

**Intra-Party Crisis and
Decline of Opposition
Parties in Nigeria: An
Assessment of the
People's Democratic
Party, 2015-2025**

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Abstract

The study interrogated intra-party crisis and the decline of opposition parties in Nigeria, focusing on the People's Democratic Party (PDP). It tried to examine the challenges and effects of the intra-party crises in the PDP, most especially in the area of providing a credible and viral alternative that can consolidate Nigeria's democracy. The study was anchored on elite theory, and the qualitative method of data collection was used to glean data from observation and documentary evidence of secondary sources. The *ex-post-facto* research design and qualitative descriptive analysis were employed with logical induction in analysis. The study revealed that the perennial crises within the PDP, precipitated

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by the normless character of politics and partisan relations, have depleted the strength of the party and equally undermined its fortunes as the major opposition party in Nigeria. Based on our findings, the paper makes a case for ideologically based partisanship as a panacea to the problem.

Keywords: Intra-Party Crisis, Decline of Opposition Party, Party Politics, Peoples Democratic Party

Introduction

In democratic societies, political parties are indispensable voluntary and informal associations of society, where people share commonly understood values, customs and attitudes of their roles in politics. They are products of and operate within economic structures, and in a context of interests that are affected by and which respond to the accumulation and distribution of goodwill and resources, including the wealth of society. As instruments of collective actions, political parties are the creation of the political elite in a bid to control the resources and personnel of government so as to implement an ideology or a political programme. In competitive political systems, parties are organised by politicians to win elections; in authoritarian systems, parties are organised to affect the attitudes and behaviours of the population. In both instances, an organisational structure must be forged, money must be raised, cadres recruited, officers elected or selected and procedures for internal governing established and agreed upon.

In competitive multi-party politics, the party that is elected to form government seeks to enact into law some policies and programmes (oftentimes consistent with the party's manifesto). Opposition parties are free to criticise the ruling party's policies, ideas and programmes and proffer alternatives. Democratic opposition political parties recognise and respect the authority of the government, even when their parties are not in power. This is possible because democratic systems are considered to have the values of tolerance, cooperation and compromise. The roles of the opposition parties are essential to democratic sustenance, it means that all sides in the political arena, however deep their differences, share the fundamental democratic values of freedom of speech, the rule of law, and equal protection under the law.

Functional constitutional democratic system is about choice. In such a system, there must be a constant reminder sent to the populace that there is a viable alternative to the incumbent political grouping that holds the potential of moving the country onto a higher qualitative democratic setting.

Multiparty democracy exists when political participation stems from periodic elections with many parties contesting for votes cast on individual basis with a view to occupying public positions in order to implement certain party manifestoes; parties that lose elections become the opposition parties. The opposition parties then are essentially “governments-in-waiting”. For a culture of democracy to hold, opposition parties need to have the confidence that the political system will guarantee their right to organise, speak, dissent and/or criticise the party in power.

In many democratic systems, the opposition parties have often been described as majority parties or parties that do not wield executive power, the parties that act as a check on the government. The opposition parties express the view of a significant section of the electors and help to ensure that the concerns of the various groups and other interests not represented in the government are not forgotten. The opposition party presents itself as a viable alternative to the ruling party. It may do this by presenting an alternative ideological platform or simply show that it has a greater competence to govern.

It has been acknowledged by democratic theory that the principle of legitimate political opposition is of the most fundamental components of any liberal democracy. According to Diamond and Linz (1998), quoted in Suleiman (2011), over the last few decades, the functionality of competitive party politics in the democratisation process has also become a subject of renewed debates. Democracy is an ideology of opposition as much as it is one of the forms of government. The fundamental role of political opposition, both as a normative value and an empirical manifestation of a proper working liberal democracy, has finally come to be acknowledged by the overwhelming majority of political elites and citizens of all democracies.

What is debatable, however, are the roles of the opposition parties in expanding space for the rule of law, respect for human rights and “good governance in developing democracies such as Nigeria”. It is evident that respect for human rights and good governance die where there are no

criticisms; therefore, in any liberal democracy, the role of the opposition parties cannot be overemphasised. The position of the PDP in Nigeria after the 2015 election makes it not only the second largest party but the largest opposition party at the national level. The PDP, therefore, by virtue of its position as the largest opposition party, is expected to perform the following functions as outlined by Southall (2005): Mobilisation of voters, presenting viable alternatives to the electorate, exposing the shortcomings in government policies, promoting open debates during conferences and seminars, promoting internal democracy, ensuring prudent use of the party's finances and working closely with civil society organisations to ensure electoral prudence during voters' registration and elections.

The state of the opposition parties in Nigeria, with specific emphasis on the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) is not as depicted above, basically because of some challenges such as protracted internal wrangling that the party has faced before and after the 2015 general election. This study, therefore, attempts to unravel the reason why the PDP has failed to effectively perform its roles as the major opposition party in Nigeria; why the party is constantly mired in crises and upheavals of many dimensions, a situation which has prevented the party from providing a credible alternative to the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC), despite being in power as a ruling party for 16 years. Hence, the study shall explore the following research question: Does intra-party crisis within the PDP affect the party's opposition role in Nigeria?

Theoretical Framework

There are many theories of political parties competing for attention in the great task of identifying the causes of and solutions to party crises. Thus, we have the group theory, the class theory and the Elite theory among others. A review of these theories shows clearly that no single one of them can adequately be used to explain party conflicts everywhere and every time. However, on a more general note, we identify the Elite theory to explain the cause of intra-party crisis in the Peoples Democratic Party. The reason for this is that despite the orientations of the other theories, they invariably acknowledge the place of elites in party conflicts.

Elite theory in politics was advanced in response to Marxism. The early elite theorists were conservatives who were opposed not only to socialism,

but also to liberal democracy as expressed by any movement which attempted to give the masses a greater influence in political affairs. They argue that elites were necessary and inevitable and that any revolution which pretended to abolish elites would end up by simply replacing one elite group with another. Elite theorists use two basic lines of argument. First, they argue that certain aspects of human nature make elites inevitable. Second, they argue that elites are necessary for any socio-political organisation to function effectively.

Elite theory often emphasises the differences in inherent abilities. All people are not created equal; some are stronger, more intelligent, more artistic etc. Those people who have the most of the particular abilities which a society rewards become the political elites. There are several elite theorists- Pareto, Mannheim, Michels etc. For the purpose of this work, Roberto Michels' work on elite theory, particularly the iron law of oligarchy is adopted. Oligarchy is domination by the few. The iron law of oligarchy, formulated by Roberto Michels (1911), suggests that there is an inevitable tendency for political organisations and by implications all organisations to be oligarchic. A participatory democratic structure cannot check oligarchic tendencies; they can only disguise them. Michels advanced a number of arguments in support of his law: Elite groups result from the need for specialisation. Elite members have greater expertise and better organisational skills than those possessed by ordinary members; Leaders from cohesive groups because they recognise that this improves their chances of remaining in power; Rank-and-file members of an organisation tend to be apathetic, and are therefore generally disposed to accept subordination and venerate leaders.

Michels iron law of oligarchy states that the necessity for all but the simplest organisations to delegate responsibility internally naturally leads to the development of a cadre of leaders. By virtue of their knowledge and position, leaders are able to manipulate the opinion of followers, or to ignore it. The leadership is free to do so because it possesses a *de facto* monopoly over all these things which contribute to the control of an organisation, such as power, status, channels of communication, and money.

The iron law applies to political parties, its scope is universal, "it is the organisation which gives birth to the dominion of the delegates over the delegators. "Who says organisation, says oligarchy" (Michels, 1962).

Oligarchy then is a concentration of entrenched illegitimate authority and/or influence in the hands of minority, such that de facto what the minority wants is generally what comes to pass even when it goes against the wishes of the majority. What this means is that in the case of democratically structured organisations of either the representative or collective type, the emergence of oligarchy involves two steps: (i) the move from the legitimate to the illegitimate exercise of formal or informal power; and (ii) the concentration of illegitimate power in the hands of a minority such that it is able to retain its position over time against the wishes of the majority, whether those wishes are expressed through disgruntled passive resistance or conscious organised opposition.

There are two ways, according to Michels, to demonstrate that an organisation is oligarchic. One can either show that the organisation does have a democratic structure, in which case a minority has formal authority to rule, as one can show that an oligarchy exists despite a democratic structure. This is to say that before we can say a nominally democratic organisation is oligarchic, we must show first that a minority is having illegitimate power, secondly, that the majority is in some way resisting that power and thirdly, and that there is a pattern of the majority being able to overcome such resistance on issues it feels are important. The iron law of oligarchy, according to Michels, does not promote internal democracy in political parties, as where there is internal democracy, there is a broad participation in the choice of leaders and the selection of candidates. Also, in internal democracy, there is a prominent role for conferences and conventions in policy formulation. It also dictates that policy-making power is concentrated in the hands of party members who are elected and therefore publicly accountable.

The application of this theory to the study of the travails of the PDP as an opposition party is appropriate. It allows us to view the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) within the context of an organisation that cannot avoid oligarchy and this will enable us to have a proper overview of how the strong oligarchic groups have dictated or attempted to dictate the affairs of the party and how this has created a myriad of challenges for the PDP during the period under study.

An Assessment of the Intra-Party Crises in the PDP and Its Decline as the Major Opposition Party in Nigeria, 2015-2025

The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) arose from four different sources—first were those so-called politicians who were denied registration by General Sani Abacha during his self-succession project. They later combined in their lukewarm opposition through the law court, which was under the military strongman, General Sani Abacha. This group called itself the G-34 committee for the fact that the petition against the self-succession project was signed by 34 men and delivered to General Abacha by Chief Solomon Lar. Included in this group was Dr. Alex Ekwueme, former vice president. The second group were those politicians who were former followers of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), who were not opposed to the self-succession of the military strongman (Abacha) but were not part of his machine, nevertheless. The group called itself All Nigerian Congress (ANC) and was led by Chief S.B. Awoniyi. The third group consisted of those who were the followers of Late General Shehu Musa Yar’adua as Peoples Democratic Movement (PDM). This group was led by Chief Tony Anenih and Alhaji Atiku Abubakar. Fourth, there were those who called themselves Social Democrats with the name, Social Progressive Party (SPP). This was a collection of politicians from different parts of the country that failed to make their position felt in the party (Omoruyi 2001).

In the appreciation of the former speaker of House of Representatives, Alhaji Gali Na’abba, “the PDP is a mixed bag of persons with diverse political backgrounds with one and only one purpose. It was meant to send a message to the military that the political class meant business with sending the military back to the barracks. To this extent, the founders covered all and sundry political persuasions: conservatives, radicals and progressives” (*The Guardian*, April 6, 2001).

According to Omoruyi (2001), during the period of military rule, especially in the last years of the Abacha regime, some of these groups like the G-34 played certain roles which sold them to the people for championing the cause of democracy through their activities which for all practical purpose were to oppose military dictatorship. Consequently, during the brief transition period of General Abdusalami Abubakar, the leaders of these groups and others did not find it difficult to assemble themselves in Abuja on July 28,

1998 for the purpose of forming a political party. The result was the formation of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP).

From 1999 to 2015, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) became the dominant party in Nigeria. It won all the presidential elections and most states and national assembly elections up to 2015. These were in 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011. While it would be untenable to contend that the PDP did not record any achievements when it was in power, it is pertinent to note that several contradictions characterised its operations. The party became engrossed in intra-party crisis. This led to frequent change of the party's leadership through presidential and governors' forums manipulation, mass defection, lack of internal party democracy, especially in its candidate selection process, failure to tackle corruption, failure to obey internal zoning arrangement, among others.

In 2013, the PDP witnessed a political tsunamic eruption that crippled the performance of the party in the 2015 general election. The 2013 crisis was precipitated by the grievances of some important party men who were not pleased with the conduct of the leadership of the party. These group protested against arbitrary suspension of members, and violations of democratic principles by the party leadership; the continued suspension of Rivers State Governor, Rotimi Amaechi, which the group considers arbitrary; the changing of the list of delegates of some states to the August 2013 special convention; the dissolution of Adamawa state chapter of the party which is considered illegal. Another major cause of the crisis was the issue of the intention of President Goodluck Jonathan to re-contest in 2015 presidential election. The aggrieved members vigorously protested against the second-term ambition of President Goodluck Jonathan in office. This situation laid the foundation of the intra-party split that led to the collapse of the party during the 2015 general election.

The special convention of the PDP, held on August, 31, 2013, presented the dissident PDP faithful with a golden opportunity to drive home their Agenda. Hence, while the convention was going on, some governors who felt aggrieved by some actions of the party leaders stormed out of the venue to address a press conference, announcing themselves as the 'New' PDP (nPDP), formed to salvage the party from those who they said had highjacked it (Okohue, 2013, Okoli, 2014).

This event signalled the emergence of a splinter party within the ruling PDP. It marked the culmination of a process that had been on a steady build-up over some months in the party. Table 1 below shows the list of notable personalities that formed the nPDP.

Table 1: Notable leaders of the splinter PDP

| S/N | Name | Political Designation | Role/position |
|-----|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. | Atiku Abubakar | Former Vice-President | Party Leader, interim |
| 2. | Abubakar K. Baraje | Former acting chairmen of PDP | Party chairman interim |
| 3. | Olagunsonye Onyinlola | Former National secretary PDP | Party secretary interim |
| 4. | Rotimi Amechi | Governor Rivers State | Lead member |
| 5. | Rabiu Kwankaso | Governor Kano State | Lead member |
| 6. | Sule Lamido | Governor Jigawa state | Lead member |
| 7. | Murtala Nyako | Governor Adamawa state | Lead member |
| 8. | Aliyu Wamako | Governor of Sokoto state | Lead member |
| 9. | Babangida Aliyu | Governor of Niger state | Lead member |
| 10. | Abdulfatah Ahmed | Governor of Kwara state | Lead member |

Source: Okoli 2014

In addition to the aforementioned, a number of serving parliamentarians indicated their alignment with the splinter PDP. At least 26 of the 74 PDP senators aligned with the new PDP, while 102 of the 205 members of the House of Representatives also joined the breakaway faction. As scarcely expected, the foregoing episode came to a climax with massive defections of members of the PDP to the opposition All Progressives Congress (APC) by October, 2013. The emergence of intra-party opposition within the PDP and the subsequent defections of members to an alternative platform is 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. This has since led to the

heating up of the Nigerian polity. It has also created unnecessary diversions and distractions capable of obfuscating leadership focus in that context.

Consequently, the unity of the PDP as a party was eroded as members were entangled in disagreement and legal tussles. It could not surmount the inherent contradictions and eventually lost the 2015 presidential elections. Out of the 29 governorship elections held on April 21, 2015, the PDP managed to win nine, which are: Taraba, Gombe, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Delta, Ebonyi, Abia and Enugu States. Even after the defeat, the party remains largely factionalised, and this continued to weaken its role as a major opposition party in Nigeria.

According to Okoli and Ali (2014), intra-party opposition in Nigeria points to the failure of the Nigerian political parties. By formation, organisation and operation, most political parties in Nigeria have been bereft of a deep sense of the ideal. More often than not, their visions and missions have curiously revolved around the question of wresting power for its own sake. This attitude of party politics has created ample opportunities for infighting that threaten the corporate existence and functional efficiency of Nigerian political parties.

Constraints to the Performance of the PDP as the Major Opposition Party in Nigeria: The Question of Internal Democracy in the PDP

The concentration of resources in the state makes possession of political power very intense. As Richards Joseph (1987) has contended, “Nigeria’s present and future depends upon a prior understanding of the nature, extent and persistence of a certain mode of political behaviour and of its social and economic ramification”. This mode of political behaviour is the “prebendal culture which sees politics as the clearing house for jobs, contracts, and official plunder. In Joseph’s exposition: Democratic Politics and prebendal politics are two sides of the same coin in Nigeria; each can be turned over to reveal the other. The system of prebendal politics enables divergent groups and constituencies to seek to accommodate their interest. The system is often wasteful, unproductive and contributes to the increasing affluence of the relative few, paltry gains for a larger number, and misery for the great majority of people. Since it is a self-justifying system which grants legitimacy to a pattern of persistent conflict and since its *modus*

oparandi is to politicise ethnic, religious and linguistic differences, it serves to make the Nigerian polity simmering cauldron of irresolvable tension over which a lid must regularly be clamped, and just as regularly removed (Joseph, 1991).

The struggle for leadership positions within the opposition PDP, is thus linked to the struggle for easy access to state resources. This is why political elites in the PDP perceive loss of power/influence within the party as a loss of access to their livelihood. It is this perception which appears to have intensified the fight for political positions within the party. This has, in turn, undermined any likelihood of promoting and building a democratic culture within the opposition PDP.

Developing a political democratic culture does not only concern the relations between parties, government, and other elements of society. It also involves the internal functioning of parties. In general, the more consolidated a democracy is, the more its political parties function internally according to democratic principles. Internal democracy includes regular terms of service and alternation in leadership positions, the use of two-way communication channels with mid-level and grassroots membership, and regular and special party conferences (Suleiman, 2011).

As history has shown, democracy in name is an entirely different game from democracy in practice. The existence and strength of a party's internal democratic process can tell us more than its words about the party's fundamentals and its ability to promote democracy. According to (Suleiman, 2011), internal democracy means that a given party employs democratic rules of the game during all lines of decision-making. It is concerned with the extent to which a political party has put in place and follows mechanisms that allow for the party executive to be responsible and accountable to its membership. It also means that in such a party, there is an internal political constitution or competition among the members in the affairs of the party.

The challenges that confront the PDP in terms of entrenching internal democracy are many; political competition is severely limited when internal democracy is constrained. The leadership exercises strict control over the selection of party officials and candidates for public offices, with the exclusion of the majority of the party.

Primary elections are an important test of the extent and degree of democracy within the PDP. Often, the process of nominating party candidates for the purpose of contestation of state power is always fraught with controversies and conflict as a result of the way and manner in which these exercises are carried out by the party leadership. The selection process is usually monopolised by a few individuals who consider themselves the backbone of the party. Usually, questions arise regarding the eligibility and criteria for candidacy, electoral processes and the procedures for securing nomination as PDP's candidate, and the type of electoral system used to select party candidates.

One issue that has dominated the debates among politicians, and particularly, the aggrieved ones, is the method often adopted for candidate selection. The degree of intra-party democracy in candidate selection is determined according to the inclusiveness criteria of "who can be selected" and "who selects candidates"? As provided by the constitution of the party, the PDP select its national leadership through the delegate conference, a form of party caucus in which representatives from the lower branches of the party meet at the national level. According to the party's rule-book, these delegates are expected to be elected by the party members at the various branches- State and Local Government.

Convening a national delegates' conference is usually a huge logistical undertaking for the PDP with high-level acrimony, confrontation and friction that the exercise raises. Many stakeholders normally resort to some tricks to either disrupt conferences or prevent some delegates from attending. In a less institutionalised party like the PDP, the party posits founders, Chief financiers or ethnic chieftains in a boardroom deal. Delegates' conferences are subsequently more pomp and ceremony meant to legitimise already agreed upon leadership positions devoid of any real participation by party members. The lack of inclusiveness and democratic leadership selection processes, lacking any clear mechanisms for neutral and independent dispute arbitration, often has negative consequences on the party's unity and cohesiveness. Consequently, more often than not, intra-party rivalry spills out into open conflict and eventually party splits.

A political system with a high degree of institutionalisation and more stable roots in society can afford to experiment with internal democratisation

reform without the threat to organisational survival, particularly, where the political culture is expected to be more participatory and more accustomed to the use of direct democracy procedures. From its inception, the PDP lacks internal democracy. Most times, what has prevented internal democracy from being realised is the politics of cartel or elite oligarchy. According to Onyekwere (2008), intra-party elections in the PDP have not been free, fair and transparent since 1999. More especially, the election of the National Chairmen has never been a tidy affair since the ouster of the pioneer chairman, Chief Solomon Lar. This has led to many questions being asked about who plays what roles in selecting the PDP National Executives, particularly the National Chairman. The choice of the Party National Chairman is very important for defining the party's course and image. In the PDP, there are no pre-selection mechanisms; this has most times made elections of candidates into various positions in the party controversial and has, over the years, destroyed the image of the party.

The 2010 Electoral Act, section 75, provides that every registered political party shall give the INEC at least 21 days' notice of any convention, conference, or meeting, convened for the purpose of electing members of its executive committees or other governing bodies or nominating candidates for elective offices. However, despite all these provisions, the PDP hardly conforms to these legal codes of internal democracy. The executives of the party caucuses, governors, the monetisation of the party nomination processes, and ill-defined screening processes for candidates by INEC ensure that PDP members do not ultimately, in most cases, nominate and elect their candidates in a transparent and democratic way.

Democracy, according to Schumpeter (1967) is an institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of competitive struggle for peoples' vote. Liberal democracy, on the other hand, according to Guaba (2003), works on certain mechanisms which include: Government by consent, public accountability, majority rule, recognition of minority rights, and constitutional government.

It is quite unfortunate that none of these principles could be found in the intra-party activities of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). There is evidently a death of democracy, transparency and accountability in the

internal electoral system of the PDP. This was reflected in the December 9, 2017, PDP national convention, which produced Uche Secondus as the party's national chairman. Secondus was handpicked by the PDP state governors through what they called 'consensus arrangement'. Weeks before the convention, the governors and powerful members of the party had agreed to crown Uche Secondus the chairman of the party, but could not summon up the courage to inform other contestants to forget their ambitions and support Secondus. Rather, the party duped other contestants by selling forms to them with the impression that all the candidates would have a level playing field when it was clear that that was not the case (DisDay, December 22, 2017).

Some aggrieved members of the party under the aegis of concerned candidates and stakeholders also formed a splinter group with brand name-fresh PDP (FPDP)- in protest of the outcome of the convention, which they described as undemocratic. Director General of the group Prince Obi-Nwosu stated that the group rejected the outcome of the December 9 convention which produced Prince Uche Secondus as PDP National Chairman. He holds that the convention was supposed to be an elective one, where a new National Working Committee (NWC) of the party would emerge. According to him, "most tragically, there was no election on that day; but a selection of predetermined persons who were eventually announced as new NWC members". He further alleged that the Senator Ahmed Makarfi-led National caretaker committee deliberately refused to release the delegate list until barely 24 hours before the convention. He also claimed that some persons on the "unity list" collected nomination forms after the official closing date for the process. In his words:

As committed and dedicated candidates and party stakeholders, we have decided to ensure that internal democracy is sustained in the party. We have decided that the dreams of our founding fathers, who laboured and sacrificed so much to build the party, are not destroyed. To this end, we have officially opened a national secretariat of the party here in Asokoro, Abuja, from where the authentic NWC of the party will be operating (PM News December 23, 2017).

The above scenario shows that the PDP type of consensus is not how democracy is practiced anywhere in the advanced democracies. PDP consensus solution is full of injustice and violates people's rights to contest any election they want or are qualified to take part in. It should be for the members to vote for or reject the candidates standing for election, not for governors and other party leaders to decide who is to serve the party against the wish of the members. That also denies members of the party the right to choose who they want to lead or serve them. It is a system that encourages and promotes authoritarianism, corruption, manipulation and other undemocratic tendencies in the party's affairs.

The PDP conventions since 1999 have given no cause to cheer; they have been characterised by bickering, boycotts, imposition of candidates and litigations. From Dr. Alex Ekwueme to Umar Damagum, the PDP has in 25 years witnessed the controversial emergence and exit of fifteen national chairmen in substantive or acting capacity. Table 2 below shows the list of national chairmen of the PDP from 1998 to 2025.

Table 2: PDP Chairmen from 1998-2025.

| S/N | Name | Date | Regime/party in power |
|-----|--------------------------|-----------|----------------------------------|
| 1 | Dr. Alex Ekweme | 1998- | Abdusalami Abubakar/ Military |
| 2 | Solomon Lar | 1998-1999 | Chief Olusegun Obasanjo/ PDP |
| 3 | Banabas Gemade | 1999-2001 | |
| 4 | Audu Ogbe | 2001-2005 | |
| 5 | Ahmadu Ali | 2005-2008 | |
| 6 | Prince Vincent Ogbulafor | 2008-2010 | Musa Yaradua/PDP |
| 7 | Okwesileze Nwodo | 2010-2011 | Goodluck Jonathan/PDP |
| 8 | Haliru Bello Mahammed | 2011 | |
| 9 | Kawu Baraje | 2011-2012 | |
| 10 | Bamanga Tukur | 2012-2014 | |
| 11 | Adamu Muazu | 2014-2015 | |
| 12 | Uche Secondus | 2015-2016 | Mohammed Buhari/APC |
| 13 | Ali Modu Sherif | 2016 | |
| 14 | Ahmed Markafi | 2016-2018 | |
| 15 | Uche Secondus | 2018-2021 | |
| 16 | Iyiochia Ayu | 2021-2023 | Ahmed Tinubu/APC |
| 17 | Aliyu Umar Damagum | 2023-Date | |

Source: Author's Compilation

From Table 2 above, it is clear that the PDP has, in 25 years, had seventeen national chairmen in substantive or acting capacity. If the lifespan of the party is to be shared among the chairmen it produced, each of them spent an average of 13 months in power. And of all the leaders it produced, only a few had a glorious exit; most of them were forced out of office in controversial circumstances.

It is equally apparent from the table that the PDP witnessed the emergence and existence of more national chairmen during the period it became an opposition party, from 2015 to date, than any other period in its history as a political party. In the last eight years, the party has had about

seven national chairmen. After Adamu Mu'azu was forced to resign after the 2015 general elections, Prince Uche Secondus took over in an acting capacity and had to be booted out via a court order, after which Alimodu Sherif stepped in and was subsequently removed during the May 21, 2016 ill-fated Portharcourt convention and replaced with Ahmed Markafi, after series of court battles, and the reemergence of Uche Secondus during the 2017 convention. And subsequently, Iyochia Ayu and Aliyu Damagum in successive order. The time, energy and resources that would have been utilised in providing a strong and formidable opposition and credible alternative view by the PDP are devoted to struggling for party positions and settling intra-party differences. And this has in turn crippled the strength and position of the PDP as the major opposition party in Nigeria.

The recent crisis of the party stems from the pre- and post-2023 general election events. During the primaries, the party found itself again in another internal crisis that has caged its opposition operational wings to date. The wave of the tussle saw the two immediate past chairmen of the party, Uche Secondus and Iyochia Ayu, being disgraced out of office. Uche Secondus, who was initially supported by Wike, fell out of favour, leading to his suspension by his ward, and his subsequent eviction from office on October 31, 2021. His successor, Iyorchia Ayu's conflict with the G-5 governors led by Nyesom Wike, also resulted in his suspension by his ward. The exit of Ayu, saw the emergence of Damagum, who is still battling with the wave of the crisis. According to Ita et al (2024), the internal crisis within the party stemmed from the outcome of the presidential primaries, which saw Atiku Abubakar emerged as the party's candidate for the 2023 general elections with 371 votes, closely followed by Nyesom Wike, with 237 votes. Meanwhile, Wike refused to support Atiku during the general elections and instead backed Tinubu, who later appointed him into his Cabinet as the Minister of the FCT. Since then, the soul of the party has been captured by the Presidency through Nyesom Wike, who is a serving minister in Tinubu's cabinet, eroding the PDP's strength and value as the major opposition party in Nigeria. According to Ngomba et al (2019), opposition politics are inevitable in a democratic society. Genuine political opposition is a necessary attribute of democracy. How can a country be democratic without virile opposition parties? How do you ensure a proper check and

balance of a government under the democratic process without an opposition? The existence of an opposition, without which politics ceases and administration takes over, is indispensable to the functioning of democratic political systems.

Conclusion

This research has provided an appraisal of political party and intra-party crises in Nigeria with particular focus on the PDP, 2015-2025, but not exhaustively; it provides some basis for further research on the issue of intra-party relations. The coming together of different individuals or groups under the label of a political party presupposes inevitability of a pattern of interaction among them. Such interactions usually produce impulses either in a cordial or conflictual way. In the opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), intra-party relations are seen to oscillate between these two ends, but more in the direction of the latter. And this has, in turn, weakened the strength of the party as the major opposition party in Nigeria. Among the underlying factors of this state of affairs are the nature of the PDP and its operating environment; dominant interest or personality influence; ideological emptiness of the party; flawed understanding of the meaning and purpose of politics, among others. The situation, however, not only constitutes a threat to democratic existence but as well affects the growth and fortunes of the party. First, party growth depends largely on elements like a party's degree of institutionalisation and coherence and discipline among party members. In other words, a party grows when it can reduce the extent of factionalism and splits through the development of an effective internal regulatory mechanism strong enough to command the obedience and support of members. Such a party no doubt would be strong enough to stand for competitive elections as well as be able to garner the people's support for electoral success. On the other hand, where a party is divided against itself, this reduces its mobilisation capacity and is at the risk of fading away with time.

To address these issues and constraints identified, there is a strong need for the party to play politics around sound ideological foundations in order to give meaning to the content and context of intra-party relations in the party.

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