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Opposition Merger, Electoral Turnover and Democratisation in Nigeria

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Abstract

The 2015 general election in Nigeria was unique for engendering alternation of power. This unprecedented feat has been generally eulogised as possibly signaling the final arrival of democracy in the country. In the mainstream literature, alternation has been underscored as one of the cornerstones of democratisation. This paper engages two main research questions: 1) How much of the alternation is attributable to opposition merger? 2) What does opposition success mean for democratisation in Nigeria? In engaging these posers, the paper draws insight from the comparative literature on opposition coalition and coordination. The paper proposes these central arguments: a) The nexus between opposition merger and electoral turnover cannot easily be determined, but can be strategically measured by critically examining the structural conditions for opposition victory, most notably incumbent performance; and the distinctive policy agenda (alternative) offered by opposition merger; b) While alternation is vital, it is not a sufficient condition for and/or evidence of democratic consolidation. Alternation can be both the cause and/or effect of democratisation. Whether alternation will advance democratisation or not, therefore, depends on several other intervening variables, most notably what the victorious opposition merger (new government) does with power. The outlook will, for instance, be positive if alternation (the new government) genuinely promotes electoral reforms that engender the independence, professionalism and impartiality of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in all ramifications, thereby promoting popular trust in electoral processes and outcomes; and also avoid the temptation of drawing from the fountain of 'the menu of manipulation' in its desire to retain power.

Introduction

The 2015 general election in Nigeria was unique for engendering alternation of power. This unprecedented feat has been generally eulogised as possibly signaling the final arrival of democracy in the country. Such a reading is understandable because in the mainstream literature, alternation of power, or better still electoral turnover, has been underscored as one of the cornerstones and signifiers of successful democratisation (Huntington, 1991; Przeworski, etal, 2000; Lindberg, 2004; 2006b; Teorell, 2010). Granted that alternation has some democratic significance that should not be trivialized, there can also be notable exceptions to the rule. As it is widely noted in some important works (Lindberg, 2004, for instance), while opposition's victory may be an expression of both freedom and fairness of an election, given that it is more unlikely that opposition will win a fraudulent election, electoral turnover may also produce some unhealthy democratic outcomes, retarding the growth and development of democratisation. Under such democratic exceptionalism usually characteristic of electoral authoritarianism

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(Hadenius and Teorell, 2007; Schedler, 2002b), regime change (turnover) may not necessarily translate into change in regime type.

Whereas the democratisation effect of opposition coalition has begun to attract scholarly attention (Wahman, 2011; 2012), little attention has been devoted to the phenomenon of party merger, both in theory and practice. The neglect may have been enforced because party merger is a very rare political incident, leaving researchers with limited empirical cases. However, the Nigerian experience, which constitutes the primary case study of this paper, has added to the few extant empirical cases, including the Social Democratic Party (SDP)-Liberal merger in England, the Conservative-Alliance in Canada to form the New Conservative Party (NCP) in Canada and the merger of the DJP, NDRP and RDP in Korea (Kim, 1997; Godbout and Belanger, 2005).

In the light of this development, the 2015 general election in Nigeria requires more critical scrutiny beyond the initial euphoria generated by the electoral turnover. More specifically, there is need to explore the likely democratization effect of both the opposition merger that produced the turnover on the one hand; and that of the turnover itself, on the other. This is the primary focus of this paper, with emphasis on two main research questions: 1) What was the relationship between opposition merger and electoral turnover in the 2015 election? 2) What does opposition success mean for democratisation in Nigeria? In engaging these posers, the paper draws insight from the comparative literature on opposition coalition and coordination. The paper proposes these central arguments: a) The nexus between opposition merger and electoral turnover cannot easily be determined, but can be strategically measured by critically examining the structural conditions for opposition victory, most notably incumbent performance; and the distinctive policy agenda (alternative) offered by opposition merger; b) While alternation is vital, it is not a sufficient condition for and/or evidence of democratic consolidation. As aptly demonstrated by other studies, alternation can be both the cause and/or effect of democratisation (Wahman, 2012: 5). Whether alternation will advance democratisation or not, therefore, depends on several other intervening variables, most notably what the victorious opposition merger (new government) does with power. The outlook will, for instance, be positive if alternation (the new government) sustains the gains of democratic reforms that enable it win the election in the first instance, including genuinely promoting electoral reforms that engender the independence, professionalism and impartiality of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in all ramifications, thereby promoting popular trust in electoral processes and outcomes; and also avoid the temptation of drawing from the fountain of 'the menu of manipulation' (Schedler, 2002a; 2002b).

The paper proceeds as follows. The first section after this introduction offers some theoretical conjectures about the relationship between electoral turnover and democratic consolidation. The second examines the place of opposition merger in democratisation, reflecting on causes and consequences of opposition merger. The third, preceded by a brief historical background on opposition coalitions in Nigerian politics, focuses on opposition merger in the 2015 Nigerian election and its impact on opposition success. The final substantive section reflects on the likely implication of electoral turnover for democratisation in Nigeria. This is followed by some concluding reflections.

Democratic Significance of Electoral Turnover

The literature on democratization has underscored the salience of turnover to the consolidation of democracy. Lindberg (2004) defines turnover of power in terms of the 'electoral turnover of the chief political executive in presidential elections and a changed majority in

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parliamentary elections'. Such a development, almost an equivalent of Huntington's (1991) the 'two-turnover-test', could be used as a measure of the degree of the consolidation of democracy after the first and founding election has been held.

For Lindberg (2004), turnover represents one of the core indicators of electoral competitiveness, the latter being one of the major democratic qualities of elections. Other indicators of competitiveness include winner's share of the vote, winning party's share of legislative seats and second party's share of legislative seats. As articulated by Lindberg, winner's share of the votes is a percentage of the total valid votes cast. Although the exact position of this variable in determining the level of competition has been, and is still being debated, the main argument has been that the closeness of the outcome among competing parties is a reflection of the level of electoral competition. As Lindberg (2004) puts it, 'being the manifest outcome of institutionalized uncertainty', alternations of power 'occurring in peaceful manner remains a sign of the distributive authority of the people inherent in the expression "rule by the people"'. Schedler (2002b; also quoted in Ornnert and Hewitt, 2006:12) has also argued that where alternation has occurred, there is likely to be more democracy and a greater likelihood that new elites are emerging.

Turnover has also been linked with the legitimacy of an election, another key democratic quality of elections. The legitimacy of an election can be determined by the extent at which political stakeholders particularly political parties and candidates accept the outcome of elections in a peaceful and open manner. Rakner and Svasand (2003:4) lend credence to this when they argue that 'the legitimacy of the electoral process hinges on the electorates' and candidates' perception that the process has been conducted in a way that does not in advance ensure a certain outcome.'

It is, therefore, expected that to enhance the democratic legitimacy of any elections, there should be certainty about the process, but uncertainty about the results (Przeworski, 1991: 40-41). This, according to Lindberg, is in itself, an intrinsic democratic quality. To measure electoral legitimacy, Staffan Lindberg identifies indicators such as loser's acceptance of election results, peacefulness of the elections at all stages –before, during and after- and breakdown. With respect to losers accepting the results, Lindberg warns that there may be situations, especially in transitional settings, where losers may raise alarm just to gain political advantage, for example, from the international community. It may also be a strategy to undermine the political rule of their rivals. By implication, Lindberg submits, that 'challenge to the official results cannot be taken at face value as substantiating allegations of irregularities' (2004: 64). This rationalisation finds empirical support in the ongoing propaganda in Africa that opposition parties and candidates see elections as legitimate only when they win and vice versa. Despite its sound logic and appeal, the argument nevertheless, fails to tell how to identify genuine rejection of results by oppositions when elections were seriously flawed. In the circumstance, it does seem that the reports of local and international election monitors may provide some leeway about the genuineness or otherwise of opposition's protests and rejection of results (Obi, 2008; Omotola, 2006; Adebayo and Omotola, 2007).

The legitimacy of elections, according to Lindberg (2004a: 64), can also be measured by the peacefulness of the elections, defined in terms of whether violence occurred at any stages of the elections, which according to him, is 'a symptom of failed institutionalisation' (Lindberg, 2004: 64). There is also the issue of breakdown, which has to do with the abortion of the electoral cycle. This can occur either through military seizure of power or the outright breakout of civil wars. As long as the electoral cycle continues, despite all odds, the elections do have

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some form of legitimacy. This, as far as Lindberg is concerned, is ‘the ultimate indicator of legitimacy’ (Lindberg, 2004a: 65). Lindberg went ahead to test the validity of these theoretical propositions, building on the foundational works of Bratton (1998; 1999), Bratton and Van de Walle (1998) and others and concluded that there were reasons for ‘demo-optimism’ in Africa on the basis of marked improvement in the democratic qualities of its successive elections.

By logical extension, when the opposition wins an election, especially under a regime of electoral authoritarianism, it can be reasonably assumed that the process was free and fair, given that it will be harder for opposition to win under manipulated elections. Herein lies the nexus between turnover and democratic legitimacy. Alternation of power is, therefore, an important indicator of the democratic quality of elections. However, securing democratic alternations requires the presence of certain mediating institutions, including the existence of an independent and professional EMB for effective electoral administration because ‘the indeterminacy of elections’ – the possibility of elections leading to alternation of power – ‘is to a large extent a function of an impartial administration of elections’ (Lindberg, 2006a: 142). Besides, there is also need for a vibrant and united opposition party willing and able to pool together their administrative and economic resources for the common good.

While turnover or alternation of power is inherently good in itself if only for its symbolic democratic value –creating a sense of fulfilment, real or imagined, that the playing ground is level among all players and that the votes truly counts-, studies have shown that it does not always automatically translate to success –democratic deepening and consolidation. In fact in extreme cases, alternation is said to be capable of producing undesirable outcomes, including change of regime without change of regime type (Levistky and Way, 2010; Schedler, 2002b). In such a situation, opposition success or alternation may not necessarily advance the cause of democratization as the victorious opposition may be nothing more than old wine in new bottle.

Opposition Merger and Electoral Turnover

What then is the place of opposition merger/coalition in the promotion of electoral turnover? In order to engage this question, it is apposite to begin with a clarification of the concept of party merger. This is vital, given that party merger is a rare phenomenon; thus the paucity of theoretical literature on the subject. In the circumstance, ‘when confronted with a party merger’, as Godbout and Belanger (2005:1) rightly argue, ‘scholars and pundits usually develop an ad hoc explanation in order to shed some light on the motives behind such an unusual phenomenon’. One major implications of this is that scholars are left ‘with very little in the way of a unified theory of mergers with some predictive power’.

It is, therefore, hardly surprising to see that in explaining the merger of three parties in the Korean election of 1990, Kim (1997: 83-100) improvised and deployed the theory of coalition. But such improvisation is problematic because as Kim (1997: 86) himself confessed, ‘merger and coalition are conceptually distinct phenomena. A coalition is a temporary union, while a merger is a permanent one’. More importantly, the central logical assumption of coalition theory, which Kim (1997) believes could also govern merger, namely that each party’s number of seats and preferences on important issues are most important in forming coalitions, would appear heavily compromised in the Nigerian case, as will be shown shortly. His deployment of the term coalition ‘in a broad sense to mean any type of collaboration among political parties, including merger, is at best a convenient escapist route that will lead nowhere in terms of the advancement of the frontier of knowledge on the subject matter.

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Despite this lacuna, Godbout and Belanger (2005), drawing from the industrial organisational literature and economics, have attempted to develop a theory of party merger where they see merger as a 'horizontal integration of two different firms'. In their organisational analogy, they portray parties as organisations:

Competing over an electoral market, where political activists are assumed to be shareholders, party leaders correspond to management, and the output offered to both voters and activists are public policies. The acquisition of market power is usually the first motive for mergers in a market economy. The argument is that horizontal mergers augment market concentration, which in return increases market power and profitability. In the case of party mergers, the market power corresponds to the pool of supporting voters, and an increase in profitability is perceived as an increase in electoral support (2005:1).

The above quotation contains important insight as to the logic and bases of party merger. Essentially, it suggests that 'exogenous and endogenous factors like leadership changes, shifts in factional alliances, electoral realignment, and controversial policy choices, are capable of precipitating a merger between two political parties'. At a more specific level, however, Godbout and Belanger (2005: 5-7) categorised the motives and by extension, benefits of merger into three. The first is what they called the size factor, which has to do with the possibility of increasing their electoral fortunes in terms of cumulative share of votes. It is also assumed that greater size increases bargaining power in the legislature. The second relates to efficiency in management because merger permits the pooling of administrative and economic resources together by otherwise independent parties. It could also help to facilitate the mobilisation of greater resources for the party. The third pertains to synergy, defined in terms of the agreement by both party activists and party leaders as to 'the content of the new party platform' resulting from 'a synergic collapse of views between members of merging parties', which will most likely be different from the previous platforms of both parties. This third element deals essentially with ideological and/or policy issues upon which popular mobilisation of the electorate will be predicated.

These explanations resonate well with Wahman's (2011: 642-657) developed in relations to opposition coalitions. For him, there are basically two incentives for coalitions, defined in terms of what he labelled as 'oppositional parties' office –and policy-gaining potentials'. By this it is meant that coalitions are formed to boost the electoral fortunes of a party (size factor) and develop a better policy platform (synergy). For this to materialise and yield the desired results, it is expected that favourable structural conditions must exist, for example, poor economic performance by the incumbent government. In order to be able to cash-in on the noticeable gaps, oppositional parties should have distinctive policy agenda (ideology?) in relations to the incumbent party/government with which to drive popular mobilization in support of the merger.

Once settled, opposition merger/coalition is expected to engender what Wahman (2012) called 'an alternation effect' by which coordinated oppositional parties are more likely to win elections, not necessarily 'a democratization effect'. Alternation effect explains a situation where opposition merger leads to electoral victory for the merged opposition parties. Democratization effect, on the other hand, connotes a situation where merger does not only bring about alternation of power, but also helps deepen the democratisation process in general through sustainable democratic reforms and enhancement of democratic accountability. This relationship can be inverted to imply that opposition merger may be counterproductive in situations where it fails to produce alternation of power. In such circumstances, merger may undermine democratisation.

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The ideal expectations, however, is the positive reinforcement of democratisation, where opposition merger will produce both the alternation and democratisation effects.

Failed Coalitions as a Precursor to Merger

Oppositional party merger is, until the formation of the All Progressive Congress (APC) in 2013, an entirely strange political phenomenon in Nigeria. Before then, what is known are coalitions/alliances among political parties. In the first federal election of 1954, for instance, a total of 184 seats were contested. The Northern People's Congress (NPC) led with 79 seats; the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) won 56 seats; the Action Group (AG) had 27 seats; the Kamerun National Congress (KRC) won 6 seats; while others had 16 seats (Nwosu, et al, 1998:50). None of these parties had enough seats to form the government at the centre. This necessitated the formation of a coalition. The NPC and the NCNC, contrary to popular expectations, formed a coalition government at the centre, with the AG in official opposition (see Sklar, 1963; Dudley, 1982; Coleman, 1958: 377 - 78).

In the federal general elections of 1959, out of the 312 seats contested for in the House of Representatives, the NPC maintained its lead with 134 seats; the NCNC alliance with Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU) won 89 seats; leaving the AG and United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) alliance with 73 seats. Again, none of the parties had enough seats in terms of two-third majority to form the government at the centre. As such, NPC entered into coalition with the NCNC/NEPU alliance to form the government at the centre, while the AG/UMBC alliance remained in opposition (Dudley, 1982; 1973). This coalition was generally condemned for violating the size principle of any functional coalition. Besides, the parties that formed the coalition; NPC, NCNC and NEPU were seen as poles apart ideologically. While the NPC was a "conservative" and a "regionally based" party, the NCNC was a "welfarist" and "trans-regional" party (Nwosu, et al, 1998:55; Ojiagbo, 1980:19).

In the first post-independence election held in 1964, there was no significant change to the trend of coalition government. Preparatory to the elections, parties had entered into alliances. The NPC; Akintola's Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP); the Niger Delta Congress (NDC), the Mid-West Democratic Front (MDF) and the Dynamic Party (DP) had formed the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA); an alliance built on the need for national unity. The NCNC, AG, NEPU, UMBC, Zamfara Commoner's Party (ZCP), and Kano People's Party (KPP) joined forces to form the United Progress Grand Alliance (UPGA), whose campaign emphasis was on a promise to restructure the federation and create new regions where necessary to halt Northern hegemony (Osaghae, 1998:42 - 43). The outcome of the election showed that the NNA won overwhelming majority with 201 seats and the UPGA with 109 seats (Ikelegbe, 1995:202). The level of frustration that attended the results of the elections was so much that the call for a broad-based government by the Tafawa Balewa regime could not stop violent eruptions, particularly in the West. The attendant impasse eventually led to the collapse of the First Republic via a Military Coup d'état on 15 January, 1966 (see Dudley, 1982; 69 - 72; Osaghae, 1998: 45 - 46; Nwosu, et. al, 1998: 85; Ikelegbe, 1995: 2002; Diamond, 1988).

During the second republic (1979-1983), the NPN made overtures to the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) for coalition, which the latter accepted and joined the government at the centre. This coalition – NPN/NPP - was reminiscent of the NPC-NCNC coalition in the first republic. After initial stability, the coalition, however, broke down as a result of crisis over distribution of largesse (see Omoruyi, 1989; Osaghae, 1998:129). The trend continues during the fourth republic, beginning from 1999 when a pre-election coalition was formed between the

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defunct All Peoples Party (APP) and the defunct Alliance of Democracy (AD) for both to present a joint candidate for the presidential election, featuring Chief Olu Falae of the AD as the presidential flag bearer and Umaru Shinkafi of the All Peoples Party (APP) as running mate. Also in 2003, then President Olusegun Obasanjo allegedly entered into an alliance with the AD to help his re-election bid. The terms of the alliance demand that the AD would not to produce a presidential candidate of its own, with the PDP expected to protect the interests of the AD governors in the south west. A similar attempt involving the AD, ANPP and a splinter group from the PDP to contest the 2007 presidential elections also failed, the same way the 2011 coalition negotiation between the Congress of Progressive Change (CPC) and Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) was stillbirth.

A cursory look at these coalitions/alliances shows that most of them, if not all, hardly produced the desired turnover and/or democratisation effects. Rather, they tended to undermine democratic development in the absence of policy synergy. Rather than rely a alternative policy issues, greater considerations would appear to have been placed on forces of identity as core mobilisational issues, especially ethno-regional and religious boundaries. Besides, such coalitions are replete with a history of failed promises and a proclivity toward a form of master-servant relations between/among the coalition partners.

Merger and Alternation in the 2015 Elections

Deriving from the foregoing historical background, the argument can be made, in a way, that failure with the experimentation with coalition building, beginning from the first election of 1954 through the breakdown of coalition negotiations between the CPC and ACN during the 2011 elections may have contributed to the emergence of opposition merger preparatory to the 2015 election. Moreover, the dominance of the PDP under the fourth republic has become a major issue of concern to most democratic players.

To be sure, the dominance of the PDP permeates all spheres of democratic life across the country. Apart from winning all presidential elections since 1999 (including the 2003, 2007 and 2011 presidential elections) with landslides, the PDP also had legislative majority in both chambers of the National Assembly, the Senate and the House of Representatives across these elections. Its legislative hegemony was so serious that the second party's share of legislative seat was almost negligible. In the founding election of 1999, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo of the PDP won the presidency with a total of 18,738,154 votes (62.78 percent) over Olu Falae, who ran for the APP/AD alliance, with 11,110,287 (37.22 percent). In the second election of 2003, for example, President Obasanjo of the PDP won the presidency with a total of 24,109,157 (61.80 percent) of total votes cast, while General Mohammed Buhari, the ANPP candidate, emerged runner-up with 12,495,326 (32.3 percent). The PDP also had a landslide victory in the National Assembly elections, winning 75 of the 109 senatorial seats, leaving the ANPP and AD with 28 and 6 seats respectively. The trend continues in 2007 when Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua of the PDP won the presidency with 24,638,063 votes, amounting to 70.34 per cent of total votes cast, leaving the other 24 opposition presidential candidates with 10,385,442 votes (29.66 per cent) of total votes cast. The PDP extended its dominance to all other elections, winning 29 of the 36 governorship positions (80.55 per cent); 247 of the 360 HOR seats (68.61 per cent) and 87 of the 109 senatorial seats (79.81 per cent). There was no major change in the 2011 elections during which the PDP won the presidency with 22 495 187 votes, leaving Mallam Nuhu Ribadu of the ACN with a paltry 2 079 159 votes and General Buhari of the CPC with 12 214 853 (Omotola, 2009; 2010).

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Other notable complications in the process include the fact that the electoral successes of the incumbent party, the PDP, were not popularly perceived to be a product of a clean electoral process. In most cases, the electoral processes were often garrisoned, infused as they were by the abuse of the power of incumbency, disproportionate use of state resources, including security agents, national treasury, state-owned media and so on. Another dimension of the problem relates to the fact that opposition parties too were unduly too fragmented and factionalised, making it difficult for them to organise as a genuinely attractive opposition and alternative government (Omotola, 2013; 2014).

In the circumstance, the urge to develop a formidable oppositional platform to dislodge the PDP became very strong; hence the recourse to the merger that led to the birth of the APC. It would be recalled that the APC was a product of the merger of the defunct Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), the All Nigerian People's Party (ANPP), and a breakaway faction of the All Progressive's Grand Alliance (APGA) led by Rochas Okorocha, the Governor of Imo State. Aimed essentially at supplanting the PDP, the emergence of APC as a mega party made the contest for 2015 more intense. The APC gained more strength when a breakaway faction of the PDP, initially christened the 'New PDP' and led by five incumbent PDP governors, a former National Chairman of the Party, leading members of the National Assembly in both chambers and their teaming supporters, defected *en masse* to the APC due to irreconcilable differences within the 'old' PDP (Omotola and Nyuykonge, 2015).

As argued elsewhere, the emergence of the APC had both positive and negative implications for democratic development (Omotola and Nyuykonge, 2015). On the positive side, the emergence of the APC, by creating a seemingly attractive opposition, engendered for the first time, real competition in the political process. On the negative side, however, the merger also came with its own complications, most notably the heightened proclivity toward violence, epitomised by excessive hate speech and the running of a largely dysfunctional electioneering campaign.

While the APC was generally well received by Nigerians, there were fears in some quarters that the managers of the merger would not be able to push through the process. Some of the critical junctures envisaged as potentially combustible by critics of the process include party primaries for the selection of candidates for elective offices, particularly the presidential election. Such a concern cannot be easily wished away, given the fact that the form and character of party primaries matter for the survival of a young mega party. In the least, it is expected that the process will be democratically open and accessible to all aspirants, competitive, transparent and credible. These requirements are essential first steps in political party and democratic development. The APC seemed fully aware of this requirement, when it conducted its presidential primary along the line of these requirements. It was keenly contested by five candidates, namely former Vice President Atiku Abubakar, Governor Rabiun Kwankwaso of Kano state, Governor Rochas Okorocha of Imo state and Mohammed Buhari, the eventual winner. The success of the exercise, contrary to the expectations of critics, contributed in endearing the party to Nigerians as a real alternative government. Though there were contentions with respect to the production of a running mate to Buhari, leading to some protraction, the eventual emergence of Professor Yemi Osinbajo also added to the growing positive image of the APC.

Also of great significance was the new policy platform provided by the party. With a slogan built around the mantra of 'change', the APC packaged and portrayed itself to Nigerians and the international community as a capable alternative to the ruling PDP. Its carefully crafted

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‘social contract’ with Nigerians was given widespread publicity, placed specific emphasis on ‘national security, revamping and diversifying the national economy, waging an effective war against corruption and promotion of youth employment’. In its campaigns, the party also stressed what it considered as ‘the corruption, recklessness, wastefulness, cluelessness and general underperformance of the PDP administration under Goodluck Jonathan’ (Omotola and Nyuykonge, 2015).

Also of relevance was the manner the party comported itself in the face of provocation by the incumbent government. An example was the sudden postponement of the elections by six weeks, which brought about significant distortions in party programmes, funding and general administration, especially for opposition parties that had to operate on a relatively thin budget compared to the ruling party’s large war chest. Irrespective of the contradictions associated with election postponement, however, the postponement also has its positive side. Above all else, it:

allowed INEC more time to tighten the loose ends of its preparations. For example, INEC was able to distribute more PVCs, a significant proportion of which were collected by voters. By so doing, INEC succeeded in dousing tensions over accusation of lopsided distribution in favour of the opposition APC. Though not a given, more collections by registered voters could translate to better prospects of higher level of participation/voter turnout. The extension could also afford INEC more time to test run its equipment and train its staff, especially ad hoc staff, in the application of the card reader and other salient aspects of the elections (Omotola and Nyuykonge, 2015).

While these salient elements in the negotiation and execution of the merger enhanced the democratic credentials of the APC in the march towards the 2015 elections, the noticeable improvement in the level of professionalism, enhanced capability and autonomy of INEC administratively and financially served to enhance the effectiveness of election administration. This in itself may not be unconnected with series of reform measures implemented since the Uwais report on electoral reform.

The result, as is commonplace, was the eventual victory of the APC, granting Nigeria a reliable democratic credential in terms of alternation of power. Buhari of the APC polled a total of 15, 424, 921 votes to emerge winner of the presidential election, against incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan’s 12, 853, 162. Parliamentary majority was also tilted in favour of the APC, which has simple majority in both the Senate and House of Representatives.

Concluding Reflections: Turnover as a Signifier of Democratic Consolidation?

For the first time in its democratic history, Nigeria’s electoral process has produced alternation of power. This feat is, by all standards, a measure of democratic progress, especially against the background of the country’s troubled democratic history. Nevertheless, as argued before now, while alternation is important, a much more vital concern should be the end product of alternation. Such end product, in this context, is best defined in terms of the democratization effect of alternation. The import of this is that alternation becomes a democratic liability if it does not advance the cause of democratization.

At the risk of repetition, it is worth restating the central argument of this paper here, which is that the democratization effect of alternation, that is, whether alternation will advance democratisation or not, depends on several intervening variables, most notably what the victorious opposition merger (new government) does with power. The outlook will, for instance,

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be positive if alternation (the new government) sustains the gains of democratic reforms that enable it win the election in the first instance, including genuinely promoting electoral reforms that engender the independence, professionalism and impartiality of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in all ramifications, thereby promoting popular trust in electoral processes and outcomes; and also avoid the temptation of drawing from the fountain of ‘the menu of manipulation’ (Schedler, 2002a; 2002b).

Engendering these mediating conditions requires focused leadership, disciplined party, and a capable and highly resourceful team of policy actors in government. Though too early to begin to subject the new government to scrutiny with respect to these requirements, the emerging signs are not very encouraging. The ongoing crisis in the national assembly is capable of creating the impression, rightly or wrongly though, that the party is incapable of managing success, if it has not be completely overwhelmed with success.

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