

# **The Dynamics of Party Alliance and Coalition in Nigeria's Fourth Republic**

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## **Abstract**

*As a democratic institution, political party does exist with the aim of capturing political power by competing for peoples' votes either alone or in cooperation with other party/parties. This paper examines the dynamic of alliance/coalition within the context of party politics in Nigeria's democratic journey with a focus on the manner and difficulty in party competition. As a result, this was subjected to qualitative-descriptive method. The paper submits that momentous attempts for political parties in Nigeria to form alliances in order to challenge the dominant parties and turn them into a winning coalition were marked by fiasco. Therefore, the perennial collapse and failures of party alliances culminated into the merger of three political parties to form the present governing All Progressive Congress (APC) which displaced the hitherto dominant Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Alignment and re-alignment geared towards creating grand coalition among numerous parties become necessary to strengthen competitive party system in order to achieve the objectives of capturing power for the benefit of the people.*

**Keywords:** Alliance, coalition, party, politics, fourth republic, Nigeria.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout history people have always come together for the purpose of achieving a particular end. In traditional societies, contending issues and divergent interest were harmonized to enhance cooperation as well as foster peaceful interaction. Thus, groups upon groups emerged as products of these interactions.

However, the role of individuals in any political system is in harmony with the degree of accommodation of political system which allows for unimpeded association. Democratic system for instance allows formation or existence of political parties. So, plurality of political party becomes one of the glaring features of modern liberal democracy. Nonetheless, the emergence of political parties in the modern world is closely associated with the emergence of constitutionalism and representative government. Section 40 of the 1999 Constitution as amended gives the people freedom to form associations and belong to political parties of their choice. As a democratic institution, political party does exist with the aim of capturing political power by subjecting itself to legal means of electioneering to compete for peoples' votes either alone or in cooperation (coalition or alliance) with other party/parties.

From the foregoing, this paper seeks to examine the phenomenon of alliance and coalition in Nigerian party politics. In doing this, the paper is segmented in to conceptual clarification of political parties, coalition, and alliance and provided a theoretical framework. It further examines cases of coalition formation in Nigeria's democratic history. Finally, it explores the challenges to alliance formation within the context of interparty politics and what it portends for democracy in Nigeria.

## **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

### **POLITICAL PARTY**

There exists preponderance in opinion of writers and scholars of political science; likewise we have various definitions of political party. This is because the meaning of political party is usually coloured by different ideological spectrums.

Citing Agbaje, Iseolorunkanmi in Ajayi and Fashagba defines political parties as a group of persons bonded in policy and opinion in support of a general political cause which essentially is the pursuit, capture and retention for as long as democratically feasible of government and its offices. He further quoted Drowse and Hughes (1972) definition as being "associations formally organized with the explicit and declared purpose of acquiring and maintaining legal control, either singly or in coalition with other similar associations over the personnel and the policy of government of an actual or prospective state"

Political parties could be seen by their common aim. That is seeking political power either singly or in cooperation with other parties. This definition brings to bear the activities of political parties as regards the subject matter of this paper. This reiterates the importance of party coalition in a competitive party system. As observed by Schumpeter, "the first and foremost aim of each political party is to prevail over the others in order to get into power or to stay in it". Therefore, any legitimate means of achieving this objective become pertinent for political parties.

In all, it is also worthwhile to observe that the salient points that run through these definitions can be aptly summarized thus, that a political party is an organization whose goal is to capture public office in any electoral competition. And that there is a group, the group is organized, the aim of the group as it has always been is to control political power which differentiates it from pressure groups. However, the concept of group, posits the party as a corporate body with a distinctive identity, members can be identified from non-members. By being organized, it implies that the party is stratified with various levels of authority.

## COALITION

The Cambridge International Dictionary of English defined coalition as the union of different political parties or groups for a particular purpose usually for a limited time. It is also a pact or treaty among individuals or groups, during which they cooperate in joint action each in their own self-interest, joining forces together for a common cause. Coalitions can be found in politics and government, military, economic, social groups, activism, etc. More importantly, coalitions are often the norm in parliamentary democracies as Flemming and etal observe that usually opposition parties in Western Europe declare their intent to form a coalition government after winning an upcoming election invariably a pre-electoral coalition (PEC). This kind of coalition is formed prior to an election involving two or more political parties putting their weaknesses and strengths together in order to bolster electoral success. It could also be post-election merger for the purpose of forming a government in a situation where no single party has a majority as in coalition government that occurs in parliamentary systems just like in Nigeria's first republic.

Samuel Bacharach (2005) defines; a coalition as a politically mobilized collection of interest groups or individuals committed to achieving a common outcome (i.e., resistance or change). Through political mobilization you create a group that has some sense of shared goals and/or a sense of connected interests. A coalition is rather an alliance for joint action.

According to Williams H. Riker in International Encyclopedia of Social Science coalition is typically regarded as a parliamentary or political grouping less permanent than a party or a faction or an interest group. But the term in recent times has acquired a technical significance in social science theories with the elaboration of the theory of n-person games. The notion of coalition formulation is central to this theory because coalition is the characteristic form of social organization for political decision making generally. The theory of n-person games was propounded by Joan Von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern. They observed a fundamental difference with respect to ascertain the best way to win between two person-games and the one that involve more than two persons. The problems that arise in the two scenarios are: the best strategy for each player to select against his opponent in a two person game. While in three person or more games the problem for each player is to choose partner(s) who can collectively win. So, the mutual selection of partner(s) is called coalition and the theory is basically on the process of forming coalitions.

Similarly, Gamson in International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences defined coalition in a more precise way. According to him, coalition is the joint use of resources to determine the outcome of a decision in a mixed motive situation involving more than two units. Here, there is always the possibility that at least two of the players may do better if they put their resources together (human and material). A lesson learnt from coalition formation according to Gamson is "strength is weakness and playing to win is playing to lose".

## ALLIANCE

In technical terms, Alliances as perceived by Arnold Wolfers in the International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences to mean promise of mutual military assistance between two or more sovereign states. Some propagandistic advantages may be gained by applying the term to loose agreement for cooperation. This type of cooperation exists at the international arena since it involves two different nations. Their coming together is greatly undermined by a specific goal which will be beneficial to the parties. The two terms are closely related, and even interchangeable in many cases. However, the two words focus on different things. *Alliance* is more about mutual interests or benefit, while *coalition* is more about doing some action. As a result of this, that theory of alliances has been used to describe party coalition.

However, within the Nigerian context, alliance has been used by political analysts and observers as same or similar to the concept of coalition. This is because in Nigeria political parties form alliances based on what they stand to gain from such actions. It is for this reason that the terms coalition and alliance are used interchangeably in this paper.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The most useful theory is the 'Minimum Resource' model developed by Gamson in 1961, Riker in 1962 and some features anticipated by Caplow back in 1956. They hypothesized that a coalition will form where total resources are as small as possible still being sufficient. For instance, according to Gamson, where in a political convention, there are three candidates, where candidate A controls 48% of the votes, B who controls 30% and C controls 22%. Each of them has absolute control over the vote of his supporters. The rule is that, simple majority is nominated.

From the above, applying the minimum resources theory, BC coalition, with 52% of the vote, is the smallest of the three possible winning coalitions; it is obviously the one that will be formed. Thus, in this situation, strength when is defined as amount of resources possessed before any coalition is formed is really weakness, since the strongest candidate with over 48% of the votes is excluded from the winning coalition.

Gamson, contends that the cheapest coalition principle could be applied to groups of any size, it does not mean defeat for the strongest players. In a further example, if there had been a four-man game in which candidate A and B each controlling 24% of votes with C controlling 22% and D 30%. Candidate D would have been both the strongest player and a member of the cheapest winning coalition. It is unwise to say that initial strength is disadvantage in a coalition situation; strength is considered weakness only under certain conditions. These conditions can clearly be specified by minimum resource theory.

The controversy that is generated from what an outcome of coalition would be could be seen from the angle of players belief in commensurate reward to resources invested in the coalition. The term parity norm is used to denote this principle of distributive justice applied to coalition. It is the general feelings of the players that they deserve rewards or profit in proportionate to what they have contributed. This principles discourages formation of coalition because if a player gains from a coalition an amount proportional to the resources he/she contributes, it is apparently to his advantage to join the coalition in which his resources represents the largest possible share of the total resources pulled together.

In candid opinion, the parity norm is even difficult to attain because of the standard of measurement. Any coalition on this basis, a smaller partner(s) will always complain or foresee a situation of marginalization. However, in any coalition situation where resources are unequal, bargaining becomes necessary. Another theory in this area is called minimum power. According to L.S. Shapely minimum power is a method of assessing the worth of an n-person game for any player. Furthermore, it is based on the number of times a player is the pivotal members, that is an important member who change an insufficient coalition into a winning coalition, Gamson interprets the pivotal power as a weight of a player's initial bargaining power. The power here is different from the amount of players' initial resources.

Invariably according to Gamson player's pivotal power is the proportion of times his resources can change a losing coalition into a winning one. Mathematically represented by shapely and Shubik in 1954 as  $P/N$  where N is the total number of permutations among the players and P is the number of pivotal.

## **EVOLUTION OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN NIGERIA**

A variety of historical circumstances and behavioural motivation can lead to the formation of political parties. A political party can thus emerge as a result of the development of parliamentary system and election procedure. This informed the emergence of political parties in countries like Belgium, Denmark, Britain, Finland, France, Italy, Netherland, Norway and Sweden. To a very extent most of the political parties in Nigeria belonged to similar category.

The first political party to be formed in Nigeria was Herbert Macaulay's Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) formed in 1922 at a period when the elective principle was introduced for the composition of the legislative council. The Nigerian Youth Movement and the National Council of Nigeria and

Cameroon (later National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC)) joined the band wagon in 1934 and 1944 respectively as a result of the series of achievements that were recorded in electoral politics.

In anticipation of the election that will follow the constitutional reforms of the early 1950's, the Jamiyyar Mutanen Arewa and the Egbe Omo Oduduwa metamorphosed into the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) and the Action Group (AG) respectively. These organizations started as pressure groups rather than political parties. They were used by Nigerians to protest against the policies of the colonial government. For instance, in the 1930s Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) was used as a veritable tool to fight against the discriminatory practices of the British colonial government in the educational sector.

It is worthy of note that the Egbe Omo Oduduwa which later became Action Group (AG) was formed in 1945 to protect the interest of Yorubas in Nigeria while the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) which started as an interest group eventually became a political party that protected the political interests of the Northern Region. The NPC was an amalgamation of Jamiyyar Mutanen Arewa A yau and Jamiyyar Jama'ar Arewa of 1951. Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU) also was formed to challenge the aristocratic statusquo of the NPC. Aside these set of parties, other political parties formed as a response of minority groups in Northern and Southern regions to emerging political development imbued with ethnicity include United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), Bornu Youth Movement (BYM), the Benin-Delta People's Party (BDPP), Mid-West State Movement (MWSM), and so on (Cited Osaghae in Brown and Iseolorunkanmi, 2014:234).

The aforementioned political parties were the dominant political parties during the first republic. They were formed basically along ethnic and regional backgrounds. They were neither funded nor formed by government. There existed no guidelines on the formation of these parties and their fortunes were solely determined by electoral success.

The abrupt intervention of military in politics in January 15, 1966 and their eventual hand over to a civilian government after 13 years led to the emergence of yet another set of political parties. The sets of political parties that emerged based on transitions' programmes were officially registered by their respective electoral bodies of various military regimes with specific guidelines. After 13 years of military rule, Murtala/Obasanjo's regime charted a transition programme geared towards returning the country to civil rule. However, the Second Republic was a remarkable departure from the First republic by virtue of its adoption of a presidential system; modeled along the American style as against the British colonially bequeathed parliamentary system. Similarly the 1979 Second Republic constitution provided for a multi-party system just like the First Republic. The lifting of embargo on political activities resulted to formation of political parties. An initial five parties were formed namely National Party of Nigeria (NPN), United People's Party (UPN), Nigerian People's Party (NPP), People's Redemption Party (PRP), and Great Nigerian People's Party (GNPP) as well as later National Advanced Party (NAP). Except NAP, all the parties were seen as offshoots, or metamorphosis of the First Republican parties because they share so many similarities such as the leadership of some of the parties was more often than not equally the same in the two republics as well as their subsequent ethnic outlook. For example, AG and UPN were led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, NCNC and NPP were led by Nnamdi Azikiwe, the leader of NEPU and PRP was Malam Aminu Kano. The Second Republic collapsed largely due to intra and inter-party squabbles and other political and electoral malfeasance.

Party system in the aborted third republic was basically a two-party model formed and funded by the government. Ibrahim Babangida regime wanted to forestall the adversarial effect of ethnic politics of the yore republics decided on a two party system. The two parties formed were National Republican Convention (NRC) and Social Democratic Party (SDP). The creation of these parties as observed by Omodia (2010) was elitist in nature with attempt to make them mass based. The two parties according to Brown and Iseolorunkanmi (2014 Citing Alkali: 238) had "government imposed pseudo-ideological orientation-the NRC-a little to the right, and SDP-a little to the left". The transition to civil rule was a

fiasco and never saw the light of the day as occasioned by the annulment of June 12 Presidential elections believed was won by the SDP candidate, Chief M.K.O Abiola.

After the collapse of the half-hearted packaged Interim National Government of Chief Ernest Shonekan, General Sani Abacha marshaled yet a new transition programme. The transition was characterized by multi-party system with five political parties, namely: The United Nigerian Congress party (UNCP), Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN), Congress for National Consensus (CNC), Grassroots Democratic Movement (GDM) and Movement for Democracy and Justice. These parties were regarded as 'the five fingers of a leprous hand' by because they all worked towards the adoption of the head of state, General Sani Abacha as their consensus candidate except Alhaji M.D. Yusuf's Movement for Democracy and Justice who mustered enough courage and stood his ground on contesting with General Abacha. According to Aina (2007) the demise of Abacha made Nigeria to have a realistic electoral time table. Several political associations sought for registration. Out of these, a few met the requirement for provisional registration. After the election to the local government council, only three of the political parties that got initial provisional registration finally got the full registration. So, the 1998/99 general elections registered three political parties for the presidential polls. The parties include the People Democratic Party (PDP), All People Party (APP) later All Nigerian Peoples' Party (ANPP) and Alliance for Democracy (AD).

The fluid and unstable nature of Nigerian political parties and party system by virtue of re-grouping and realignment have led to the death of some parties while others have been transformed. Out of the three parties that were ushered by the fourth republic, only the PDP could be said to have survived and maintained its name till present as some have fizzled out and others have gone through transformation at the turn of every general elections from 2003 while so many other parties have been registered till today and we are still counting.

## **HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF ALLIANCE/COALITION IN NIGERIA**

Coalition and alliance have been part of the moving history of party politics around the world and particularly in Nigeria. The aftermath of 1959 general elections necessitated the formation of first coalition in Nigeria. The results of the House of Representatives showed that no party had the absolute majority. Consequently, the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) and the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) entered into a working alliance which produced a coalition government (Ujo: 2000b:106). The NPC and NCNC coalition provided a measure of North-South consensus which would not have been the case had the NCNC and the AG formed a coalition. This coalition government was eventually sworn in on the day of the country's independence 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1960. This coalition Esemé and Oni (2014) citing Akinsanya (2005) regarded the NPC/NCNC federal coalition government as an anomaly owing to their conflicting differences. They added that the coalition was made possible because of the earlier governmental relationship at the center by the leadership of the parties exemplified by Dr Azikiwe and Sir Tafawa Balewa.

Husseini J. Ibrahim pointed out in April 2007 WeeklyTrust that in December 1964 Nigeria had its first general election since the attainment of independence to elect representatives to the federal legislature. The aftermath of the election coupled with the disagreement over the census exercise and figure resulted in the breakdown of alliance between NPC and the NCNC leading to a new alignment and realignment to the detriment of AG and NCNC. To reiterate, the alliance between NPC and NCNC collapsed because of distrust and apprehensions which led to the parties seeking new alliances (Esemé and Oni: 2014 citing Asia: 2001, Ikelegbe: 2004).

By the turn of 1964 general elections, the Nigerian politics had become polarized into a competition between two opposing alliances. They were Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) with NPC and NNDP and the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) having the NCNC, the AG and the NEPU.

The parties in the first republic suddenly became regionalized and became ethnically based parties. The subsequent alliance such as, the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) formed by NPC and NNDP on

one hand and United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) formed by AG and the NCNC on the other hand collapsed. These alliances employed crude tactics to wrest power and defeat the opposition, principally, with ethnic agenda used to mobilize and divide the electorate. The cross regional party alliances failed in performing the integrative function.

According to Aina (2007) assessing the dangers of inter-party and intra-party relations at independence in 1960, particularly 1964/65 general elections with the ethnicization of parties and electoral politics. Not even the attempt at broad political re-grouping into the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) and the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) by the major and minority parties offered the needed respite (Aina 2007:8).

Similarly, harping on Osaghe's observation Eseme and Oni pointed out that even the seeming national and cross-regional outlook of the two mega alliances, the character of the coalition depicted North against South groups, where the NNA was dominated by NPC and aimed at maintaining the Northern hegemonic statusquo by extending its tentacles to form alliance with the parties in opposition in the south. While on the other hand the UPGA made up of essentially of NCNC, a southern party whose aim was geared towards ending northern hegemony had to team up with parties opposed to the NPC in the north in order to achieve its objective.

Ashafa (2002) noted that intensity of the inter and intra party conflicts as well as their negative impact led to the January 1966 coup and July 1966 counter coup and the end of the first republic. Following the collapse of the first republic and the subsequent intervention of the military, a period of interregnum existed. This period grounded party politics as well as other political activities to a halt. Be that as it may, Oyediran (1999:44) was of the opinion that the official death of political parties did not necessitate the creation of vacuum. It will interest one to note that political association in various guises continued to function either openly or clandestinely.

However, the military ushered in the second republic and eventually, returned to civilian rule with official registration of five political parties to contest the 1979 general elections. The parties were namely NPN, UPN, NPP, GNPP and PRP. There was a move for the NPP and NPN alliance before the 1979 elections. The alliance proved abortive. This was later resumed after an agreement was reached with office sharing arrangement in the federal cabinet (Joseph 1999:106).

With the emergence of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) candidate Alhaji Shehu Shagari as the winner of the 1979 elections conducted under the military rule of General Olusegun Obasanjo, opposition parties especially the Unity Party of Nigerian (UPN) led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo challenged the victory and accused the military government of rigging the election in favour of the NPN. Soon after the NPN assumed power, it attempted to form a government of national unity but the move was completely rejected by the UPN and PRP. They vehemently refused to participate in the unity government. The NPP however accepted to participate in the unity government that was initiated by Shehu Shagari's NPN government. The NPP was compensated with the position of the speaker of the House of Representatives.

It is pertinent to observe that before the military intervention in 1983 the opposition political parties accused Shagari, his party and the Federal Electoral Commission of Nigeria (FEDECO) of manipulating the elections in favour of the ruling NPN. So, the coalition of opposition parties was formed. It included the UPN (leader of the coalition) GNPP, Nigerian Advance Party (NAP), and NPP earlier in the previous unity government and PRP.

According to Aluaigba (2007) alliance formation in Nigerian politics along a two party system were similar in both the first and second republic. While it was NNA and UPGA in the first republic in the second republic attempts were made by several parties to come under the umbrella of progressive people alliance to challenge the political dominance of the ruling NPN but it did not happen. However, the 1983 general elections took place and were reportedly marred by large scale rigging and violence. Similar to how the first republic collapse, the outcome of the 1983 general elections triggered another military coup

that brought to an abrupt end the second republic consequently, leaving yet another vacuum in party politics for about 10 years.

It is also important to note that both the (NPC) Northern Peoples' Congress and its look-alike National Party of Nigeria (NPN) shared certain similarities. While the former dominated the NNA formed with NNDP in the first republic, the latter dominated the second republic alliance too. Similarly the opposition alliance was led by the AG (Awolowo's party) in the first republic, the second republic UPN and alliance formed was also headed by the same person, Chief Obafemi Awolowo.

Sadly there existed a gap in genuine organic party and coalitional politics in the aborted Third Republic and the Abacha's transition respectively. With the lifting of embargo on party politics in the aborted Third Republic, more than forty political associations emerged but only thirteen applied sought for registration from the National Electoral Commission (NEC). After NEC's Verification only six political associations were shortlisted and submitted to General Ibrahim Babangida for consideration. President Babangida collapsed the political associations and formed two political parties. The forming of coalition or alliance presupposes a multi-party system contrary to a two-party arrangement where electoral competitiveness is absolutely between the two relatively equal political parties of the Babangida's failed transition. Similarly even the five political parties that operated during General Abacha's transition programme negated the principle of multi-partism and freedom of choice as they all worked in unison towards making General Abacha to succeed himself.

### **ALLIANCE AND COALITION FORMATION IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC**

The fourth republic also began with alliance of both APP and AD combined to produce the latter's presidential candidate as their consensus presidential flag-bearer, Chief Olu Falae while APP presidential candidate Umaru Shinkafi became his running mate by virtue of a two party coalition agreement to contest with the PDP candidates, General Olusegun Obasanjo and Atiku Abubakar. However, the alliance could not withstand the might of PDP; therefore it was defeated in the 1999 presidential election. This made Brown and Iseolorunkanmi, (2014:244) to observe that the alliance had to breakdown after the election because it was built on seeking for power. They further maintained that had the objective of the alliance realized, it would have led to the emergence of a two party system. Unfortunately, the end of the alignment signaled the beginning of a dominant party system characterized by ascendancy and dominance of the PDP.

The fourth republic was ushered in by yet another election that did not enjoy the required support and credibility. This problem necessitated the composition of a unity government. Consequently, the opposition party members were taken on board by the People's Democratic Party's (PDP) government of Olusengun Obasanjo. Obasanjo appointed three All Peoples' Party (APP) and two Alliance for Democracy (AD) members into his cabinet. The APP members were Hajiya Aisha Isma'il, Dr. Muhammad Shata and Prince Vincent Ogbulafor. In addition, the National Chairman of APP, Senator Mahmud Waziri was made presidential adviser. The AD members were Chief Bola Ige and Mrs. Modupe Adelaja. Apart from Bola Ige who was assassinated less than two years after, all the opposition politicians ended up defecting to the PDP. Indeed, Ogbulafor became the National Secretary of the PDP at a point in time.

In the run-up to 2003 general elections there was registration of three additional political parties namely: All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), United Nigerian People Party (UNPP) and the National Democratic Party (NDP). The 2003 presidential election witnessed a dramatic geo-ethnic colouration in Nigerian election and a change in party co-operation. This was observed by Ibrahim and Hassan (2013) that there was allegation that Obasanjo reached an agreement or a kind of alliance with the opposition AD Southwest Governors in order to help his re-election bid for second tenure. This is evident in Alliance for Democracy (AD) largely controlled by the South-Western Nigeria decided not to field a presidential candidate by subsequently going into a sort of tacit alliance with the ruling PDP to enhance the re-election of Chief Obasanjo, a Yoruba extraction who eventually came out victorious against his major contender,



General Muhammadu Buhari of the All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) who is of Hausa/Fulani extraction. The seeming alliance however spelt doom for AD and which finally consumed the party as all the Southwest governors lost their seats to the PDP except Ahmed Tinubu, Lagos state Governor who was opposed to the alliance only retained his seat for second tenure. The move was seen as the most stupid alliance in the history of Nigeria (Ibrahim and Hassan, 2013:5-6).

During his second term, Obasanjo did not see the need for any unity government apparently because he succeeded in consolidating his firm grip on the polity. After the 2003 general election, opposition to President Obasanjo was largely from within his own political party. The PDP succeeded in weakening genuine opposition by tactically consuming the AD and reducing the strength of the ANPP.

Similarly, before the 2007 general election, the presidential ambition of Vice President Atiku Abubakar to succeed his Boss, President Olusegun Obasanjo as PDP presidential aspirant was scuttled. This led to a move by Atiku/PDP splinter group, ANPP and AD to form an alliance but this did not see the light of the day because of disagreement over presidential flag bearer of the proposed alliance owing to individual difference between the key actors involving General Muhammadu Buhari and Vice President Atiku Abubakar. The end result of this culminated into the death of AD. Therefore, from its ashes the Action Congress (AC) was formed and Atiku emerged as its presidential candidate while Buhari for the second time emerged as ANPP's presidential candidate. The PDP presidential ticket was given to Umaru Musa Yar'adua who eventually emerged victorious in the 2007 general election.

The hegemonic claim of the dominant parties such as NPC, NPN and PDP in their different republics could not be substantiated because in relatively free and fair elections having had highest numbers of vote in 1959, 1979 and 1999 elections respectively they however had failed to prove their dominance at the polls where in their subsequent elections in 1964, 1983 and 2003 elections they had to abuse the incumbency powers to make themselves hegemonic (Ibrahim and Hassan: 2013).

Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'adua's election was regarded as controversial and highly contentious. Thus, the old game of co-opting the opposition to erode challenges of a flawed mandate comes in handy. The ANPP and Progressive Peoples Alliances (PPA) accepted to join the Unity Government of the ruling People's Democratic Party, although as against Action Congress (AC's) refusal. Most of the opposition members who were appointed into Yar'adua's government ended up defecting to the ruling PDP as was the case during Obasanjo's first tenure.

The seeming dominance of the PDP having been demonstrated in the in 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections necessitated a move by some opposition parties like ANPP, ACN and CPC to form an alliance towards the 2011 election but the effort failed because of what has been tagged fragmented party system characterized by disparaging parties interests coming together to form opposition; failure to agree on a presidential flag bearer; ethno-regionalism and intimidation of opposition members by the dominant party and subsequently the opposition were weakened by internal strife and disagreement making the PDP to soar and continued to dominate. All these culminated in the three opposition parties producing a presidential candidate each namely, Mallam Ibrahim Shekarau (ANPP), Mallam Nuhu Ribadu (ACN) and General Muhammadu Buhari (CPC) singly going it alone to challenge the PDP candidate Dr. Goodluck Jonathan in the 2011 presidential election (Ibrahim and Hassan: 2013).

## **CHALLENGES TO COALITION AND INTER-PARTY POLITICS IN NIGERIA**

Political parties in Nigeria rely on electoral success as very fundamental to their existence in the sense that when they lose in any election, they tend to go into limbo. Therefore, coalition as a temporary arrangement with the aim of capturing power-so, when this does not happen automatically marks the end of coalition because they have been unable to turn coalition to a winning one. It can be argued that the failure of political parties' alliance or coalition to muster a strong challenge to the dominant party

system in Nigeria, however laid the foundation upon which a successful party merger was fostered and achieved therefore resulting in All Progressive Congress (APC), the federal led governing party.

Brown and Ifeolorunkanmi (2014) concluded that party realignment in Nigeria is a form of coalition characterized by party merger and party switching. Party merging according to them is exemplified in the formation of the All Progressives Congress in 2013 in the build up to the 2015 election comprising a fusion of Nigeria's three biggest opposition parties involving the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) and a faction of All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) while Ibrahim and Hassan have regarded this process that ended up in APC as beginning from alliance and ended up in a merger. While alliance may be regarded as a means, merger will assume an end in this inter-party relation.

The merger of Parties into APC could be viewed as a North-South-West groups' alliance. The alliance has pushed the PDP momentarily to a party more popular among the people of the South-South and South-East geo-political zones by virtue of what transpired in the 2015 general election, where the PDP won all the states in the South-East and South-South in the presidential election and also won the gubernatorial elections in all the states where elections were held in the geopolitical zone except Imo state.

It could be observed that the upset of the dominant party system that existed from 1999 to 2015, when the PDP dominated the Nigerian political scene and even boasted of ruling Nigeria for sixty years would not have been possible without the alliance that gave birth to the APC. This is because from 1999 to 2015 the PDP had enormous resources and proved to be too powerful for a single party at the centre to defeat. Therefore, there was need for parties to pull their resources together and join forces as marshaled by parties that fused to create the APC which eventually defeated the PDP.

Resulting from the 2015 general election with APC coming out victorious, a two party system could have emerged as both the APC and PDP stand out among the rest parties. It will be too early to adduce to the end of a dominant party system and a shift to a competitive two party system. This is because it will depend on how both parties alternate political power or how long and preponderant the APC holds sway and how well the PDP reorganize and reenergize to provide a formidable alternative to the governing party at least at the federal level.

In the case of the opposition parties, they lack the commitments, dedication and strategy to coalition formation. In fact, they become apprehensive towards coalition/alliance based on the non-committal of co-operating parties to the ideals. This has brought about the collapse of many alliances. Most times parties become engrossed in competitiveness even in coalition scenarios and lose focus of the purpose that brought them together. This is evident in the agreement/pact by the Action Congress (AC) and the All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP). It was a paper alliance that broke down or never saw the light of the day in the run off to the 2007 general elections because of interparty rivalry.

It has always been the case that one party always become preponderant and become overwhelmingly powerful. This is because the party that captures the power wants to consolidate its hold on power. As they rely on state and its resources as an "indulgent strategy" in the words of Ashafa (2002) about PDP's survival strategy. Consequently, they pursue 'sidon tight syndrome' to stay on in power, possibly making the combined effort of other political parties insufficient to unseat the respective ruling parties.

Also the ruling parties have at various times undermined opposition political parties and made any coalition possible. This they do by breaking the ranks of the genuine opposition by tempting them with the bait of inclusion in the unity governments and by luring some influential and important members with goodies of power and appointments thereby leading to some defecting to the governing party. These actions always weaken the strength of the opposition parties and eventually driving country towards a one party state

because of band wagon effect of wanting to belong to the ruling parties. This is why Ibrahim and Hassan (2013) have categorized Nigerian political parties into three and they include a dominant party, legislative representational parties as well as other small parties most of them formed as platforms to important politicians who lose out in the bigger parties or to access resource from electoral body.

Also coalition could take the form of party acquiescence which could be seen as the fallout of a dominant party system whereby apart from some individuals dumping their parties to join the ruling party, some small-weak parties would not be able to field candidates for election especially, presidential and in some cases governorships with the decisions to give their supports and endorsement to the governing party in general elections. Similarly, because of 'winners take all' principle and the desire not to lose out completely in the power equation lead some of the small and supposed opposition party members to continue to romance with the governing parties. This is why in some quarters such parties are regarded as appendages and being floated by the ruling party. This situation was common at the centre when PDP held sway. The seeming prospects of victory for the APC before the 2015 general elections made some of the small parties to lend their supports and endorsed the APC. Will APC wielding the federal power also get engrossed in the party politicking that was occasioned during the sixteen years of PDP administration? This question live so much to be desired as Nigerian political parties and including the APC are seen as association or coming together of people of strange bed fellows.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Political parties as an essential feature of democracy cannot be overemphasized, owing to the crucial role they play for the survival or otherwise of any democracy. Regrouping and re-organization become necessary among political parties in Nigeria to meet the challenges of capturing power and use it for the benefit of the people. This is because onus of ensuring responsible governance lies with the opposition. As a result there is need for constructive opposition political party/parties among several parties that now exist which was earlier missing in Nigerian democratic space when the PDP held sway. Serious political parties could form a grand alliance with a measure of commitments to the ideals of alliance therefore strategize to wrest power from any party in government just like the APC had demonstrated in the 2015 general elections.

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Kaduna WeeklyTrust April 14 2007 Volume 10