being that the region was still hurting over the 1993 mishap, and this was a conciliatory move made by the PDP. The presidential candidate also showed his preference for democratic rule over military rule by stating that "it is still the best because it protects and projects essential and fundamental human rights which allow popular participation" (Adeoti and Obassa, 1998).

It should be noted that before the party's convention, which was held on 16 February 1999 in the city of Jos, Plateau State, Alhaji Mohammed Abubakar Rimi publicly resisted the idea of zoning the presidency to the south. His opinion was that the action was undemocratic and, by that, denied the emergence of potential candidates outside the Southern region. He not only opposed the decision but also went on to declare his intention to run for the office of the President. This was a test case for the party's commitment to the zoning of its executive positions and that of the elective positions (especially the office of the President). This was already spelt out in the party's constitution in compliance with the guidelines provided by INEC for the registration of political parties. It was also a major effort put forward by the PDP to heal the country and integrate various parts of the country that have felt estranged from the Nigerian state. Thus, the party denied Alhaji Rimi the chance to contest as it was against its internal rules (Mohammed, 1999).

Eventually, the convention was held on 15 February 1999 without any contestants from the North. The faces were all southerners as seen from the array of names above, except for the 2,469 delegates across all regions, supporters and party members. Performance in statistical terms showed Chief Obasanjo picking the party's ticket

with the total votes of 1,658 (67.97% of the total votes cast); he defeated his closest opponent, Dr. Alex Ekwueme, who got 521 votes (Ajibade *et al.*, 1999). He made the following remarks about his nomination, the entire process for the party primary and his successful screening by INEC on 17 February 1999: "it has heightened my optimism about the future of democratic government in our country. I commend the leadership of the PDP at all levels for their efforts in laying such a solid foundation for our party". Subsequently, the party's flag bearer submitted the name of Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, who was at that time, the Governor-elect of Adamawa State, as his Vice Presidential candidate (Dunia, 1999b).

In the spirit of true democracy, the six other contestants peacefully accepted the result and went on to pledge their commitment to work for the victory of the party's flag bearer (New Nigerian, February 16, pp. 1-2). The significance of this disposition was that they believed in the orderliness and the free and fair atmosphere in which the primary election was conducted. Additionally, the interest of the party and the nation was held above their individual interests. This primary election of the party was adjudged the fairest since the country opted for the presidential system (Iweka, 1999). By implication, the democratic ethos within the party at this stage was highly regarded and adhered to.

At the party's dinner organised to raise funds for the presidential campaign, over 260 million Naira was raised. Campaign posters for the presidential candidate carried the following words: "Your future is your vote, on Saturday, 27th February 1999, your vote will ensure: Prosperity, Development, Social Justice, Transparency, and Accountability. Vote Obasanjo for President". It is worthy of note that the candidate of the PDP also received backing from some top members of the APP led by Senator Abubakar Olusola Saraki. This action was based on the party's performance in the previous elections, which made them conclude that only the presidential candidate of the PDP had a chance to get the nation's number one position. Moreover, some of them were not happy with the outcome of their party's convention, which they believed was a rape of democracy. Therefore, because of these reasons together with the fact that Chief Olu Falae, the alliance candidate of AD and APP, was not popular like his opponent, they advocated for Obasanjo/PDP presidency. The consequence, according to them, was that working for him (Falae) was wasting their resources because he could not beat a popular candidate (Adekunle, 1999).

Local Government Elections

Three days before the Local Government elections across the country, the National Chairman of the party, Chief Solomon Lar, campaigned for all candidates of the PDP by assuring that the party in its entirety was ready to rekindle the faith of Nigerians in the country. He stressed

that the agenda of the party was to develop the nation without any part left at the stage they met in 1998. This idea was to be achieved through driving a nation-wide economic revival: "we are committed to restoring in every Nigerian the belief that wherever he may be, whatever honest trade he may be engaged in, whatever dreams he may have, we have begun to lay, today, the foundations for their accomplishment" (Dunia, 1998b).

To understand the campaign tone of the party for this particular election, one will need to interrogate the performance of the Nigerian economy at this time. It has witnessed a downturn; oil revenues were fluctuating just as inflation figures were unstable. Additionally, the increase in the burdens of servicing foreign debts had also impacted negatively on the economy. The Local Government, which is the third tier of government and the closest to the Nigerian masses, has been neglected in terms of infrastructure. In fact, most rural areas had insignificant or no government presence and the poverty rates were high. Therefore, the language of the campaign was about economic revival at the grassroots, and it resonated with the people.

The results from Table 1 show that the PDP was ahead of all other parties. It won fifty per cent or above in 36 states and the FCT, having 459 chairmanship positions and 4650 councillorship seats under its control. This overwhelming victory was described by the National Chairman of the party as a demonstration of confidence by Nigerians that only the PDP had what it took to deliver on the expectations of the entire citizenry.

However, having said this about the figures in Table 1, a further critical inquiry raises a lot of questions about the military government and the transparency of the transition program. At the early stage, the PDP was unusually stronger than all other parties put together. This showed clearly that the military government had a special interest and was using the PDP as a proxy in government. The emergence of General Olusegun Obasanjo (an ex-military officer) as its flag bearer also speaks volumes, especially with the weight of generals around him. Overall, the PDP's support by the military from behind the scenes to emerge as the dominant party in the politics of the Fourth Republic was not good for the nurturing of a vibrant democratic process. It went on to dominate in all the elections conducted within the period of study, a situation that hindered the emergence of a strong opposition, which is an ingredient for democracy. This has become a pattern since the early days of the Fourth Republic. Every party that captures power at the centre has always dominated the political scene to the decline of the opposition.

Gubernatorial and presidential elections

Following the successful performance of the party at the local government polls, it stepped up its preparations for the next round of elections. It fixed the sum of 250,000

Table 1. Summary of results of Local Government Elections (December 5, 1998).

Parties	LG Chairs	Councilors
PDP	389	3,342
APP	182	1,456
AD	100	744
MDJ	2	39
PRP	2	18
UPP	1	11
UDP	-	11
NSM	-	4
DAM	-	4
Total	676	5,629

Source: New Nigerian, Thursday, December 10, 1998, p. 2.

Table 2. Summary of results for Governorship, State and Federal Legislators Elections (January 5, 1999).

S/No.	Party	Governors	State Legislators	HoR	Senate
1.	AD	6	166	68	20
2.	APP	9	251	74	24
3.	PDP	20	528	206	59

Source. Compiled by the Author from different sources.

Naira and a nonrefundable fee of 5,000 for nomination forms meant for Governorship and State House of Assembly aspirants, respectively. In order to open up the political space for participation to all regardless of social class, the National Executive Council (NEC) approved 35 years as the minimum age limit for gubernatorial contestants and 30 years for members who intended to contest for the State Houses of Assembly. Tuesday, 29 December, was the day that the party primaries kicked off across the nation, while the elections were held on 9 January 1999. Table 2 shows the performance of the PDP in both the Governorship and State Houses of Assembly Elections.

Again, the result of the State Houses of Assembly was a repeat of the party's electoral dominance across the federation. Importantly, the Table 2 also gives a breakdown of results for the Saturday, 20 February 1999 National Assembly elections; it further confirms the dominance of the PDP over its two opponents – AD and APP. The performance of the party indicated that it was in control of the National Assembly with 57 per cent of the seats. The 59 Senate seats were won in 27 states, and the only seat in the Federal Capital Territory out of the total 108 senators (Orolua, 1999b).

Presidential elections that marked the peak of the transition program were held on 27 February 1999 between two candidates available – Chief Olu Falae of the AD/APP alliance and Chief Olusegun Obasanjo of the PDP. Chief Obasanjo/PDP was declared the winner by

the Chairman of INEC Justice Ephraim Akpata by stating that “Chief Olusegun Obasajo has emerged the winner having scored more than one-quarter of the votes cast at the election in each of at least two-thirds of all the states of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja and having obtained more votes than his opponent, Chief Olu Falae” (Orolua, 1999b). What this declaration translated into, in terms of figures, was that the candidates of the PDP scored 18,738,154 votes against the opponent's 11,110,287 votes. In terms of the distribution of the votes, the PDP scored more than one-quarter votes cast in 32 states and the Federal Capital Territory.

Reflecting on the performance of the party during the Local Government election, the results during the presidential elections showed that it maintained its nationwide dominance (Njoku *et al.*, 1999). This evidently underscored the fact that it emerged as a people/national party and that its message of national integration and true democracy gained acceptance. Consequently, the President-elect reiterated this central agenda of the party in his response to the victory. Thus, he promised to make national reconciliation his first assignment (Dunia, 1999b).

UNDEMOCRATIC PRACTICES

One factor that precipitated the sudden decline of the

PDP's goodwill in the Nigerian political space is non-adherence to democratic ethos within its camp and across the various structures of government. For instance, members of the G34 were known as a power bloc within the party. They held the party to ransom by misappropriating to themselves the power to determine what happens in their respective territories of origin in terms of party formation, party primaries, elections, appointments and contracts. They insisted that the unwritten agreement in this regard must remain binding and therefore, every form of material and authority relating to their geopolitical zones and states was given to them. With this, they had enormous powers to impose candidates with questionable character and doubtful loyalty to the party. They collected projects/contracts without executing them; collected allocations meant for their areas of influence and commercialised both party and political positions, and employment opportunities.

This naturally triggered intra-party conflicts, which gave the opportunity for the opposition to ridicule the PDP and thereby weakened its base (Malachy, 2013). Members of the public berated the party for being akin to an approved culture of disregard for law and order. Candidate imposition was high right from the beginning, and the president, governors and Local Government chairpersons emerged more powerful than the party chairmen. This was unhealthy for the party and the process of entrenching democracy in Nigeria. It was equally different from the practice obtainable during the Second Republic in which party chairmen wielded significant power over members regardless of their portfolios. The President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, was notorious for authoritarian/dictatorial exercise of power over the party leadership and for constantly fighting the national assembly leaders from his party. These and many other practices, such as intra-party feuds, unregulated corruption, interpersonal conflict arising from selfish interest, etc., stifled the burgeoning spirit of democracy in the country and the process of entrenching the culture of democracy in Nigeria at the inception of the Fourth Republic. There was also brazen disregard for the rule of law, a key ingredient of democracy, and this naturally hastened the collapse of the growing democratic culture across the country.

Another area where these negative practices became easily noticeable was the decline in the number of voters who got registered and turned out for elections. For instance, in 1999, 57.9 million registered for the election, and 30.3 million (52%) only voted. This low turnout was not unconnected to the initial scepticism that many had about the transition. An improvement was recorded in the buildup to the 2003 elections, with 60.8m as registered voters, while 43 million (69%) turned up for the elections. But this improvement was trimmed in the preparation for the 2007 elections. 61.6 million Nigerians registered, but only 35.3 million (58%) voted (Fabiyyi, 2023). The implication was that the rising hopes and expectations of citizens were getting dashed by the politicians, and many

considered voting as a wasteful exercise, having no corresponding improvement in the socio-political sphere of the country. This is also logical when one considers the annual growth rate of Nigeria's population and the fact that the voters' register was usually updated only after four years. It meant that more people were turning 18, but not many were enthusiastic about having a voter's card to exercise their franchise. This was a result of the failure of democracy to meet the yearnings and aspirations of most citizens.

CONCLUSION

The history of the PDP during its early years shows the emergence of the party from several nationalist-political organisations with connections to the grassroots. This afforded the party its national outlook both in principle and practice right from its formative stage. Furthermore, its national position was obvious in regard to its physical presence in several parts of the country, which was not determined by any primordial factor. It had control over many political constituencies at the three tiers of government, thereby comfortably positioned to participate in the flourishing democratization process.

Its constitution and manifesto had the pursuit of national unity and entrenching the ideals of democracy as the foremost objectives. It was not only enshrined in these documents, but it was an operational philosophy that espoused the federal character scheme, which ensured that party positions and those of government were distributed across the geo-political regions of the country, and the position of the President to be rotated between the North and South in order to create a level playing field for all segments of the country. By taking this principle, the PDP was employing the consociational theory of democracy that was first developed by Arend Lijphart. It calls for the voluntary, rational, and purposive coalition of leaders (political elite) of a culturally fragmented society so as to achieve national harmony or cohesion. This democratic theory can be normative for a culturally diverse society like Nigeria because of its ability to generate and lead to a unity that is built within rather than imposed from without. However, in the later years, the party took so many steps that put it out of favour with the electorate, thereby sowing the seed of its decline. Some of these actions were directly against the attempts to preserve democracy in Nigeria.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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