



Dominance of A One-Party System as a Threat to Multiparty Democracy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

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Abstract

This paper examines the dominant role of the ruling political party in Nigeria since the country's transition to democracy in 1999. When Nigeria transitioned to democracy, the Peoples' Democratic Party dominated power for 16 years. This period (1999-2014) was marked by power mismanagement until the party was defeated in the 2015 general election. But before then, Nigeria was evolving into a one-party system. This paper used the secondary method of data collection and content analysis to analyse the data collected. The paper adopted the Greene single-party dominance theory. The findings discovered that, since returning to democracy in Nigeria in 1999, any political party that assumes power tries to dominate the political environment and does everything possible to silence opposition and tilt toward a one-party state. This happened when the PDP was in control of political power from 1999 to 2015. And since the assumption of power in 2015, the All-Progressive Congress has been moving towards the direction of a one-party system. This is a violation of the principle of multi-party democracy. The paper therefore recommended, among others, that all political parties should be given equal opportunity to participate in the democratic process and no political party should dominate the political environment at the disadvantage of others.

Keywords: *Dominance, One-party System, Threat, Multi-party Democracy*

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Background to the Study

In the democratisation view, the multi-party system provides the framework within which the interests and demands of the citizens are aggregated and accomplished in a more transparent, participatory and credible manner. Therefore, political parties usually respond to the wishes and aspirations of the people by packaging them into party manifestos, as instruments of mobilisation during election campaigns and as policy guidelines if endorsed by citizens to govern. This shows that political parties possess the institutional capacity to persuade the masses, maximising factors that influence political participation. For example, parties have potential bargaining power in an active legislature to influence the formation of public policies. It is fundamental to state that the effectiveness of the multi-party system greatly lies in the parameter where people enjoy freedom to form, join and independently manage their political affiliations. This helps to broaden the political space and widens the choice for democratic participation by individual citizens based on their ideological orientations and convictions. This tends to suggest that the manner in which parties carry out these functions is an indicator of whether a particular democratic system is consolidated or fragile (Jega, 2007).

When Nigeria returned to democratic governance and multiparty politics in 1999, the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), which gained power, remained dominant to the extent that it appeared the country was evolving into a consolidated one-party state. Under that context, elections assumed the character of warfare with the ruling party doing everything to cling to power. This scenario persisted until the 2015 general elections, which led to the emergence of the opposition party (All Progressive Congress, APC) as the winner of the presidential election and majority seats in the National Assembly after sixteen years of PDP dominance of Nigeria's political landscape in the fourth republic.

However, with the All-Progressive Congress coming to power, many analysts foresaw Nigeria gradually evolving into a more consolidated democracy and democratic ideals. But with the conduct and the outcome of the 2023 general election, there is a doubt cast on the Nigerian democratic journey, whether we are really ready for a multi-party democracy or not. Aside from that, the APC has since assumed the role of the PDP, in which opposition political party members are persuaded or coerced to join the APC in readiness for the 2027 general election. This, in due course brings about the spirit of one dominant political power in a country with a constitution that provides for a multiparty democracy. In Africa, one-party systems were common in the East African Sub-Region after independence. Countries like Kenya had the Kenya African National Union (KANU), Zambia African National Union (ZANU), Tanzania African National Union (TANU). But with the global advocate of democratic governance after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990, all these evolved into multiparty democracy.

Methodologically, this paper used the secondary method of data collection. The data for the paper were obtained from already existing sources. The paper used the documentary method to analyse the data. And the paper adopted Greene's Resource Theory of Single Party Dominance (2007). The theory focuses on how a political party in power dominates not just because of its ability to control the political power, but because of the state's economic

resources. This implies that the dominant party's resource advantages render the opposition parties unable to compete. Consequently, there is a relationship between political power control and resource control, which gives the ruling political party in power to have an advantage over and above the opposition.

Party Politics and Power Alternation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

The inception of party politics in Nigeria has been traced to June 24, 1923, following the introduction of the elective principle by the Clifford constitution, and the political parties formed under that dispensation “had very limited and self-serving objectives” (Ikeanyi & Chukwujekwu, 2023, p.112). It would appear that their main objective, according to Ikeanyi and Chukwujekwu, was perhaps to secure legitimacy for the colonial government through the exercise of their very limited franchise restricted to Lagos and Calabar. The first political party to emerge in Nigeria was the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) under the leadership of Herbert Macaulay. Its activities were restricted to contesting elections in the Lagos city council. For years, the NNDP was hegemonic in its dominance in electoral politics in the country. This was to be challenged by the Lagos Youth Movement - later Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), which was formed in 1934 and which defeated the NNDP in the elections for the three seats allocated to Lagos that year. By 1944, the increasing tempo of nationalist agitation had resulted in the formation of another political party, the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC), initially under the leadership of Herbert Macaulay and later Nnamdi Azikwe (Ikeanyi & Chukwujekwu, 2023). This was followed, in quick succession, by the transformation of the Egbe Omo Oduduwa, a Yoruba socio-cultural organisation, into a political party, the Action Group (AG) in 1950 under the leadership of Chief Obafemi Awolowo and the Northern People Congress (NPC) in 1959 with dominance in the northern region (Ikeanyi & Chukwujekwu, 2023).

By 1951, a breakaway faction of the NPC consisting mainly of radical youths based in Kano formed the Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU). These parties dominated the political landscape of the country, particularly in their respective regions in the march towards independence and in the First Republic. Historically, Nigeria's political party formations have been characterised by mobilisation leaders, who, as founders, exercised tremendous influence. Notable examples of such leaders were Obafemi Awolowo of the AG and UPN, and Nnamdi Azikwe of the NCNC and NPP in the first and second republics (1960-1966, and 1979-1988), respectively. In addition, Sir Ahmadu Bello and Tafawa Balewa were the icons of the NPC in the first republic, who, though not alive by the second republic, nonetheless commanded a mythical presence and inspiration within the NPN in the second republic. Such leaders influenced party nominations and other internal party processes to the extent of compromising internal party democracy (Dike, 2003).

After the second interregnum of military rule (1983—1999), the nature and texture of party politics changed. Political parties were no longer guided by an ideology or specific focus; they were not led by a mobilisation leader who could drive and guide their actions and policies, and inspire internal cohesion and discipline. Political parties assumed the character of electoral machines, whose sole aim was to win political power through the ballot. Aspirants were

mostly individual actors sponsored by some powerful individuals, because the cost of electioneering had now become astronomical. Over three decades, military rule distorted social values and undermined democratic institutions in Nigeria, political parties and civil society. It was worse for the development of the country's party system. The political parties were in complete limbo and almost near extinction, courtesy of the numerous military coups and counter-coups that punctuated Nigeria's political history. The military held all democratic institutions in virtual captivity for much of the period between 1966, when they first struck, and 1999, when the current democratic experiment under Nigeria's fourth republic began.

In other words, after prolonged military rule and even a more protracted transition programme, Nigeria's fourth republic was born on May 29, 1999. In the march towards the Fourth Republic, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) initially granted provisional registration to nine political parties in 1998 out of 24 political associations that applied for registration. Only three political parties - the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the All-Peoples Party (APP) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD) - were granted full registration and so contested the 1999 elections (Simbine, 2013). However, by 2015, the number of political parties in the Fourth Republic of Nigeria had risen from 3 to 91. One outgrowth of the proliferation of political parties was the spate of intra-party conflicts that has characterised party politics in the current dispensation. Muhammad (2008) observed that intraparty conflict has remained a dominant feature of partisan politics in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, as virtually all the major political parties have been afflicted by varying degrees of internal crisis. Similarly, Olorungbemi (2014, p.248) averred that:

Since the inception of the present democratic rule in 1999, political party organisations have been transformed into a battlefield characterised by hatred, enmity, victimisation, and suspicion resulting from bitter struggles among party members in their quest to achieve public and / or personal interests.

Also, Ikeanyi and Chukwujekwu (2023, p.113) affirmed that

Since the return to so-called democratic governance in 1999, party activities, especially in the areas of selection, election, accountability, and discipline, appear to be far below democratic requirements, such that Nigeria's democratic project has been the subject of intense debate in many quarters.

They further noted that:

political parties were neck-dipped into all manners of antidemocratic activities including: electoral manipulations during primary and secondary elections, thuggery, hooliganism and vandalism during elections, party cross-carpeting, political assassination of political opponents, arising from unfair method of selecting party's flag bearers and generally lack of party's internal democracy (Dike 2003 cited in Ikeanyi & Chukwujekwu, 2023, p.113).

Evaluating the role of political parties in the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria, Omilusi (2016) had stressed that while the process of forming and registering political parties has remained relatively open since 1999, the internal governance of the parties has hardly been

liberalised. In fact, a few rich politicians have captured and privatised the political parties to meet their narrow ends, thereby re-orienting the parties away from their basic functions of interest articulation, aggregation and political education. As a result, “political parties have become vehicles for power acquisition and surplus extraction, and this has had dire consequences for internal democratic practices within the parties (Omoweh, 2012, pp.43-44). Mbah (2011, p.15) reiterated that “since 1999, political parties have faced the problem of nondemocratic practices”. The conduct of party primaries throughout the country clearly shows that Nigerian political parties are not operating within the norms of democratic principles. Various political parties have failed to adopt the provisions of their constitutions to all party members who are eligible and want to run for office in their party primaries. Some candidates were imposed on the party without an election and due process. In a 2006 report on Nigeria, International IDEA documented that:

At the party congresses, leaders are elected, and candidates are nominated for elective positions. The elections, however, are usually pre-determined, and party bosses tend to have the final say in the selection of leaders. This process leads to the continual internal party crisis that the country has experienced. Party bosses or godfathers are unwilling to allow internal party democracy, a circumstance that leads to frequent conflicts and constrains the development of parties as popular organisations. Indeed, over the years, these party bosses have developed comprehensive techniques for eliminating popular aspirants from party posts and for preventing them from being nominated for elective positions (International IDEA, 2006, p. 7 cited in Omilusi, 2016, p. 16).

According to the IDEA's Report, Nigerian parties have a wide range of techniques to eliminate people from party primaries, including:

1. A declaration by powerful 'party owners', party barons, state governors, godfathers and so on that those entitled to vote must support one candidate and other aspirants must withdraw. Since these people are very powerful and feared in their communities, their declarations carry much weight.
2. Zoning and other forms of administrative fiat are used to exclude unwanted aspirants simply by taking the party zone out of the seat or position in question to an area where the aspirant being excluded is not indigenous.
3. Aspirants who oppose the godfathers' candidates are often subject to violence by thugs or security personnel.
4. Money, a significant factor in party primaries, is used to bribe officials and to induce voters to support particular candidates. Since the godfather generally has more money than the 'independent' aspirants trying to gain access, many are eliminated because they simply cannot match their opponents' spending.
5. One disturbing technique is what Nigerian's call 'results by declaration', whereby an aspirant wins a nomination or election, but polling officials simply disregard the results and declare the loser as the winner (Cited in Omilusi, 2016, p.37).

Omilusi (2016) strongly argued that in Nigeria, political parties have abandoned their traditional roles in the democratic enterprise and have thus constituted themselves into fetters

to the democratisation and governance processes. Citing Momoh (2010), Omilusi stated that:

There is no more political education, consistent and sustained financial membership, regular grassroots meetings, except when elections are at hand. As such, party executives are faced with one tendency against another in the interplay of internal contestation for the soul and heart of the party. The dominant tendency does not wish to have a few positions; they prefer to take all, if not the strategic positions, viz., Party Chairman, Secretary, and Treasurer. They can choose to trade Vice Chairman, Publicity Secretary, and Women Leader to other tendencies. When democracy and contest for power are designed in such an absolutist winner-takes-all spirit, it spells doom for democracy, as this behaviour is again brought into the arena of national politics (Omilusi, 2016, p.38).

Omilusi concluded that it is as a result of the poor orientation of the political parties that democracy has been saddled with a myriad of challenges since the inception of Nigeria's fourth republic, among which are “the imposition of candidates, godfatherism, money politics, injustice, lack of party manifestoes and ideology, party indiscipline and so on” p.38).

Elaborating on the phenomenon of godfatherism, Gambo (2006, p.88) stated that “Godfatherism in this sense means the practice of political office seekers getting connected to an individual who is believed to have the ability to deliver a desired outcome in an electoral contest”. A 2007 Human Rights Watch Report on party financing in Nigeria went on to graphically explain that in the Nigerian context:

Godfathers are not mere financiers of political campaigns. Rather, they are individuals whose power stems not just from wealth but from their ability to deploy violence and corruption to manipulate national, state or local political systems in support of the politicians they sponsor. In return, they demand a substantial degree of control over the governments they help bring into being, not in order to shape government policy, but to exact direct financial “returns” in the form of government resources stolen by their protégés or lucrative government contracts awarded to them as further opportunities for graft. Godfathers also require their sponsored politicians to use government institutions to generate patronage for other protégés (HRW 2007, p.33).

Instructively, it was through the process of godfatherism that the People's Democratic Party (PDP), which won the maiden presidential election in Nigeria's fourth republic in 1999, held sway and remained dominant in Nigeria's party politics for nearly two decades (1999-2015). In fact, the elections, which brought the party's presidential candidate, retired General Olusegun Obasanjo, to power in 1999 and for a second term in 2003, were widely condemned as unfair and unfree by many international and local observers, including the Transition Monitoring Group and the Carter Centre. In 2007, Obasanjo hoisted his preferred candidate and par man, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, on the nation in an election that was roundly condemned as severely flawed by both domestic and international observers (European Union, 2007; Human Rights Watch, 2007). In the build-up to the election, Obasanjo himself had bragged that the election would be a do-or-die affair, and he lived up to that boast by all standards.

Following the 2007 election, the PDP grew into a virtual behemoth with some of its prominent members bragging that it would rule for a thousand years. The administration of President Yar'Adua, who was inaugurated on May 29, 2007, but died in office on May 5, 2010. The vice president, Dr Goodluck Jonathan, was sworn in as his replacement on May 6, 2010, and so became Nigeria's 14th head of state, both civilian and military. Jonathan served out Yar'Adua's term, which was due to run until May 29, 2011. On April 16, 2011, a new presidential election was conducted in which President Jonathan of the PDP was declared the winner on April 19, 2011, with 22,495,187 of the total 39,469,484 votes cast. He defeated General Muhammadu Buhari of the main opposition party, the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), who got 12,214,853 votes (African Elections Database: 2011 Nigeria Election; Purefoy, 2011).

Self-described as Africa's largest party, the PDP was described by the Nigerian Nobel laureate, Professor Wole Soyinka, as a “power machine and a machinery for massive looting and despoliation of people's collective patrimony” (Amuwo, 2015, p.15). In the build-up to the 2015 general election, a former US Ambassador to Nigeria, John Campbell, stated that “The PDP stood for nothing except power for its leaders and the public knew it” (Campbell, 2010, p.86). And Alamu (2015, p.3) summed up by referring to the party as “A fascist Terror machine from which the entire nation is seeking liberation”.

It was in this awe-inspiring state that the PDP contested, and perhaps surprisingly, lost the 2015 presidential election to a newly formed opposition coalition known as the All-Progressive Congress (APC). The loss became a watershed in the annals of Nigerian politics because it marked the first power alternation from an incumbent president to an opposition candidate in Nigeria's political history. The APC was basically a fusion of Buhari's CPC and the Action Congress of Nigeria (CAN) led by Bola Ahmed Tinubu. The coalition fielded Muhammadu Buhari as its presidential candidate in the March 2015 presidential election, and he defeated the incumbent, President Goodluck Jonathan, by nearly 2 million votes (African Elections Database: 2015 Nigeria Election). Meanwhile, Jonathan's tenure had witnessed lots of political turbulence, which rocked his ruling PDP, resulting in the fragmentation of the party in the build-up to the 2015 election. A dispassionate analysis of the details of the loss would reveal that it was as intriguing as the attempt by the PDP to perpetuate itself in power ad infinitum.

In an elaborate exposition on the 2015 presidential election, Ngwu and Ajah (2022) observed that given the enormity of resources and organisational structure at its disposal after 16 years of dominance in Nigeria's fourth republic, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) was in a pole position not only to retain the presidency, governorship and legislative seats it occupied going into the 2015 elections but was, in fact, expected to make further in-roads into opposition-controlled territories at the various levels. This was more so when cognisance was taken of the continued weakening of the opposition parties in successive elections before 2015. Such erosion of opposition had led the main opposition candidate in the three previous elections, Muhammadu Buhari, to vow never to contest future elections after he failed in his third attempt to wrestle power from the PDP in 2011, having previously contested in 2003 and 2007 (Ngwu & Ajah, 2022).

As of August 2013, the PDP occupied 21 out of 36 governorship seats, 75 out of 109 seats in the upper legislative chambers (the Senate), which gave it an absolute majority, and 208 out of 360 members in the lower legislative chambers (the House of Representatives). The party also controlled a correspondingly large number of local government council chairmanship and councillorship seats across the country. Besides, tradition also favoured a PDP victory since the factor of incumbency had always proved decisive in previous elections in Nigeria (Owen & Usman, 2015).

The Collapse of PDP and the Emergence of APC to Power

Before the commencement of the 2015 elections, however, the ruling PDP suffered a severe haemorrhage arising from wrangling within its fold. On August 31 2013, when the party held its special convention, several notable members of the party staged a walkout over “increasing repression within the party, restrictions of freedom of association, arbitrary suspension of members and serial violation of the party's constitution by the chairman, Bamanga Tukur” (Aniche 2017, p.29). The faction also accused President Goodluck Jonathan of actively supporting the Chairman in return for the party's presidential ticket in the 2015 elections. The party members who staged a walkout on August 31, 2013, included Alhaji Abubakar Kawu Baraje, former Acting National Chairman of the party, Chief Olagunsoye Oyinlola, the then incumbent secretary of the party, and former Vice President Alhaji Atiku Abubakar. It also included seven state governors, governors and other party notables.

The breakaway faction, which was named the new PDP (nPDP), literally sought to take over the party structure at the national and sub-national levels. This was however, averted by an 18 October 2013 court order, which stopped the nPDP from establishing offices and barred the INEC from recognising it as a political party. Five of the seven governors who had walked out on the party defected to a new alliance, the All-Progressives Congress (APC), which was to eventually unseat the PDP in the 2015 presidential election. The climax of the defections was perhaps the dramatic defection of the then Speaker of the House of Representatives, Alhaji Aminu Waziri Tambuwal, to the APC in 2014. Those defections boosted the number of states controlled by the opposition to sixteen, leaving the PDP with eighteen. Furthermore, 49 House of Representatives members and 11 senators (all elected on the PDP platform) also defected, thereby establishing numerical parity between the ruling PDP and the opposition in the National Assembly for the first time since 1999 (Aniche, 2017).

Chukwuma and Ali (2014, p. 256) described the persistence of internal crisis within the PDP and the subsequent defections of the aggrieved members of the party to the opposing party as “a culmination of the perennial subterranean wrangling in the party, which stemmed from desperate ambitions, lack of ideological attachment to the party system, and crass partisan opportunism”. The mass defections were, without doubt, injurious to the party's electoral fortunes in the 2015 general elections. In hindsight, it appears that the mortal blow was inflicted on the party from within by some equally aggrieved members who chose not to defect and instead stayed back to undermine the party's internal cohesion from within. But even more telling is the fact that for most of the campaign period during the 2015 election, the national chairman of the PDP at the time, Alhaji Adamu Muazu, was widely suspected of not

working for the success of the party's presidential candidate; even if he did not overtly campaign for the opposition candidate, General Muhammadu Buhari (Rtd). It was also evident that many PDP state governors, who did not openly identify with the nPDP, did not also stick out their necks to campaign for Jonathan's reelection. This may have partly accounted for the low voter turnout recorded in many of the strongholds of the PDP, particularly in the presidential election in 2015.

The thesis that the PDP chairman and some party bigwigs might have covertly supported the candidature of the opposition presidential candidate over their party's candidate and then incumbent president Goodluck Jonathan was reinforced by a key player in the Jonathan administration and former justice minister, Bello Adoke. In an interview granted in June 2019, Adoke gave a graphic account of how in 2015 the Chairman had wanted to announce the acceptance of the presidential election result even before a decision was reached by President Jonathan to concede defeat. Recalling the conversation that took place between him and Muazu, Mr Adoke stated that on March 31, 2015 Muazu had threatened to concede defeat “if by 5 p.m. this evening the president does not concede defeat” (Abdulaziz, June 5, 2019, para.8). Adoke explained that as the Attorney General and member of the national security council, he knew that such a declaration by the chairman would not bode well for the party and country, “given that Muazu was already being viewed with a lot of suspicions that he was not committed to Jonathan's second term election” (para. 10).

In a more pungent submission on the chicanery that led to the defeat of PDP in the 2015 presidential election, Femi Fani-Kayode, the Director of Media, PDP Presidential Campaign Organisation in that election, declared unequivocally that the Muazu-led National Working Committee (NWC) was largely responsible for the failure of the party at the election. Describing the roles of some members of the NWC played in the disaster that befell the party in that election, Fani-Kayode stated “they are indeed the enemy within” ...fueled by hate and envy (Jimoh, May 20, 2015 <https://guardian.ng/news/how-some-pdp-leaders-caused-jonathans-loss-by-fani-kayode/>).

In another twist to the tale, it was reported that the 'age factor' was one of the major reasons that informed the decision of top bigwigs of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) to abandon President Jonathan's reelection in the March 28, 2015 presidential election. The age factor refers to the age-related campaign mounted by the Jonathan campaign team in a bid to checkmate the septuagenarian opposition presidential candidate, General Muhammadu Buhari. The report has it that by overstressing the unsuitability of the opposition candidate on account of his age, the Jonathan campaign team alienated many PDP members who felt that there would be no chance of their contesting the presidential election in 2019. They therefore became jittery and lukewarm towards the Jonathan campaign, thus paving the way for the All-Progressives Congress (APC) candidate.

Cumulatively, these internal wranglings and cloak-and-dagger chicanery within the ruling PDP led to the victory of the opposition APC presidential candidate, General Muhammadu Buhari. In that election, the APC also secured 60 seats in the Senate out of the total of 109

senatorial seats, and 225 seats out of the total of 360 seats in the House of Representatives, to become the majority party. The PDP, on its part, managed 49 seats in the Senate out of the total of 109 senatorial seats, and 125 seats out of the total of 360 seats in the House of Representatives, and was thus relegated to the role of opposition party for the first time since the return to democracy in the country in 1999. Also, out of 29 states where gubernatorial elections were conducted in 2015, APC won 20 states while PDP won nine states (Aniche, 2018).

After a thorough review of the undercurrents in the 2015 presidential election, Ngwu and Ajah concluded that the defeat of the incumbent president and PDP presidential candidate, Goodluck Jonathan, by the candidate of the main opposition party, Muhammadu Buhari, in that election was as much a function of the intraparty chicanery within the PDP as it was due to the mobilisation efforts of the opposition APC. Nor was it necessarily a reflection of the evaluation of the first six-year rule of President Jonathan by the electorate. In other words, it would be safe to conclude that the only power alternation to have occurred in Nigeria's fourth republic, and by extension, the country's political history, was forced and so was not indicative of the consolidation of democracy in the country. In fact, there is a sense in which it could be described as the civilian equivalent of a coup d'état. And to underscore the forced nature of the alternation, after nearly ten years of APC rule (2015-December 2024), the party has once again imposed itself as a behemoth bestriding Nigeria's political firmament and choking up the democratic spaces in the country. When the opposition APC broke the power dominance of the PDP, it was making Nigeria a one-party political system. It was a welcome development for the citizens who had heard several times, members of the PDP boasting of ruling Nigeria for sixty years. Sooner than the President Muhammadu Buhari-led APC government commenced its rule. People became dissatisfied with the style of leadership and the political programmes of the government. Poverty and hunger set in, and the citizens started clamouring for an alternative political leadership on a different political platform outside of the PDP and the APC.

In 2019, the general election was an opportunity for the citizens to decide on a change of political leadership. The presidential contest was between the incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari of APC and former Vice President under President Olusegun Obasanjo, 1999 – 2023, who contested on the PDP as the major opposition political party. The political contest, which was very keen, was believed to have been won by Alhaji Atiku Abubakar. However, the apex court upheld the decisions of the tribunal and the appeal court and declared President Muhammadu Buhari the winner of the 2019 presidential election. The means by which INEC and the Supreme Court gave the presidential mandate to President Buhari was widely criticised by many political analysts who saw APC is going the same way the PDP was in the past before its defeat in the 2015 general election.

Centrally, in the 2023 general election, the political atmosphere was different from all other years' political contests. The entry of the former governor of Anambra state, Gregory Peter Obi, in the presidential contest under the Labour Party ticket. The #OBIDIENT MOVEMENT# became a sure force to be reckoned with and a game-changer for Nigerian

politics. The 2023 general election was therefore featured three major political parties this time. The APC was saddled by the former Lagos state governor and one-time senator, Bola Ahmed Tinubu. The Labour Party (LP) was led by Mr Gregory Peter Obi. And the PDP presidential candidate was former Vice President, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar.

In the pre-election contest, there was a level playing ground for all the major contesting political parties as well as other minor ones. Although there were some complaints of harassment and intimidation in some quarters, the pre-election political activities were not violent enough to be reckoned with. At least once, Nigeria has witnessed an election with more than two major political parties in contention. The electoral contests were well carried out. The election went on without much complaint of violence or intimidation, as witnessed under the reign of the PDP. Unfortunately, however, after the election, the APC Presidential candidate was declared the winner. And the PDP presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar, as second and Peter Obi, third. The declaration by INEC sparked nationwide criticism and objections to the results of the election. However, the INEC national chairman, Prof. Yakubu Mahmud, stated that if anyone was not satisfied with the results announced by INEC should go to the court. INEC, however, had promised earlier on that the election results would be transmitted electronically, but unfortunately, the results of the National Assembly were transmitted electronically while those of the presidency cast on the same day and time were not. INEC, in a clarification motive, stated that the Bi-Modal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS), was faulty and could not authenticate the actual number of voters accredited and, as a result, could not warrant the presidential result to be transmitted electronically, on the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV Portal). However, the accreditation of the presidential and the national assembly elections went on concurrently. The excuses of INEC cast doubt in the minds of many Nigerians about whether INEC is at all an eligible body to manage elections in Nigeria.

The 2023 general election and particularly the presidential election result became a major topic of discussion among Nigerians, whether the APC would go the same way the PDP had in the past. Since then, we have been witnessing some members of the opposition parties from the PDP and Labour Party cross-carpeting to the APC. In a statement, Comrade Adams Oshiomole, one-time governor of Edo state and a national Chairman of the APC, once said, “no matter the sins of any politicians, once he crossed carpet to the APC, his sins are forgotten”. This implies that politicians with cases of money laundering and other related offences, but once they cross carpet to the APC. They would no longer be pursued by the anti-graft agencies: ICPC, EFCC, Police, DSS, NIA, among others. The statement and the happenings in the political arena in recent times show the APC descending to being the only dominant political party and doing everything possible to silence opposition. For instance, in the 2025 by-elections across some constituencies in some states. We witnessed the APC winning a landslide victory in non-APC states. Such occurred in Karim Lamido Local Government Area of Taraba state and Rivers' state Local Councils election, where APC swept 20 local councils out of 23. More worrisome is the issue of cross-carpeting of state governors and legislative members at the state and national levels into the APC. The fears of a one-party system in a multi-party constitution are antithetical to democracy and democratic ideals.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Generally, a one-party system is disadvantageous to democracy because of the dangers it poses. This is because it serves as a critical threat to democratic values. On the other hand, it leads to the concentration of power in a few hands and limits open participation. A one-party system undermines accountability, freedoms, and diverse representation. As a result, the primary purpose of this paper is to identify how the absence of competition leads to governance challenges such as potential dictatorship, systemic corruption, and the suppression of minority viewpoints. On a serious note, a one-party system leads to the suppression of opposition, which often results in limited freedom of association, choice, speech, and dissent, as alternative views are treated as subversion. This paper, therefore, highlights how power rests with a one party or leader, often leading to a "one-man show" and the erosion of checks and balances. One-party systems tend to impose a single ideology, failing to represent the varied interests and aspirations of a diverse population. While some may, however, argue that one-party systems offer stability or faster decision-making, studying them as a disadvantage emphasises that these efficiencies are generally achieved at the expense of core democratic principles.

In Nigeria, the 1999 transition constitution that ushered in democracy makes provision for multiparty democracy. Therefore, entrenching or imposing one-party rule in the country is not just against the abuse of the constitution but a breach of democratic principles. This is because a one-party state is commonly identified by political analysts as abusive to the human rights of the citizens and a breach of open political participation.

Following the above, the paper recommends that:

1. The current government under the All-Progressive Congress should desist from the practices enforced by the PDP in the past (1999 – 2015) by drawing Nigeria closer to a one-party state.
2. And as a result, open more political space for opposition political parties to participate actively in the political process and on a level playing ground in the electoral competition, to give the citizens a window of opportunity for more alternatives.

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