

## **Opposition Political Parties and Promotion of Good Governance In Nigeria: Demystifying the Role of Peoples Democratic Party under All Progressive Congress Led Government**

*<sup>1</sup>Anthony Itumo, <sup>2</sup>Chinyere Ndukwe and <sup>1</sup>Victor C. Amagwula*

<sup>1</sup>Department of Political Science, Ebonyi State University, P.M.B 053, Abakaliki, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Department of Public Administration, Ebonyi State University, P.M.B 053, Abakaliki, Nigeria

**Abstract:** One of the cultures of a democracy that distinguished it from authoritarian leadership is the presence of functional and healthy opposition political parties. Suffice it to assert that political parties form the bedrock of a democratic system of government. In Nigerian the formation of All Progressive Congress (APC) at the wake of 2015 general election made manifest the existence of formidable opposition. This development rekindled Nigerians' confidence in the opposition parties and by extension made the quest for good governance in Nigeria more promising. Evidentially, the role of APC as effective opposition party in Nigeria's Fourth Republic made her won public confidence and by extension became the ruling party after 2015 general elections in Nigeria. This development accorded the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) the leading role of opposition party in Nigerian democracy. In the light of this political outcome, this study through a descriptive method, examined the role of the PDP towards the promotion of good governance in the Nigerian and its challenges. Using content analytical technique the study discovered that the PDP is ill-prepared to play the role of opposition party in Nigeria democracy due to protracted leadership tussle that bedeviled the party. It argues that the inability of PDP to effectively and promptly manage her internal crisis largely eroded of its opposition role. To this end, this paper recommends that the PDP should tackle its internal division to reposition itself to play the role of opposition in Nigeria.

**Key words:** Nigeria • Good Governance • Democracy • Opposition party and leadership tussle

### **INTRODUCTION**

It is an indisputable fact that healthy opposition political party is an essential structure in every functional democracy. Put differently, the survival, stability and how robust a democratic society operates, is largely determined by the role and responsiveness of the opposition party. Stressing on this observation, Mwolwus [1] noted that good governance and functional democracy needs the push and pressure of a virile opposition. He further notes that every government needs a constant reminder that there is always an alternative group waiting to take over if it fails [2].

Good governance all over the world and Nigeria in particular is largely the product of vibrant opposition party structure. This is because every vibrant opposition party constantly checkmates and constructively criticizes

the policy deficiencies of the incumbent government. This effort by the opposition structure is towards becoming a good alternative in governance process.

Unfortunately, Olaniyi and Saawua [3] argue that the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) looks ill-prepared for the opposition role it assumed in 2015 after her lost in the last general election in Nigeria. They further maintain that governance challenges that bedeviled the Nigerian state is partly due to confused and weak opposition structure and operation of the PDP especially since 2015 [3:2]. It becomes apparent to say that internal crisis and structural weakness that greeted the Peoples Democratic Party before August 2017 negatively affected her supposed role in good governance process as an opposition party. One of the challenges facing the growth of democracy in Nigeria and as such retards the evidences of good governance is the problem of ineffective and weak

opposition party structure. This issue has become so pronounced that political party members no longer consider national interest or peoples will instead they continuously change party platform in the bid to protect their own political ambitions.

In every functional democracy, good governance is when government programmes and policies are put into actions and implemented towards improving the socio-economic well being of the people. Thus, for government to live up to her expectations, there is a serious need for a reminder or pressure from the side of the opposition party.

In Nigeria, after the 2015 general election, the Peoples Democratic Party becomes the leading opposition [3]. Though, there is an impression that the PDP is failing as an opposition party judging by the role played by the current ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) when it was performing the task of opposition party. For instance, the defunct Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), in particular battled the PDP when it planned to completely remove fuel subsidy in January 2012.

Unfortunately, since 2015 till date, the leading opposition PDP is seemingly yet to recover from the political injury it sustained after her unprecedented and shocking defeat in 2015 general election, coupled with the internal crisis that bedeviled the party over leadership tussle, which created an avenue for her members to defect to the ruling All Progressives Party (APC), hence making the opposition structure weak at the detriment of Nigeria's democracy and good governance. Thus, this becomes problematic to the values of representative democracy.

This paper is a bold attempt to study the trendiness of good governance as a political concept and its connecting rod with the role of opposition structure in any political society with special interest in the Nigerian state's Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) through a descriptive approach. The theoretical framework harps on the theory of prebendalism. The paper further conceptualized good governance and opposition structure and her role in engineering the manifestation of the evidences of good governance. To this effect, important recommendations were made towards addressing the observable lapses in the operation of opposition elements in the Nigerian state.

**Theoretical Framework:** Theory simply means set of propositions systematically postulated to explain a given phenomenon. Thus, this paper adopts the theoretical

framework of prebendalism. This theory was developed by Joseph in 1996. The central idea of this theory is that office holders and power wielders appropriate public offices and resources for their own good and interest without minding public will. Thus, in this scenario, party members who decamp or defect are largely after their own interest instead of using opposition party structure as a platform to advocate good governance and socio-economic well being of the people. This development is uncommon in countries with effective opposition party structure like the Britain and the United States.

The implication of the above postulation in relation to the phenomenon under study is that elected representatives in the Nigerian state under a particular party framework misappropriate the democratic requirement of such platform against personal political aspiration. Thus, this further endangers the much expected yield of good governance. Buttressing on this scenario, scholar like Aborishade [4] asserts that the recurrent incident of defecting among party members is not really for national purpose or good, but for the desire for increasing political chances among power mongers in the Nigerian state. Thus, this tendency among prebends (party members) continuously makes opposition elements weaker and insignificant in promoting the culture and indicators of good governance in the Nigerian state.

**Conceptualizing Good Governance:** Political analyst, policy makers and social scientists have made different efforts towards reviewing the cardinal issues that constitute good governance. To this effect, the essential factors that translates to good governance was given by the United Nations Economic and social commission (UNESCO) and scholars like Jega [5] and Gisselquist [6].

According to the UNESCO [7], good governance is characterized by mass participation, consensus, responsiveness, effective and efficiency in policy issues, rule of law, equity and inclusiveness. Good governance is achieved when government policies and decisions are in line with public will and are thoroughly implemented. Good governance assures that corruption is minimized, the view of minorities is taken into account and that the voices of the vulnerable in society are heard in decision making.

It is also responsive to the present and future needs of the society [7]. Though, in the view of Gisselquist [6] the concept of good governance is ambiguous and lacks clarity. Hence, he stated thus;

“Governance is a term that has become a part of the vernacular of a large range of development institutions and other actors within the international arena.

What it means exactly, however has not been so well established [6].

Meanwhile citing former United Nations secretary general, Banki Moon, Gissilquest asserts that good governance is perhaps the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development. Thus despite this observation, good governance is an extremely elusive objective. It means different thing to different power wielders and state actors.

Furthermore, works by the World Bank and other multilateral development banks on good governance addresses economic institutions and public accountability regulatory reform and public sector skills and leadership. Haven said this; suffice it to assert that good governance is nothing but the product of functional government. Good governance is the manifestation of governments’ demonstration of will to implement strategic socio-economic policies and programmes of the state with the aim of improving the citizen’s welfare. Stressing on this Jega [5] notes that good governance is manifest in every functional democracy. Thus, there’s good governance where democratic ideals are respected and practiced. Jega [5] conceptualized good governance from the perspective of democracy. This made him to say that democracy is the condition for responsive governance. In line with Jega’s submission, Nwabueze [8] argues that it is only in a political environment of constitutional democracy that good governance can thrive. Thus by extension, good governance is the outcome of political tolerance, stable political system, functional political institutions and healthy political competition [8: 16].

However, despite the imperativeness of good governance in every political society, it has become relative difficult to achieve in totality. This difficulty is as a result of emerging internal political threat that is peculiar to every political system [7]. Stressing on these threats on the manifestation of the evidences of good governance especially in the Nigeria state, Jega [5] captures that electoral violence, political intolerance, selfish political ambitions, pettiness, intra- party and inter-party violence has made good governance and democratic consolidation elusive in Nigeria and Africa at large. Johnston and Kpundeh [9] sums that lack of transparency and

accountability along with non-implementation of government policies has continuously back warded the pace of effective governance in the Nigerian State.

To this end, it becomes apparent that erstwhile in developed nations like United states and Britain, good governance thrive on the platform of inter-structural relations, political will to implement strategic social policies, accountability of government structures and respect for rule of law and democratic principles. But the challenges of good governance are becoming worrisome in developing states either due to weak political structures or abuse of power [8: 13].

### **Scholars’ Perspectives on the Concept of Opposition**

**Political Party:** The concept of opposition party is essential and predominant in political lexicon. Though, it is obvious that opposition parties exist both in the politics of developed counties and developing countries, but their divergences lie in the scope of their functionality, patriotic tendency and perception of politics.

In politics, the opposition comprises one or more political parties or other organized groups that are opposed to the government or the ruling party of a country. It is this party that goes against another party especially in policies making and governance actions [10]. The degree of opposition varies according to political conditions of given political system. Pointing on this political condition, Shokpeka and Nwaokocha [11] asserts that opposition party is muffled in many parts of Africa because of colonial Legacies and cultural factors. He further noted that democracy in Nigeria will develop if the opposition appropriately appreciates its role and adequately carries out same with expected altruistic motives. For instance, in the parliamentary system of government as practiced in the United Kingdom, the task and responsibilities of the opposition party is clearly stated. Meanwhile, in the developed states, they co-ordinate the activities of the party through effective leadership especially on issues affecting the public [12].

Shokpeka and Nwaokocha [11] further asserts that opposition party provides alternative ideas and socio-economic ideology in the state. Thus, this is a requisite for good governance. Furthermore, the network of Ethiopian Scholars (NES) stated that effective and sustainable opposition party is dependent on the level of party tolerance, respect for party views and democratic ethos. Thus, opposition party should not be suppressed or intimidated in any political environment. Popoola [13]

buttressed on this view when he noted that opposition party in Nigeria must be pragmatic. Hence, opposition must not be for opposition sake and it must be devoid of violence and must be within the globally accepted standard or best practice. In his exact words, he captures that:

“They people in government are not angels, they are human and indeed Nigerians. They are liable to make mistakes and in the same way as party in opposition. They only duty on opposition party need is to provide an alternative view and this must be properly dissected, articulated and effectively communicated to the general Public [13:5].

Meanwhile, Awolowo [14] stressed on the challenges of opposition party and its effect in the Nigerian state. He asserts that oppression and victimization of the opposition elements was a key factor that led to the collapse of the first republic. Awolowo [14] also argued that dissent is a hallmark of representative democracy and effective governance.

From the above scholars view, suffice it to note that there must be opportunities for persons holding contrasting ideas, views outlook and philosophy concerning the solution to social, political and economic, problem to air their view freely and without any form of restriction. Also, there should be an ample opportunity for society to debate alternate courses of action before deciding upon a particular policy. This condition is a condition for good governance and functional representation.

**The Evolution of Opposition Politics and Party in Nigeria:** The institution of opposition politics and party in the Nigerian Political history was strongly established and became more influential in the first republic when the Northern people’s congress (NPC) and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) formed the federal government and Chief Obafemi Awolowo of all Action Group (AG) left the Western Region as Premier to the Centre in the Parliament to lead the opposition [15]. That was the period when Nigeria actually felt that the Country had an Opposition which made opposition culture more robust in Nigeria politics as such puts the sir Tafawa Belewa NPC Government on Its toes. Though, politics of intolerance, suspicious and bitterness among the major political parties prompted the military to

intervene in Nigerian Politics on January 15, 1966. Mba [16] captures that the second republic was ushered with a presidential system of government. There were many opposition political parties but the most focal of all the five political parties of the peoples redemption party (PRP), Great Nigerian’s people’s party (GNPP) and the Nigerians people party (NPP) was the Unity party of Nigeria headed by the same chief Obafemi Awolowo who was the leader of opposition in the first republic.

Writing on the present political dispensation which started in 1999, Mba [16] argues that the 16 (Sixteen) years of people’s Democratic Party (PDP) made opposition party structure to take a different dimension as the country never witnessed a strong opposition. The reason for this was a result of the fact that the political parties which could have stood in opposition were not settled as they were bedeviled with serious internal crisis which did not give them the opportunity to scrutinize the government [16: 4]. Also, he further notes that those in the political parties were not consistent as they kept jumping from one political party to the other. Meanwhile, the beneficiary of the instability during that moment was the PDP. Although, the only party that was to have stood as a formidable opposition between 1999 and 2003 was the Alliance for democracy (AD) but because they wanted to protect Obasanjo who is from the South West Which they believed was representing the turn of the area to be at the Centre, it chickened out. This was what led to its disintegration before it eventually died. The Action congress of Nigeria (ACN) which came after the AD in the south West and which could have been an opposition party, did not have the muscle under the presidency of Obasanjo to do so.

Egwemi [17] sums that Nigeria in the past 16 years of the ongoing political dispensation started experiencing real opposition with the emergence of the Action Congress of Nigeria which had six states of Lagos, Osun, Ogun Ekiti, Oyo and Edo. These six states gave the party strength to mount formidable machinery used to confront the PDP. It also set up a powerful publicity organ at the national level headed by a lawyer and a journalist, Alhaji Lai Muhammed [17:3]. Thus, in a bid to strengthen the opposition foundation of the Nigeria politics and to reshape power relations between and among political parties in Nigeria, there was a strong alliance between Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), Congress for progressive Change (CPC) and the All Nigeria Peoples party (ANPP) into formidable opposition called All

Progressives Congress (APC). This marked a new era in Nigeria's democracy and governance process. This new era was manifest in power influence as the APC took control of Nigeria power both at the Centre and the State level [18]. This political scenario gave the hitherto ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), the role of leading opposition party after her unprecedented political defeat in the 2015 general election.

**PDP and Opposition Role in Nigeria's Democracy: An Overview:** It is imperative to note that political party is one of the ingredients that bring out the taste of democracy. In other words, political party is an indispensable structure of democracy as a governance culture. Though, the extent to which any political party exercises internal harmony, healthy ideology and enjoys public confidence determines its democratic and political relevance and extent to which it can influence the electorate and machineries of the government.

Haven said the above; the People's Democratic Party (PDP) did not get a safe landing after the 2015 general elections. During the above election and after sixteen (16) years of uninterrupted control of national power by the PDP, it lost to the All Progressive Congress (APC) thus, a fate that made it a leading opposition party [19]. Meanwhile, instead of the party (PDP) to girdle and position itself towards playing such a role that was crucial for the survival of Nigeria's democracy, it got itself enmeshed with internal crisis over leadership tussle which translated into unpatriotic behaviour as her members started to defect to the ruling All Progressives Congress in search of brighter political atmosphere. In view of this, Dozie [20] strongly asserts that the party has completely failed its members and Nigerians as far as opposition politics is concerned. In his exact words, Dozie [20] aptly noted that thus;

The party has found itself in a protracted crisis since the unexpected emergence of Senator Ali Modu Sheriff as its national chairman. Shortly after his emergence, many party faithful within and outside the PDP cried foul that the emergence of sheriff portends a big danger for the future of the party. They agreed that Sheriff, former Borno State Governor will only succeed in ruining and destabilizing the party because of his antecedents [20:3].

Furthermore, suffice it to note that the hitherto leadership rancor that bedeviled the PDP did not only affect party politics but also weakened the opposition capacity of the party which was manifest in the Edo and

Ondo 2017 gubernatorial election. By this, the party lacked the collective will at state level to nominate and support a single candidate for the political job especially in Edo State [20].

Supporting this view, Mwolwus [1] reckoned that as APC assumed its new role of a ruling party, Nigerians expected to see a robust opposition from the PDP; an opposition element that would aid in engineering the course of fighting poverty through supportive ideas, an opposition element that would initiate policy measures through constructive criticism towards addressing the rising problem of unemployment. This reasoning is based on the reality that opposition structure is an essential part of any governance process in any political society. But instead, there was sheer manifestation of fighting, squabbling, bickering, criticism and counter criticism among party members. Meanwhile, it is on record that the defeat of 2015 general elections highly destabilized the party in no small measures, thus prompting many Nigerians to begin to wonder if the party, amidst the defeat and attendant confusion can play the role of an opposition effectively. In the light of the foregoing, Dozie [20] argue that before PDP can make itself instrumental in the course of good governance and democratic consolidation in Nigeria under the umbrella of opposition party, it must first put its house in order by ensuring internal democracy, carry all its members along and be willing to build a strong and united party devoid of rancor and bickering. Meanwhile, Egbosiuba [21] aptly captures that internal democracy goes beyond a party's ability to freely elect her flag bearers without any form of imposition of candidates. It also entails a party's ability to harmonize her ideas and orientations in line with public will and values. Thus, from this perspective internal democracy connotes structural stability and ideological will of a given political party and its reflection in governance process.

Furthermore, some of its prominent members must embark on confidence building in order to stabilize the party and perhaps reinvigorate the mind of her followers towards building a credible party structure. Meanwhile, some opinions hold that the reason why it seems as if the PDP looks ill prepared or weak in discharging its opposition was because she never saw her defeat coming in the 2015 general elections. Thus, the role of opposition becomes strange to the party.

Furthermore, scholars like Olaniyi and Saawua [19] note that another disturbing trend that has impinged on the capacity of the PDP to discharge her opposition role towards promoting good governance in Nigeria is the issue of defection. Strategically, to them, defection at this time and in this context is unjustifiable and unpatriotic. It

only depicted PDP members who defected as “fair-weather politicians”, who left their crisis-ridden party in search of political green pastures and brighter political atmosphere. Hence, patriotism also entails accepting public responsibility that will improve national value. Thus, declining any vital responsibility in a given public institution amounts to unpatriotic tendency.

Suffice it to note that Nigeria needs patriotic party members who are vibrant, keen and bold to represent the opposition structure of this nascent democracy. These crop of individuals will always keep the ruling party on its toes; an opposition that will look at issues dispassionately and analyses them critically without sentiments. In view of this, the national chairman of the APC, Chief John Odige Oyegun argued that; “our great party needs a strong opposition party to keep it on its toes for the benefit of the populace”.

To this end, it is crystal clear that Nigeria’s nascent democracy from the purview of opposition ideals and culture from 2015 till date has dramatically fractured and stunted apparently due to the internal crisis and general structural weakness of the PDP to stand in the governance gap between the ruling APC and the electorates. This scenario is in sharp deviation in what is obtainable erstwhile in developed states like the United States and Britain. Hence, it becomes expedient and exigent for the opposition structure to rise to her task given how strategic such a role is in our course for democratic consolidation and in achieving remarkable stride in good governance. Thus, this can be done through political sensitization among the members. This measure is crucial in re-awakening the spirit and task of opposition party. Thus, through sensitization, political enlightenment and internal stability, the people’s Democratic Party (PDP) and other opposition parties can muster the human and material resources to watch dog the governance flaws of All Progressives Congress (APC).

## CONCLUSION

The study affirms good governance depends on the existence of vibrant and robust opposition polities. This means that the presence of opposition parties retracts the ruling party from sliding into arbitrary behaviours that could deter good governance in the state. By implications, without the presence of opposition elements to be on the toe of the ruling party, power could be abused and rule of law violated as such resulting to negligence of public will in governance process. It was because of this reason that Popoola [13] avers that people in government are not

angels, they are human and indeed Nigerians. They are liable to make mistakes and in the same way as party in opposition. The only duty on opposition party need is to provide an alternative view and effectively communicated to the general public. Nigeria’s political development is strongly linked and dependent on the healthy role and functionality of all its political institutions including political parties. This observation categorically made Awolowo [14] to submit that dissent is a hallmark of representative democracy and effective governance which is result-based. He further reckoned that for functional opposition structure that will be a pillar in engineering the course of good governance in Nigeria, there is need to eschew victimization and oppression of opposing elements. Instead, tolerance and a wider political space should be created for a sound and healthy political system.

**Recommendations:** In line with the fundamental findings of this study, the researcher makes the following recommendations:

- There is serious need for the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) and other opposition elements to girdle their actions towards presenting themselves as alternative machinery to governance in healthy and democratic manners.
- Through advocacy and political sensitization, the right opposition ideals and values should be inculcated in the orientation of Nigeria’s political parties for better perspective of issues.
- The hallmark of any party ideology should anchor on patriotism and selfless service against the negative orientation of prebendalism and political sentiment.
- Lastly, the tendency for undue defection from one political party to another especially in search selfish brighter political opportunity should be condemned both by the Nigerian public and mass media. Through this, party members will start seeing political party as an instrument for political development good governance.

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