

Nigeria's Political Transition to 2027: Challenges and Opportunities for a Multi-Party Democracy

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Abstract

Nigeria's democratic experience since the return to constitutional rule in 1999 has been characterised by uninterrupted electoral transitions, expanding political competition, and the continuing evolution of a multi-party system. As the country approaches the 2027 General Elections, political realignments, coalition building, party defections, and strategic alliances have intensified, raising important questions about the future of democratic governance and electoral competition.

This paper examines Nigeria's political transition towards the 2027 General Elections within the broader context of the country's multi-party democracy. Drawing on historical analysis and established theories of political parties and party systems, the study explores the evolution of coalition politics, mergers, alliances, defections, elite consensus, and party realignments from the First Republic to the present democratic dispensation. It further analyses the changing strengths and weaknesses of both the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) and the opposition political parties in the context of the emerging electoral contest.

The paper argues that concerns about Nigeria drifting towards a one-party state should be understood within the broader context of the history of multi-party democracy in Nigeria. **Historically, Nigeria's multi-party democracy tends to move towards a one dominant party system rather than a one party state.** This paper contends that the relative dominance of a ruling party has often been influenced not only by its political strategies alone, but also by the internal fragmentation, leadership challenges, ideological inconsistencies, and organisational weaknesses of the opposition. Historical experience demonstrates that successful political transitions in Nigeria have generally depended on broad-based political coalitions, strategic elite consensus, and effective national mobilisation.

The study concludes that the credibility of Nigeria's 2027 political transition will depend not merely on electoral outcomes but on the collective commitment of political parties, the electoral institutions, security agencies, civil society organisations, the media, and citizens to democratic principles, constitutionalism, peaceful political competition, and credible elections. It is hoped that the analysis and recommendations presented in this paper will contribute further to scholarly discourse, informed public debate, and policy initiatives aimed at strengthening democratic governance and democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Introduction

Democratic transitions constitute defining moments in the political development of every nation. They provide an important test of the resilience of democratic institutions, the maturity of political actors, and the capacity of the political system to manage competition peacefully within the framework of constitutional governance. In plural societies such as Nigeria, where political competition intersects with ethnic, religious, regional, and socio-economic diversity, electoral transitions assume even greater national significance.

Although the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) formally released the timetable for the 2027 General Elections in May 2026, preparations for the transition had commenced much earlier. Across the country, consultations, strategic alliances, coalition-building, defections, and intense political engagements had already become prominent features of the emerging electoral landscape. While these activities initially remained relatively subdued in some parts of the federation, they have progressively gathered momentum, creating an atmosphere that increasingly resembles an election season.

Nigeria's democratic experience since the return to civil rule in 1999 represents one of the most significant achievements in the country's post-independence political history. For more than twenty-seven years, constitutional government has endured despite formidable challenges, including electoral disputes, insecurity, economic pressures, judicial contestations, and periodic political crises. Given the country's previous experience of prolonged military rule, interrupted democratic experiments, and constitutional instability, the continuity of the Fourth Republic, despite its limitations, constitutes a notable milestone in Africa's democratic evolution. Nevertheless, democratic transitions in Nigeria have rarely been free from uncertainty.

Successive electoral cycles have been characterised by intense political competition, elite bargaining, litigations, defections, and, in some instances, electoral violence. This pattern reflects the high political stakes associated with state power in Nigeria, where access to public office often carries significant political, economic, and institutional influence.

Against this background, this paper examines Nigeria's political transition towards the 2027 General Elections within the broader context of the country's multi-party democratic system. It analyses the historical evolution of party politics, coalition-building, mergers, defections, elite consensus, and political realignments from the First Republic to the present democratic dispensation.

It also evaluates the comparative strengths and weaknesses of both the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) and the opposition parties as they prepare for the forthcoming elections.

The central argument advanced in this paper is that the current electoral dominance of the APC should not, in itself, be interpreted as conclusive evidence that Nigeria is evolving into a one-party state. Rather, the relative weakness of the opposition reflects longstanding organisational deficiencies, internal leadership conflicts, ideological inconsistency, strategic fragmentation, and the inability of opposition parties to construct a coherent national political platform capable of attracting broad electoral support. **In reality, as noted earlier on, Nigeria's experience of multi-party democracy reveals that the country often tends to move towards a one dominant party system rather than a one party state. This was the case with the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), during the Second Republic, 1979-1983, and the case of People's Democratic Party (PDP), during its sixteen years reign (1999-2015), under the Fourth Republic.**

Comparative political experience demonstrates that governing parties rarely relinquish political power voluntarily. Electoral success therefore depends not only on public dissatisfaction with incumbents but also on the ability of opposition parties to organise effectively, develop credible policy alternatives, mobilise citizens across regional and social dimensions, and present themselves as a viable governing alternative. It is within this broader analytical framework that Nigeria's political transition to 2027 should be understood. As one leading politician in Nigeria said, "Power is never served *ala'carte*, You have to struggle for power" (Tinubu. B, 2018).

Significance of the Study

The political transition towards Nigeria's 2027 General Elections represents another important milestone in the country's democratic journey. Beyond the immediate contest for political office, it provides an opportunity to reflect on the broader evolution of democratic institutions, party politics, political competition, and governance in one of Africa's most diverse and strategically important Nations. Consequently, this study is significant both for its scholarly contribution and its practical relevance to contemporary democratic discourse.

From an academic perspective, the paper seeks to contribute to the growing literature on democratic transitions, political parties, coalition politics, and democratic consolidation in plural societies. By integrating historical analysis with comparative political theory, the study provides a framework for understanding how party systems evolve in response to changing political, institutional, and societal conditions. It also demonstrates the continuing relevance of classical and contemporary theories of party politics in explaining Nigeria's democratic experience.

The study is equally significant because it situates current political developments within their broader historical context. Rather than viewing the

political realignments preceding the 2027 General Elections as isolated events, the paper demonstrates that they are part of a longer tradition of coalition-building, party formation, mergers, defections, and elite accommodation that has characterised Nigeria's political development since political independence. This historical perspective enables a more balanced appreciation of both continuity and change in the country's democratic evolution.

The paper also has important policy relevance. Its analysis highlights the institutional conditions necessary for strengthening democratic governance, promoting peaceful political competition, and consolidating Nigeria's multi-party democracy. In this respect, the study should be of value to legislators, policymakers, political parties, electoral management bodies, civil society organisations, development partners, and other stakeholders committed to democratic governance and constitutional rule.

Furthermore, the study seeks to contribute to informed public discourse by encouraging a more nuanced understanding of Nigeria's party system. Public debates on elections frequently focus on personalities and short-term political developments, often at the expense of the deeper institutional and structural issues that shape democratic outcomes. By shifting attention to these underlying factors, the paper encourages a more evidence-based discussion of Nigeria's democratic future.

Scope of the Study

This paper examines Nigeria's political transition towards the 2027 General Elections within the broader context of democratic consolidation and the evolution of the country's multi-party system. While the forthcoming elections provide the immediate context for the analysis, the study extends beyond contemporary political developments to examine the historical, institutional, and theoretical factors that have shaped party politics and democratic competition in Nigeria.

The analysis focuses principally on the evolution of political parties, coalition-building, mergers, alliances, defections, elite political accommodation, and electoral competition from the First Republic to the present democratic dispensation. Particular attention is devoted to developments under the Fourth Republic (1999 to date), during which Nigeria has experienced its longest uninterrupted period of constitutional governance.

The paper also examines selected theoretical perspectives on political parties, party systems, and democratic governance in order to provide an appropriate analytical framework for understanding Nigeria's contemporary political experience. Comparative references are made, where appropriate, to other democratic systems, not for purposes of direct comparison, but to illuminate

broader principles relevant to the management of political diversity and democratic competition.

The study does not seek to predict the outcome of the 2027 General Elections, nor does it advocate the interests of any political party, candidate, or political tendency. Rather, its primary objective is to analyse the opportunities and challenges confronting Nigeria's multi-party democracy and to identify the institutional and political conditions that are likely to strengthen democratic governance, political stability, and peaceful electoral competition.

Given the fluid nature of political developments, particularly during periods preceding general elections, the paper recognises that new political alignments, judicial decisions, policy initiatives, and electoral developments may emerge after its completion. Accordingly, the analysis should be understood as reflecting the state of knowledge and political developments available at the time of writing this paper.

Central Thesis of the Paper

This paper is anchored on the central thesis that the success or failure of democratic transitions in Nigeria is determined less by the personal popularity, charisma, or political ambition of individual candidates than by their capacity to build broad-based political parties, forge strategic alliances, cultivate elite consensus, and mobilise inclusive national coalitions capable of accommodating Nigeria's complex socio-political diversity. Within the context of Nigeria's multi-party democracy, coalition politics is therefore not merely an electoral strategy but a structural imperative for democratic stability, peaceful political transitions, and sustainable governance.

The paper further argues that Nigeria's presidential politics has, over time, exhibited discernible structural patterns. Historical experience demonstrates that successful presidential candidates have generally emerged through carefully negotiated political compromises, inter-regional cooperation, and broad-based alliances rather than through individual popularity alone. Even where strong personalities have played significant roles, their electoral success has ultimately depended upon the existence of extensive political networks and institutional support built over many years.

Flowing from this proposition, the paper contends that as Nigeria approaches the 2027 General Elections, the increasing realignment of political forces through mergers, alliances, and coalition-building should not be viewed merely as temporary electoral calculations. Rather, they represent rational political responses

to the structural realities of governing one of the world's most diverse federal democracies. In this respect, coalition politics constitutes both a democratic necessity and a strategic mechanism for promoting national integration, political accommodation, and governmental legitimacy.

Underlying this analysis is the author's long-held proposition that Nigeria's presidential politics is shaped by a number of interrelated strategic variables which collectively influence electoral outcomes before, during, and after elections. Unless these critical strands are carefully understood, calibrated, and effectively managed by political actors, the prospects of attaining presidential power remain significantly constrained irrespective of personal popularity or political resources. This is perhaps why, a number of leading politicians in Nigeria who aspire to become President of the country hardly succeed, no matter how many times they try. The developments leading to the 2027 General Elections therefore provide a compelling opportunity to examine the continuing relevance of this proposition within Nigeria's evolving democratic experience.

Accordingly, this paper examines the political dynamics shaping Nigeria's transition to 2027 and argues that the future of democratic governance will depend not only on the credibility of electoral institutions and constitutional processes but also on the willingness of political actors to embrace inclusive coalition-building, national consensus, and democratic accommodation as indispensable foundations for political stability and democratic consolidation.

Conceptual Clarifications

Before examining the evolution of party realignments in Nigeria, it is necessary to clarify several concepts that are frequently used in discussions of party politics, particularly the notions of coalitions, mergers, and political alliances. Although these concepts are often used interchangeably in public discourse, they represent distinct forms of political organisation and cooperation, each with its own institutional characteristics and democratic implications.

A proper understanding of Nigeria's evolving party system requires conceptual clarity. In political discourse, the terms coalition, merger, and alliance are frequently used interchangeably, even though they describe distinct forms of political cooperation. The failure to distinguish among them has often generated confusion in both public debate and academic discussions of party politics. It is therefore useful to clarify these concepts before examining their application in Nigeria's democratic experience.

Coalitions

In comparative politics, a coalition refers to a political arrangement in which two or more individuals, groups, organisations, or political parties agree to cooperate in pursuit of shared objectives. Such cooperation is usually motivated by the recognition that common goals can be achieved more effectively through collective action than through isolated efforts.

Coalitions are not necessarily permanent institutions. They may be established to pursue specific political objectives, such as constitutional reform, electoral mobilisation, opposition coordination, or government formation. Once the agreed objectives have been achieved - or become unattainable - the coalition may either dissolve or evolve into a more permanent political organisation. In parliamentary democracies, coalition governments commonly emerge after general elections when no single political party secures an absolute majority of parliamentary seats. Under such circumstances, two or more parties negotiate agreements that enable them to form a government capable of commanding legislative confidence. In some instances, particularly during periods of national crisis or political transitions, these arrangements may assume the form of governments of national unity.

Within the Nigerian context, coalition-building has frequently served as a strategic instrument for bringing together diverse political actors prior to elections or during periods of political realignment. Such coalitions have often constituted the foundation upon which more enduring party organisations were subsequently formed and established.

Mergers

A merger represents a fundamentally different process. Unlike a coalition, which preserves the separate identities of participating organisations, a merger involves the legal and organisational integration of two or more registered political parties into a single political party. The process ordinarily requires participating parties to dissolve their separate organisational structures and establish a new institutional framework. This involves harmonising party constitutions, manifestos, leadership structures, membership registers, organisational organs, party symbols, names, colours, logos, and operational procedures.

The objective is to create one unified political organisation capable of functioning as a single legal and electoral entity. Mergers therefore represent a much deeper level of political integration than coalitions. Rather than cooperating while retaining separate identities, the participating parties voluntarily relinquish their independent existence in favour of a common institutional platform. The formation of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in 2013 remains one of the most clearest examples of party merger in Nigeria's Fourth Republic and illustrates the organisational complexity that accompanies such political integration.

Alliances

Political alliances occupy an intermediate position between coalitions and mergers. An alliance is generally understood as a formal agreement between two or more political parties to cooperate for specific electoral or legislative purposes while preserving their separate legal identities.

Unlike mergers, alliances do not require participating parties to dissolve or surrender their organisational autonomy. Each party retains its constitution, leadership, membership, identity, and organisational structure. Cooperation is usually confined to agreed areas of interests, including joint campaigns, candidate endorsements, legislative collaboration, policy coordination, or electoral strategy. Alliances are particularly common when political parties perceive that cooperation offers greater electoral advantage than independent competition, especially when confronting a dominant governing party or a particularly formidable opposition.

Although alliances are often negotiated before elections, they may also emerge afterwards. In presidential systems, post-election alliances may facilitate legislative cooperation, strengthen executive-legislative relations, or contribute to broader governments of national unity during periods requiring exceptional political consensus.

Comparative Distinctions

The distinctions among these concepts are therefore clear. Coalitions emphasise political cooperation around shared objectives; mergers involve the institutional fusion of political parties into a single organisation; while alliances are cooperative arrangements in which participating parties retain their separate legal and organisational identities. Recognising these distinctions is essential for understanding both comparative party politics and Nigeria's democratic development.

Much of the public discussion surrounding party realignments has tended to blur these concepts, thereby obscuring important institutional differences that influence political behaviour and democratic outcomes. The conceptual clarity established here provides an important analytical foundation for the subsequent examination of Nigeria's historical experience with party formation, coalition-building, mergers, defections, and political realignments from the First Republic to the present democratic dispensation.

Theoretical Perspectives

At this stage, the paper examines some selected theoretical perspectives on political parties, party systems, and democratic governance in order to provide an appropriate analytical framework for understanding and discussing Nigeria's contemporary political experience. One of the enduring questions in comparative

politics concerns the type of party system most appropriate for societies characterised by deep ethnic, religious, linguistic, regional, and socio-economic diversity. While no single model is universally applicable, the debate has remained central to democratic theory because the structure of a party system often shapes the quality of representation, political stability, and democratic governance. Nigeria, with its remarkable diversity and federal character, provides a particularly compelling case for examining this question. Proponents of the multi-party system argue that democratic governance is strengthened when political institutions provide opportunities for the broad representation of society's diverse interests.

In heterogeneous societies, political parties perform the vital function of articulating and aggregating competing demands while providing peaceful avenues through which citizens participate in the political process. A competitive multi-party system therefore enhances political inclusion, widens electoral choice, encourages citizen participation, and reduces the danger that political power may become permanently concentrated in the hands of a single political elite or dominant social group.

From this perspective, political pluralism contributes not merely to electoral competition but also to democratic legitimacy. By creating opportunities for representation, negotiation, compromise, and coalition-building, multi-party systems provide institutional mechanisms through which social diversity can be managed peacefully. Rather than suppressing differences, they seek to accommodate them within constitutional politics.

Critics, however, advance a different argument. They contend that an excessive proliferation of political parties may fragment the political landscape, complicate government formation, weaken policy coherence, and encourage unstable coalition arrangements. Where political parties lack clear ideological identities, electoral competition may become driven primarily by personalities, elite bargaining, and shifting political alliances rather than by coherent policy alternatives.

In such circumstances, the mere existence of numerous political parties does not necessarily deepen democracy or improve governance. Consequently, many scholars argue that the effectiveness of a democratic system depends less on the number of political parties than on their institutional strength, internal democracy, organisational capacity, ideological coherence, and commitment to national interest. Stable democracies require political parties capable not only of winning elections but also of governing responsibly, aggregating societal interests and demands, and maintaining public confidence in democratic institutions.

The comparative literature offers valuable insights into this debate. Among the most influential contributors is Arend Lijphart, (1977), whose work on democratic institutions fundamentally reshaped contemporary understanding of governance in plural societies. In his seminal studies of democratic systems, Lijphart

distinguishes between majoritarian democracy, in which political power is concentrated in the hands of electoral winners, and consensus democracy, which seeks to distribute political authority more broadly through power-sharing, coalition governments, and inclusive decision-making. He argues that consensus-oriented institutions are generally better suited to deeply divided societies because they encourage accommodation, negotiation, and cooperation among competing political interests rather than winner-takes-all politics.

Lijphart's analysis has particular relevance for countries such as Nigeria, where ethnic, religious, and regional diversity constitutes a permanent feature of the political landscape. His central proposition is that democratic stability is more likely to be sustained when major political groups perceive themselves as participants in governance rather than permanent outsiders. Inclusive political arrangements, therefore, contribute not only to representation but also to national cohesion and democratic legitimacy.

Other leading scholars have approached the subject from complementary perspectives. Giovanni Sartori (1976), emphasises the importance of party-system structure and the strategic interactions among political parties. Maurice Duverger (1954), demonstrates how electoral systems influence the number and behaviour of political parties, while Anthony Downs (1957), explains party competition through the logic of rational electoral choice, arguing that parties frequently adjust their policies in order to maximise electoral support.

Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, (1967), through their social cleavage theory, illustrate how enduring social divisions shape party formation and electoral behaviour, whereas Robert Dahl's (1971), concept of polyarchy highlights the indispensable role of political competition, political participation, and civil liberties in sustaining democratic government. Similarly, Joseph Schumpeter (1942), in turn, conceptualises democracy primarily as a competitive process through which political elite seek public support in free elections, making political parties indispensable institutions for democratic governance.

Individually, none of these theoretical perspectives fully explains the complexity of Nigeria's democratic experience. Collectively, however, they provide a powerful analytical framework. Lijphart explains the importance of inclusion and coalition-building in diverse societies; Sartori illuminates the dynamics of party competition; Duverger demonstrates the relationship between electoral rules and party systems; Downs clarifies the strategic behaviour of political parties; Lipset and Rokkan reveal the influence of enduring social cleavages; Dahl underscores the importance of political competition and participation; while Schumpeter reminds us that democracy ultimately depends upon genuine electoral contestations among organised political actors.

These theoretical perspectives were further complemented by a number of Nigerian scholars who contextualised these theories within Nigeria's unique historical, socio-cultural, and political environment. Among the most influential were Nnoli, O. (1980), Dudley, B. J. (1982) and Osaghae, E. E. (1998). Others include Oyediran, O. (1981), and Richard A. Joseph (1987). Of course, Richard A. Joseph is not a Nigerian, but he fully understands the dynamics of Nigeria's politics. The scholarly works of these Authors have significantly enriched the understanding of political parties, party systems, and democratic development within the Nigerian context.

According to Okwudiba Nnoli (1980) political parties in post-colonial African states, particularly Nigeria, cannot be adequately understood without reference to the country's ethnic configuration and the political economy of the state. He demonstrates that party formation, mobilisation, and competition have historically been shaped by ethnic identities, regional interests, and struggles over access to state power and resources. His work provides an important framework for analysing how political parties function within deeply plural societies.

Similarly, Billy Dudley (1982), examines the evolution of Nigeria's party system within the broader context of democratic governance and political instability. He contends that political parties are indispensable institutions for political participation, representation, and leadership recruitment, but cautions that where parties become vehicles for elite competition rather than programme-based politics, they can undermine democratic consolidation. His analysis of the collapse of Nigeria's First Republic remains one of the most authoritative accounts of the relationship between party politics, electoral competition, and democratic breakdown.

In the same vein, Eghosa Osaghae (1998), extends the debate by examining the complex interactions between ethnicity, federalism, state-building, and democratic governance in multi-ethnic societies. He argues that the stability and effectiveness of political parties depend largely on their capacity to accommodate diversity, promote inclusive participation, and manage competing social interests through democratic institutions rather than sectarian mobilisation. His work highlights the importance of institutional design and political accommodation in sustaining democratic transitions in heterogeneous nations such as Nigeria.

Oyediran, O. (1981), examines political parties within the broader framework of constitutional development, representative government, and democratic institutions in Nigeria. He argues that political parties constitute the essential vehicles through which citizens participate in governance, articulate public interests, and ensure political accountability. He further contends that the effectiveness of a democratic system depends not only on the existence of multiple political parties but also on the extent to which such parties are internally

democratic, ideologically coherent and committed to constitutional governance. His work underscores the importance of strong political institutions as the foundation for democratic stability and national integration.

Similarly, Richard A. Joseph (1987), provides one of the most influential explanations of Nigerian party politics through his theory of prebendalism. Joseph argues that political competition in Nigeria has often been driven less by ideological differences than by the struggle among political elite, for access to public office and the distribution of state resources to supporters and constituencies. According to him, public offices are frequently perceived as prebends to which office holders are entitled and from which they are expected to benefit themselves, their families, ethnic groups, and political networks. This perspective helps to explain recurring patterns of patronage politics, elite defections, coalition building, party fragmentation, and electoral realignments that have characterised Nigeria's democratic experience. Joseph's analysis, therefore, provides an important conceptual framework for understanding many of the political developments shaping Nigeria's transition towards the 2027 General Elections.

All these theoretical perspectives are critical and relevant to Nigeria's political transition towards the 2027 General Elections. They invite reflection on several important questions. Can political parties build broad national coalitions that transcend regional, ethnic, and religious divisions? Will electoral competition increasingly revolve around programmes and public policy rather than personalities and elite calculations? Can democratic inclusion be strengthened without sacrificing governmental effectiveness? How can Nigeria reconcile broad political participation with the need for stable and accountable governance?

We have demonstrated in these reviews that no single theoretical perspective adequately explains the complexities of political parties and multi-party systems, particularly in a heterogeneous and developing democracy such as Nigeria. Rather, each scholar offers a distinct analytical approach that, when combined with others, provides a more comprehensive understanding of the country's political evolution.

The classical comparative scholars, including Maurice Duverger, Giovanni Sartori, Arend Lijphart, and Anthony Downs, provide the conceptual foundations for understanding the nature, functions and behaviour of political parties and party systems. Their works explain the institutional characteristics of political parties, patterns of party competition, electoral behaviour, coalition formation, and the conditions under which different party systems contribute to democratic stability or instability. Their contributions demonstrate that the country's party system has evolved under the combined influence of ethnicity, regionalism, federalism, constitutional development, elite competition, patronage politics, and the continuing quest for national integration. They also illustrate that political parties in Nigeria often perform functions that extend beyond ideological representation,

serving simultaneously as instruments of political mobilisation, elite bargaining, coalition building, and the distribution of political power.

Viewed collectively, these theoretical perspectives reinforce the proposition that democratic consolidation in Nigeria depends not merely on the existence of multiple political parties but on the emergence of political organisations that are internally democratic, ideologically coherent, nationally inclusive and firmly committed to constitutionalism, the rule of law and good governance. They further suggest that the sustainability of Nigeria's democratic transition will depend upon the capacity of political actors and institutions to manage political competition peacefully, strengthen electoral integrity, deepen citizen participation, and promote national cohesion.

These theoretical insights provide the intellectual foundation for the present study. They offer an appropriate analytical framework for examining the dynamics of Nigeria's political transition towards the 2027 General Elections, the emerging patterns of coalition politics and party realignments, the challenges confronting the country's multi-party system, and the opportunities for strengthening democratic governance. Accordingly, the analysis that follow draws upon these complementary theoretical traditions in evaluating the prospects for a stable, competitive, and sustainable multi-party democracy in Nigeria.

The Nigerian experience suggests that neither excessive party fragmentation nor the overwhelming dominance of a single political party provides a satisfactory democratic outcome. The challenge lies in achieving an appropriate balance between political inclusiveness and effective governance. A viable multi-party system should simultaneously encourage broad representation, facilitate democratic competition, promote national integration, and produce governments capable of exercising authority effectively within the constitutional framework.

As Nigeria approaches the 2027 General Elections, the emergence of new political alignments and renewed coalition-building has once again placed these issues at the centre of national political discourse. The critical question is therefore not simply whether Nigeria should maintain a multi-party system, rather, it is whether its political parties can evolve into resilient, programmatic, nationally representative institutions capable of deepening democratic consolidation, strengthening public confidence, and advancing national development.

Methodological Note

This paper adopts a qualitative research approach, drawing primarily on historical and documentary methods of analysis. The historical method is employed to trace the evolution of Nigeria's party system from the First Republic to the contemporary Fourth Republic, with particular emphasis on the emergence of political parties, coalition-building, mergers, alliances, defections, and elite

political realignments. By situating current political developments within their historical context, the paper seeks to demonstrate that many of the issues shaping Nigeria's transition towards the 2027 General Elections are rooted in long-standing institutional and political processes rather than isolated contemporary events.

The analysis is further informed by insights from comparative political theory, particularly the works of leading scholars on democracy, party systems, electoral competition, and democratic consolidation. These theoretical perspectives provide the analytical framework for interpreting Nigeria's evolving party system and assessing its implications for democratic governance.

Methodologically, the paper is interpretive and analytical rather than predictive. Its purpose is neither to forecast electoral outcomes nor to advocate the interests of any political party, candidate, or ideological tendency. Rather, it seeks to provide a balanced and evidence-based assessment of the opportunities and challenges confronting Nigeria's multi-party democracy as the country prepares for the 2027 General Elections.

Background: Nigeria – A Complex and Plural Nation-State

Nigeria occupies a distinctive position among contemporary nation-states. As at July, 2026 Nigeria's has an estimated population exceeding 242.4 million people, accounting for up to 15.3% of African population, (Worldometer, July 2026). It is characterised by extraordinary ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural, and regional diversity. Home to over 370 ethnic groups and languages, the country represents one of the most complex plural societies in the world.

This diversity has profoundly shaped its political evolution, constitutional development, federal structure, and democratic experience. Contrary to the view once expressed by some early commentators that Nigeria is merely a "geographical expression," the country's political history demonstrates a continuous, if often challenging, effort to build a viable nation-state founded on constitutionalism, democratic governance, and a shared sense of national identity. Since attaining political independence in 1960, successive governments have grappled with the fundamental task of managing diversity while promoting national unity, political stability, inclusive governance, and socio-economic development.

Nigeria's demographic profile further underscores its strategic importance. In addition to being Africa's largest population centre, it possesses one of the world's youngest populations, with millions of young citizens entering the political and economic space each year. As at July, 2026 over 60% - 70% of Nigeria's population was under the age of 30 while up to 40% - 42% were teenagers, (Worldometer, July 2026). This demographic reality presents both significant opportunities and formidable challenges. A youthful population, if properly

managed, can serve as a powerful engine for innovation, economic growth, and democratic participation. Conversely, persistent unemployment, poverty, inequality, and social exclusion have the potential to generate political discontent, social unrest, and insecurity if not effectively addressed.

The country's social diversity has also exerted considerable influence on the design and operation of its political institutions. Federalism, the federal character principle, power-sharing arrangements, rotational leadership, and the constitutional recognition of multiple political parties have all evolved, in varying degrees, as institutional mechanisms for accommodating and managing diversity, promoting inclusion, and preserving national cohesion. These arrangements reflect an enduring search for political structures capable of balancing competing interests while sustaining democratic stability. It is within this broader context that Nigeria's party system should be studied and understood.

Political parties are expected not merely to compete for electoral victory but also to serve as instruments of national integration by building broad coalitions that transcend ethnic, religious, regional, and sectional identities. Their effectiveness, therefore, should be assessed not only by their electoral performance but also by their capacity to foster national consensus, social cohesion, strengthen democratic institutions, and promote responsible governance.

Accordingly, any meaningful analysis of Nigeria's democratic trajectory, including the debate over the desirability and sustainability of a multi-party system, must be situated within the country's unique socio-political and demographic realities. Democratic institutions cannot be separated from the social environment within which they operate, nor can political competition be fully understood without reference to the diversity that defines the Nigerian state.

Ultimately, Nigeria's diversity constitutes both one of its greatest strengths and one of its most enduring governance challenges. Properly managed, it provides a rich foundation for national creativity, resilience, and democratic pluralism. Poorly managed, however, it can deepen political fragmentation, undermine social cohesion, and weaken democratic institutions. The long-term success of Nigeria's democratic experiment will therefore depend on the capacity of its political leadership, public institutions, and citizens to transform diversity from a source of political contestations into a foundation for national unity, constitutional stability, and sustainable development.

In this regard, several institutions remain indispensable to democratic consolidation. These include the Constitution, an independent electoral management body, a professional and impartial judiciary, an effective legislature, vibrant political parties, a responsible media, and an active civil society. Together, these institutions provide the essential framework through which democratic

governance is sustained, political competition is regulated, and public accountability is promoted.

Political Parties and the Democratic Process: Concept, Meaning, and Relevance

Any meaningful discussion of democratic governance or a multi-party system must begin with a clear understanding of the concept and meaning of a political party. Political parties constitute one of the most important institutions of modern democracy. They serve as the vital link between the state and society, providing the organizational framework through which citizens participate in governance, articulate political preferences, aggregate interests, and compete peacefully for public office. In virtually all democratic societies, political parties are indispensable instruments of political mobilization, leadership recruitment, policy formulation, representation, and the orderly transfer of political power through constitutional means.

At its simplest level, a political party may be understood as an organized association of individuals who share broadly similar political values, principles, or policy objectives and who seek to acquire and exercise political power through constitutional and electoral processes. Political parties therefore perform the critical function of transforming diverse societal interests into coherent policy alternatives and presenting them to the electorate for consideration. In this sense, they constitute the institutional foundation upon which representative democracy rests. Because of their central role in democratic governance, political scientists have offered different definitions of political parties, each emphasizing particular aspects of their character and functions.

One of the earliest and most influential definitions was provided by the Irish political philosopher and statesman, Edmund Burke. Writing in 1770, Burke defined a political party as "a body of men united for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed." Burke's conception highlights three essential characteristics of a political party. First, it is an organized body of citizens acting collectively rather than individually. Second, its members are united by shared political principles and values rather than by personal ambition alone. Third, the ultimate purpose of political organization should be the advancement of the national or public interest. Burke's definition remains highly relevant because it reminds us that political parties should be more than electoral machines created solely to win elections. Rather, they should be enduring institutions founded upon shared principles and dedicated to promoting the common good.

From a different perspective, the American political scientist and economist Anthony Downs approached political parties through the lens of rational choice

theory. In his seminal work, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957), he defined a political party as "a team of men seeking to control the governing apparatus by gaining office in a duly constituted election." Downs argued that parties formulate policies largely as instruments for winning elections rather than contesting elections merely to implement pre-existing policies. In his analysis, electoral competition closely resembles economic competition: just as firms compete for customers in a marketplace, political parties compete for votes in the electoral marketplace.

Consequently, parties often adjust their programmes and campaign strategies to maximize electoral support, particularly in competitive democratic systems. Downs' contribution is especially valuable because it demonstrates that political parties are not merely ideological associations but practical organizations established to contest elections, secure political power, and govern through constitutionally recognized institutions.

Perhaps the most widely cited contemporary definition is that of the Italian political scientist Giovanni Sartori, whose pioneering work on political parties and party systems has profoundly influenced comparative political analysis. Sartori defined a political party as "any political group that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections, candidates for public office" (1976). His definition identifies two indispensable characteristics of a political party: participation in competitive elections and the capacity to secure public office through the electoral process.

By deliberately adopting this minimalist definition, Sartori distinguished political parties from pressure groups, civil society organizations, advocacy movements, ethnic associations, and other political organizations that seek to influence public policy without directly competing for governmental power. His formulation underscores the centrality of electoral competition as the defining institutional characteristic of political parties in democratic systems.

Taken together, the perspectives of Burke, Downs, and Sartori provide a comprehensive understanding of the nature and purpose of political parties. Burke emphasizes shared principles and commitment to the national interest; Downs highlights the struggle for governmental power through democratic competition; while Sartori identifies participation in elections and the capacity to place candidates in public office as the defining institutional features of political parties. Collectively, these perspectives demonstrate that a genuine political party combines principled ideas, organized competition for political power, and a commitment to governing in the public interest.

Beyond competing for political office, political parties perform several indispensable functions in every democratic society. They provide citizens with avenues for political participation and representation; recruit, train, and present

leaders for public office; articulate and aggregate societal interests; formulate policy alternatives; educate citizens on public affairs; and offer voters meaningful choices during elections. Equally important, political parties promote governmental accountability by scrutinizing the actions of those in power and presenting credible alternative programmes of governance. Without effective political parties, representative democracy would be largely impossible.

Across much of Africa, nationalist movements transformed themselves into political parties during the struggle against colonial rule in the 1950s and 1960s and subsequently assumed responsibility for governing newly independent states. As a result, political parties became both instruments of national liberation and vehicles for democratic governance. Although Africa's democratic experience has often been interrupted by military rule, authoritarian governments, ethnic polarization, weak institutions, and electoral crises, political parties have remained central actors in the continent's continuing search for democratic consolidation and constitutional governance.

Nigeria's political experience vividly illustrates the pivotal role of political parties in nation-building and democratic development. From the regional political parties of the First Republic through the two-party experiment of the Third Republic to the multi-party arrangements of the Fourth Republic, political parties have profoundly shaped the country's political evolution. Indeed, the history of Nigeria's democratic development is, in many respects, the history of the evolution of its political parties. They have served as platforms for political competition, elite bargaining, leadership recruitment, citizen participation, policy articulation, and the pursuit of national integration within one of the world's most diverse societies.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of political parties in Nigeria has frequently been constrained by weak ideological foundations, personality-driven politics, persistent defections, electoral malpractice, inadequate internal democracy, and the excessive monetization of the political process. These challenges have often weakened public confidence in political parties and undermined their capacity to function as effective vehicles for democratic governance. Yet, despite these limitations, political parties remain indispensable to Nigeria's democratic project. No democratic system can function effectively without viable political parties capable of mobilizing citizens, articulating societal interests, recruiting competent leaders, and providing credible alternatives for governance.

Political parties are therefore not merely participants in the democratic process; they are among its principal architects and custodians. Their strength, organizational capacity, internal democracy, ideological coherence, and commitment to national development largely determine the quality, stability, and sustainability of democratic governance. Having established the conceptual foundations, functions, and democratic relevance of political parties, the discussion

now turns to the nature of Nigeria's multi-party system, examining its evolution, its contemporary realities, and the challenges and opportunities it presents as the country prepares for the 2027 General Elections.

Historical Evolution of Political Party Coalitions, Alliances and Mergers in Nigeria

Understanding Nigeria's political transition towards the 2027 General Elections requires an appreciation of the historical evolution of party politics in the country. Contemporary debates surrounding coalitions, alliances, mergers, and political realignments are neither novel nor unique to the Fourth Republic. Rather, they constitute recurring features of Nigeria's democratic experience, reflecting the continuous search by political actors for viable electoral platforms capable of securing political power within a highly diverse society.

The history of Nigerian party politics demonstrates that coalition-building has frequently emerged as a pragmatic response to the country's complex social composition and electoral realities. Successive political generations have sought different institutional arrangements through which broad political support could be mobilised across regional, ethnic, religious, and ideological divides. Although the forms and objectives of these arrangements have varied over time, they have consistently reflected the recognition that no single political tendency can easily govern a country as diverse as Nigeria without building strategic partnerships.

Against this background, it is appropriate to examine the historical development of political coalitions, alliances, and mergers across Nigeria's successive democratic dispensations, beginning with the First Republic.

Political Coalitions and Alliances during the First Republic - 1959–1966.

Nigeria's First Republic emerged from the constitutional developments that culminated in the country's independence on 1 October 1960. Operating under the Westminster parliamentary system, the party system was characterised by strong regional foundations, with political competition largely organised around the country's three major regions.

The three dominant political parties were the Northern People's Congress (NPC), which exercised overwhelming influence in Northern Nigeria; the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), whose principal electoral strength was located in the Eastern Region; and the Action Group (AG), which dominated the Western Region. Alongside these major parties existed several smaller but politically significant organisations, including the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) and the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC). Although the principal parties maintained national organisational structures and professed

national aspirations, their electoral support base remained overwhelmingly regional in character.

The Federal Elections of December 1959 produced no outright parliamentary majority for any single political party. While the NPC led by Sir Ahmadu Bello, Sardauna of Sokoto, emerged as the largest party in the Federal Parliament, it did not secure sufficient seats to form a government independently. The electoral outcome therefore made coalition-building a constitutional and political necessity.

Following post-election negotiations, the NPC entered into a coalition agreement with the NCNC led by Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, leading to the formation of Nigeria's first independence government. Under this arrangement, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa of the NPC became Prime Minister, while Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe of the NCNC assumed the office of Governor-General at independence before becoming the first President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, following the country's transition to republican status in 1963. The Action Group, under the leadership of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, assumed the role of the official parliamentary opposition, (Alkali, R. 2024).

The NPC–NCNC Coalition represented the first formal inter-party governing coalition in Nigeria's political history. Beyond facilitating the formation of government, it reflected an attempt to promote political stability and national cohesion during the formative years of political independence. At a time when regional loyalties remained politically influential, cooperation between the country's two largest political parties provided an important measure of national legitimacy for the newly independent nation. In fact, one of the major achievements of the NNA alliance was the creation of the Mid West Region, the fourth region from Western Nigeria.

As preparations commenced for the Federal Elections of 1964, however, the political environment became increasingly polarised. Internal disagreements within the Action Group culminated in a major leadership crisis between Chief Obafemi Awolowo and his deputy, Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola. The ensuing crisis led to the split within the Action Group, leading to the emergence of the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) under Akintola's leadership and significantly altered the balance of political forces within the federation.

These developments precipitated a complex realignment of political parties into two major electoral alliances. The first, the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA), was led by the NPC and included the NNDP together with several northern-based political organisations. The second, the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA), brought together the NCNC, the Action Group, NEPU, the UMBC, and other opposition parties seeking to challenge the dominance of the ruling coalition.

The formation of the NNA and the UPGA marked the first large-scale experiment in electoral alliance politics in Nigeria. Rather than contesting elections

independently, the major political parties recognised that cooperation offered greater prospects for electoral success in an increasingly competitive political environment. These alliances demonstrated both the opportunities and the limitations of coalition politics in a plural society. On the one hand, they confirmed that broad political cooperation was often indispensable in a federation characterised by profound regional, ethnic, and religious diversity. On the other hand, the alliances also revealed the fragility of political partnerships that rested more on immediate electoral calculations than on enduring ideological convergence or institutional cohesion.

The disputed Federal Elections of 1964, followed by the political crisis in the Western Region in 1965, generated widespread instability and undermined public confidence in the democratic process. These developments, together with growing political tension across the federation, created the conditions that culminated in the military intervention of January 1966 and the collapse of Nigeria's First Republic.

The experience of the First Republic nevertheless established an enduring feature of Nigerian politics - that, in a highly diverse plural society, coalition-building and political alliances are not exceptional developments but recurring mechanisms through which political actors seek to secure electoral viability, governmental legitimacy, and national political accommodation.

Political Party Alliances and Coalitions During the Second Republic: 1979–1983.

Following thirteen years of military rule, Nigeria returned to civilian government on 1 October 1979. But unlike the Parliamentary System of Government which was practiced under the First Republic, the Second Republic constitution of 1979 was a Presidential system of government, modeled after the United States system. Thus, unlike the Parliamentary constitution of the First Republic, the presidential system encouraged broader national party structures and coalition-building. In the run up to the 1979 elections, five major political parties were registered by the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) namely: the National Party of Nigeria (NPN); Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN); Nigerian People's Party (NPP); People's Redemption Party (PRP); Great Nigeria People's Party (GNPP). Of course, just as was the case during the First Republic, there were a number of smaller political parties.

Although the larger political parties possessed wider national spread than their First Republic predecessors, many observers noted strong similarities and continuities with earlier regional political traditions. For example, while the UPN was widely regarded as the successor to the Action Group (AG), the NPP inherited much of the NCNC political base, and the PRP drew inspiration from the NEPU

tradition. The NPN was more national in character and composition but its roots lied with the old NPC.

The most important coalition arrangement of the Second Republic was the alliance between the NPN and the NPP which was formed after the 1979 elections. Although Alhaji Shehu Shagari won the presidency under the NPN, the party could not secure a comfortable legislative majority in National Assembly. To strengthen governance and ensure parliamentary support, the NPN entered into an accord with the NPP. The Agreement provided for: inclusion of NPP members in the federal cabinet; appointment of NPP nominees into federal boards and parastatals; and legislative cooperation between the two parties. This arrangement became popularly known as the "NPN-NPP Accord." It was not a merger but a governing coalition designed to provide stability to the new civilian administration.

However, by 1981, (barely two years after the Agreement), the the NPN - NPP Accord collapsed. This followed disagreements over appointments, patronage distribution and policy influence which weakened the alliance. The NPP eventually withdrew from the Accord, leading to increased polarization among political parties and intensifying competition ahead of the 1983 elections. The collapse of the coalition contributed to legislative tensions and weakened prospects for bipartisan cooperation.

Meanwhile, during the period leading to the 1983 elections, opposition political parties led by Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Alhaji Aminu Kano and Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim, also explored various forms of cooperation aimed at challenging the dominance of the NPN. However, ideological differences, personal rivalries among the party leaders, and regional interests prevented the emergence of a united opposition front comparable to later coalitions such as the APC alliance of 2013–2015.

As a result, the opposition political parties remained fragmented and went into the 1983 General elections deeply divided. This allowed the NPN to consolidate its electoral position in the 1983 elections. The disputed conduct of those elections, combined with economic decline and allegations of widespread electoral malpractice, eventually paved the way for the military coup of 31 December 1983.

Clearly, the experiences of the First and Second Republics reveal that coalition-building has been a persistent feature of Nigeria's multi-party politics. The NPC–NCNC coalition (1959-1960), the NNA and UPGA alliances, 1964-1965, and the NPN–NPP Accord, 1979-1981, all illustrate how political actors have repeatedly relied on inter-party cooperation to win and attain power, broaden legitimacy and manage Nigeria's complex social diversity.

At the same time, these experiences demonstrate that coalitions built primarily on electoral expediency rather than shared ideology or institutionalized agreements often prove fragile and difficult to sustain. For contemporary debates on Nigeria's

transition to 2027, these historical experiences provide valuable lessons regarding the opportunities and challenges facing coalition politics within a multi-party democratic system.

Political Party Alliances, Coalitions and the Formation of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), -1998–1999.

The transition from military to civilian rule in 1998 marked a defining moment in Nigeria's political development. Following years of political uncertainty, the annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election, the prolonged military rule, and the death of General Sani Abacha in June 1998, the country embarked upon a new transition programme under the administration of General Abdulsalami Abubakar. The political atmosphere created fresh opportunities for political dialogue, elite accommodation, and the construction of broad-based political organisations capable of leading Nigeria back to constitutional democracy.

It was within this broader national context that the coalition-building process leading to the formation of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) gathered momentum. Unlike many previous political alignments, the PDP emerged not merely as an electoral platform but as the product of sustained consultations among political leaders drawn from different regions, political traditions, and ideological backgrounds who shared a common commitment to restoring democratic governance.

One of the most illuminating insider accounts of this process was provided by Sule Lamido, in his autobiography, *Being True to Myself*. Lamido traced the origins of the Movement to a series of consultations, long before General Sani Abacha died, among leading pro-democracy politicians during the Abacha era. According to his account, the initial discussions began in May 1994 with a meeting of nine prominent political figures-popularly known as the G9-held at No. 9 Raymond Njoku Street, Ikoyi, Lagos. Participants included Dr Alex Ekwueme, Chief Bola Ige, Chief Solomon Lar, Professor Jerry Gana, Alhaji Adamu Ciroma, Alhaji Abubakar Rimi, Dr Iyiorchia Ayu, Dr Francis Ellah, and Malam Sule Lamido, (Lamido, S. 2025).

Their principal objective was to explore a coordinated political response after their respective political associations had been denied registration by the military administration of General Sani Abacha. Lamido's narrative also highlights an important exchange during the meeting. Chief Bola Ige reportedly challenged the northern participants to demonstrate that opposition to military rule was genuinely national rather than regionally driven. He argued that unless influential northern political leaders openly mobilised against General Abacha's regime, many Nigerians would continue to regard the opposition movement with scepticism.

According to Lamido, this intervention became a turning point in the evolution of the coalition. In response to this challenge, a smaller group of northern political leaders subsequently met in Kaduna under the leadership of Alhaji Adamu Ciroma. Their deliberations eventually gave rise to what became known as the G18, comprising prominent northern politicians committed to opposing the proposed political transition programme of the Abacha administration. The group addressed an open letter to General Abacha expressing reservations about the direction of the transition process and warning against any attempt to perpetuate military rule, (Lamido, S. 2025).

The significance of the G18, however, lay not merely in its regional composition but in the role it played in broadening the national democratic movement. As Lamido explains, the initiative subsequently expanded into the G34, bringing together eminent political leaders from all parts of the federation. The G34 became one of the most influential political platforms opposing General Abacha's proposed self-succession programme and played a pivotal role in the negotiations that eventually culminated in the formation of the Peoples Democratic Party.

The PDP therefore emerged from one of the broadest political coalitions in Nigeria's contemporary history. Its founding membership included distinguished politicians who had previously belonged to different political parties and ideological traditions. Former leaders and prominent members of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), the Nigerian People's Party (NPP), the People's Redemption Party (PRP), and, subsequently, politicians associated with the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and other political tendencies came together in pursuit of a common national objective. By subordinating earlier political differences to the larger goal of democratic transition, they succeeded in constructing a political platform with genuinely national reach and organisational capacity.

The experience of the aborted Third Republic also significantly influenced the character of the emerging coalition. The creation of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC) under General Ibrahim Babangida's transition programme, together with the annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election won by Chief M. K. O. Abiola, reinforced public demands for a credible and inclusive democratic transition. Many politicians who had participated in the SDP subsequently became important contributors to the formation and organisational development of the PDP.

These broad political consultations and realignments ultimately positioned the PDP to emerge as the dominant political party during the transition to the Fourth Republic. Its extensive national network, experienced leadership, and broad-based coalition enabled it to sponsor General Olusegun Obasanjo as its presidential

candidate in the 1999 General Elections, which marked Nigeria's return to constitutional rule after prolonged military governance.

Although the PDP emerged as the governing party in 1999, it was not the only significant political organisation participating in the transition. Other major parties, including the All Peoples Party (APP) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD), also contested the elections and contributed to the restoration of competitive party politics. While these parties enjoyed stronger regional support, they nevertheless possessed broader organisational structures than many of their First Republic predecessors and reflected the constitutional requirement for greater national political inclusion.

As Nigeria's democratic experience matured, the number of registered political parties expanded considerably, reaching to ninety-three by 2019. However, subsequent electoral reforms and the enforcement of constitutional requirements relating to electoral performance resulted in the deregistration of many parties that failed to satisfy prescribed legal thresholds. Consequently, only eighteen political parties participated in the 2023 General Elections. This development illustrates the continuing effort to balance political pluralism with the need for an effective, credible, and institutionally viable party system.

Coalition Building and the Formation of the All Progressives Congress (APC): 2013–2015

Unlike the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), which emerged in 1998 largely as a broad coalition of influential political actors during Nigeria's transition to civil rule, the emergence of the All Progressives Congress (APC) was a gradual and carefully negotiated process of coalition-building among opposition political parties and influential political leaders. Its formation represented one of the most significant developments in Nigeria's democratic history because it fundamentally altered the country's party system and eventually produced the first peaceful electoral transfer of presidential power from a ruling party to an opposition party in 2015.

The evolution of the APC may be understood in three distinct phases. The first phase began in September 2006 when several opposition parties sought to consolidate their political strength by merging into a single platform. These parties included the defunct Action Congress (AC), a faction of the Alliance for Democracy (AD), the Justice Party (JP), the Advanced Congress of Democrats (ACD), and a number of smaller political associations. The merger produced the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), which rapidly emerged as the dominant opposition party in much of Southern Nigeria. One of the principal architects of this political realignment was Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the former Governor

of Lagos State and the current President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, whose strategic vision played a central role in building the opposition coalition.

The second phase occurred in February 2013 when three major opposition parties - the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), and the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP)-formally agreed to merge. They were joined by a faction of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), creating the All Progressives Congress (APC). This merger brought together political tendencies with different regional, ideological, and historical backgrounds under a common platform united principally by the objective of providing a credible national alternative to the PDP.

The decisive third phase came later in 2013 following the internal crisis within the PDP. On 25 November 2013, after months of intense political negotiations and disagreements within the ruling party, the breakaway faction known as the New PDP (nPDP) formally joined the APC. This development transformed what had been an opposition coalition into a genuinely national political movement capable of mounting a serious challenge to the incumbent government.

Among the most influential members of the nPDP who defected were five serving governors: Rotimi Amaechi of Rivers State, Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso of Kano State, Murtala Nyako of Adamawa State, Abdulfatah Ahmed of Kwara State, and Aliyu Wamakko of Sokoto State. These governors had earlier belonged to the group popularly known as the G-7 Governors, who openly challenged the leadership of President Goodluck Jonathan and the national leadership of the PDP.

Although the original G-7 also included Governors Mu'azu Babangida Aliyu of Niger State and Sule Lamido of Jigawa State, both did not defect to APC but remained in the PDP. Nevertheless, the defection of the other five governors significantly altered Nigeria's political balance. The importance of this development extended far beyond the movement of governors alone. Before the arrival of the nPDP, the APC already controlled eleven state governments. With the addition of the five defecting governors, its strength increased to sixteen governors, accompanied by numerous serving senators, members of the House of Representatives, members of State Houses of Assembly, and other influential political office holders. Equally significant was the defection of several nationally prominent political figures, including former Vice President Atiku Abubakar, former PDP National Chairman Alhaji Kawu Baraje, and many other senior party leaders whose political influence extended across different regions of the federation.

From a historical perspective, the significance of these defections lay not merely in their numerical value but in their strategic implications. They dramatically expanded the APC's national reach, strengthened its organizational capacity, enhanced its financial and political resources, and increased its electoral

credibility. Much like the PDP at its own formation in 1998, the APC became a broad coalition of diverse political interests united by a common objective rather than by complete ideological uniformity. The coalition successfully pooled regional influence, organizational structures, political experience, and electoral resources into a single national platform capable of competing effectively for federal power.

The emergence of the APC therefore represented far more than the registration of another political party. It marked the reconfiguration of Nigeria's party system through the successful consolidation of opposition forces. For the first time since the beginning of the Fourth Republic, Nigeria possessed an opposition party with sufficient geographical spread, organizational depth, leadership experience, and political resources to compete effectively against the ruling PDP.

The political consequences became evident during the 2015 General Elections. General Muhammadu Buhari had previously contested the presidency on three separate occasions without success. He ran under the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) in 2003 and 2007, and under the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) in 2011. Although he enjoyed considerable popularity, particularly in Northern Nigeria, the political platforms on which he contested lacked the broad national coalition necessary to secure victory in Nigeria's highly diverse electoral environment.

The formation of the APC fundamentally changed that equation. By combining the electoral strengths of previously fragmented opposition parties with the political influence of the defecting nPDP leaders, the APC provided General Buhari with the first truly national platform of his political career. The result was his historic victory in the 2015 presidential election—the first occasion in Nigeria's democratic history in which an incumbent ruling party was defeated through the ballot box and peacefully transferred power to the opposition.

The durability of the coalition was further demonstrated in the 2023 General Elections when the APC again secured the presidency with the election of Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu. While the political contexts of 2015 and 2023 differed considerably, both elections underscored a recurring feature of Nigerian politics: broad-based political coalitions, strategic alliances, and nationwide organizational structures remain indispensable ingredients for success in presidential elections.

The formation of the APC therefore represented a watershed in Nigeria's democratic evolution. It illustrates that in a politically diverse federation such as Nigeria, electoral success is seldom achieved through regional strength or individual popularity alone. Rather, it is often the product of painstaking coalition-building, institutional consolidation, and the ability to forge broad national alliances capable of commanding support across the country's complex political, regional, and social landscape. This experience provides an important foundation

for understanding both the transformation of Nigeria's party system and the wider dynamics of political competition as the country prepares for the 2027 General Elections.

Political Party Implosion: How the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) Lost Power in 2015

The emergence of the New Peoples Democratic Party (nPDP) in 2013 and the subsequent defection of its principal leaders to the All Progressives Congress (APC) fundamentally reconfigured Nigeria's party system. More importantly, it marked the beginning of the chain of political developments that culminated in the defeat of the PDP in the 2015 General Elections after sixteen uninterrupted years in power. From every objective assessment, the events of 2013–2014 constitute one of the most significant turning points in the fortunes of the PDP and in the political history of Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

The crisis within the PDP did not arise suddenly. Rather, it reflected the accumulation of deep-seated disagreements over internal party democracy, the concentration of influence within the party leadership, perceptions of political marginalisation among influential stakeholders, disputes over the zoning of the presidency, and growing dissatisfaction with the management of party affairs. Individually, these issues might have been manageable; collectively, however, they generated a crisis of confidence that gradually weakened the cohesion of the ruling party.

The internal conflict reached its climax during the PDP Special National Convention of 31 August 2013, when a group of senior party leaders dramatically walked out of the National Convention at the Eagle Square, Abuja, and announced the formation of the New PDP (nPDP). The faction comprised serving governors, members of the National Assembly, former ministers, and senior party officials. Among its most influential members were the Governors of Rivers, Kano, Sokoto, Adamawa, and Kwara States, whose subsequent defection to the APC substantially altered the country's political balance.

These governors, as we earlier noted, were soon joined by other nationally prominent political figures, including former Vice President Atiku Abubakar, Senator Bukola Saraki, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Rt. Hon. Aminu Waziri Tambuwal, together with numerous legislators and influential political actors across the federation. Their collective movement transformed the APC from a relatively young opposition coalition into a genuinely national political party with the organisational reach, leadership capacity, and electoral strength necessary to challenge the ruling PDP.

The consequences of these developments were profound. The defections significantly weakened the PDP's organisational structure, reduced its political

dominance in several strategic states, and strengthened the opposition's ability to compete effectively at the national level. In this sense, the 2015 presidential election was not merely a contest between two political parties; it was the culmination of a major political realignment that had begun nearly two years earlier.

Although the PDP continued to project an image of unity and confidence, important warning signs had already emerged. On 16 September 2014, the PDP Caucus met at the Presidential Villa and endorsed President Goodluck Jonathan for a second term in office. The following day, the Board of Trustees unanimously affirmed that decision, while the National Executive Committee formally ratified the endorsement on 18 September 2014, effectively granting President Jonathan the party's presidential ticket well before the National Convention.

Looking at these developments from the outside, these endorsements suggested a united political organisation. Beneath the surface, however, serious divisions persisted. Within six months, many influential political actors who had publicly endorsed President Jonathan either withdrew their active support or aligned themselves with forces working against the party's electoral success. The contrast between the public display of unity and the underlying political reality illustrates the extent to which internal cohesion had already deteriorated.

It would therefore be an oversimplification to attribute the PDP's defeat solely to the growing strength of the APC. Equally important were the internal divisions, unresolved grievances, leadership disputes, and loss of confidence within the ruling party itself. In many respects, the PDP's electoral defeat reflected both the effectiveness of the opposition coalition and the inability of the ruling party to preserve its internal unity during a critical period in Nigeria's democratic development. For this reason, it may reasonably be argued that the 2015 election was shaped by two interconnected processes.

The first was the successful consolidation of the opposition under the APC. The second was the progressive fragmentation of the PDP from within. Together, these developments transformed Nigeria's political landscape and produced the country's first democratic transfer of presidential power from an incumbent ruling party to an opposition party through the ballot box.

Nigeria, Political Coalitions and Elite Consensus

The events leading to the 2015 elections also reveal a broader characteristic of Nigerian politics. Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, no individual has successfully attained the presidency without the support of a broad-based political party and a coalition of influential political actors that cuts across regional, ethnic, religious, and institutional forces. Although these alliances are often informal, fluid,

and sometimes temporary, they have consistently played a decisive role in determining electoral outcomes.

The political career of General Muhammadu Buhari illustrates this reality. Before 2015, he contested the presidency on three occasions but was unsuccessful. Although he commanded considerable personal popularity and a loyal electoral base, the political parties under which he contested-the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) and later the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC)-did not possess the national organisational reach or coalition strength required to secure victory in Nigeria's highly plural society.

His electoral breakthrough came only after the formation of the APC, whose broad national coalition substantially expanded his political appeal beyond his traditional support base. The lesson is both clear and significant: in Nigeria's complex federal system, personal popularity, political experience, or regional dominance alone are rarely sufficient to secure the presidency. Electoral success depends fundamentally on the ability to construct and sustain broad and durable political coalitions.

This conclusion reinforces an argument we advanced elsewhere that the Nigerian political process is shaped by several strategic variables which must be carefully aligned before a presidential candidate can successfully emerge and govern effectively (Alkali, R. A. 2024). While the precise configuration of these variables may differ from one election to another, the broader principle remains constant: coalition-building, elite accommodation, institutional support, and nationwide political acceptability remain indispensable features of successful presidential politics in Nigeria.

A further observation may also be made. Nigerian political history suggests that many successful presidential candidates did not begin their political journeys as overwhelming favourites. Rather, they emerged through prolonged negotiation, strategic compromise, and broad political accommodation within their respective parties and coalitions. The election of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu in 2023 illustrates both the continuity and the evolving character of this pattern. Despite significant opposition to his Presidential ambition before, and during the APC presidential primaries, he ultimately secured his party's nomination and subsequently won the presidential election, demonstrating once again the decisive importance of political organisation, coalition-building, and strategic elite consensus in Nigeria's democratic process.

The broader lesson for Nigeria's political transition to 2027 is therefore unmistakable. Political parties that neglect internal democracy, fail to manage competing interests, or underestimate the importance of coalition-building risk repeating the experience of the PDP in 2015. Conversely, parties capable of maintaining internal cohesion, accommodating diverse political interests, and

building broad national alliances are more likely to command public confidence and electoral success. In this respect, the events of 2015 are not merely matters of historical interest; they remain valuable lessons for all political actors seeking to shape Nigeria's democratic future.

Nigeria's Democratic Transitions: 1999–2027

Nigeria's contemporary democratic experience may best be understood through the succession of political transitions that have taken place since the restoration of constitutional rule in 1999. In this context, a political transition refers to the constitutional and electoral processes through which political authority is renewed or transferred from one administration to another. The concept extends beyond a mere change of presidents; it encompasses the broader cycle of general elections through which the Nigerian electorate periodically renews or redefines its democratic mandate.

As Nigeria commemorated twenty-six years of uninterrupted democratic governance on 29 May 2026, the country reached an important milestone in its political history. For the first time since independence in 1960, Nigeria has sustained constitutional civilian rule for over a quarter of a century without military interruption. Although the country's democratic journey has not been free from political crises, institutional weaknesses, or electoral controversies, the continuity of constitutional government represents one of the most significant achievements of the Fourth Republic.

The first democratic transition of the Fourth Republic occurred between 1998 and 1999 under the leadership of General Abdulsalami Abubakar. Following the death of General Sani Abacha, the military government initiated a carefully managed transition programme that culminated in the General Elections of 1999 and the peaceful transfer of power to President Olusegun Obasanjo on 29 May 1999. This marked the beginning of Nigeria's longest uninterrupted period of democratic governance.

The second democratic transition took place in 2003 when President Obasanjo successfully sought and secured re-election for a second constitutional term. The election represented the first opportunity under the Fourth Republic for an incumbent civilian president to renew his mandate through the electoral process.

The third transition followed the completion of President Obasanjo's constitutionally permitted two terms in office. The 2007 General Elections produced the election of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, who was sworn into office on 29 May 2007. This represented Nigeria's first civilian-to-civilian transfer of presidential authority under the Fourth Republic, an important milestone in the country's democratic consolidation despite widespread criticism of the electoral process itself.

The fourth transition was unique in Nigeria's constitutional history. It arose not from a general election but from the untimely death of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua on 5 May 2010 after a prolonged illness. Prior to his death, the prolonged absence of the President had generated a constitutional and political crisis, which was resolved through the invocation of the Doctrine of Necessity by the National Assembly. This extraordinary constitutional innovation enabled Vice President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan to assume presidential powers and, following President Yar'Adua's death, to be sworn in as President on 6 May 2010. Unlike the other transitions discussed here, this was an irregular but constitutionally significant transition that demonstrated the capacity of Nigeria's democratic institutions to respond to an unforeseen national crisis while preserving constitutional continuity (Alkali, R. A., 2024).

The fifth democratic transition occurred in 2011 when President Goodluck Jonathan sought and won election in his own right. Having completed the unexpired period of President Yar'Adua's tenure, his victory in the 2011 General Elections provided him with an independent democratic mandate and reinforced the constitutional principle that political legitimacy ultimately derives from the electorate.

The sixth transition, in 2015, occupies a special place in Nigeria's democratic history. Following the General Elections, President Goodluck Jonathan graciously accepted the verdict of the elections even before the final count was announced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Dr Goodluck Jonathan, in a rare Statemanship conceded victory to General Muhammadu Buhari, the presidential candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC). This marked the first occasion since Nigeria's political independence, that, an incumbent ruling party peacefully transferred presidential power to an opposition party through the ballot box. The election therefore represented a defining moment in Nigeria's democratic consolidation and significantly enhanced the country's democratic credentials both within Africa and internationally.

The seventh transition occurred in 2019 when President Muhammadu Buhari was re-elected for a second term of four years, demonstrating the continued operation of Nigeria's constitutional electoral cycle.

The eighth democratic transition followed the 2023 General Elections, which produced the election of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu under the platform of the All Progressives Congress (APC). His election marked another peaceful transfer of authority under the constitutional framework of the Fourth Republic and further extended Nigeria's uninterrupted democratic experience.

Viewed collectively, these transitions illustrate both continuity and change in Nigeria's democratic evolution. Since 1999, the country has conducted eight general elections under the Fourth Republic, produced five elected presidents, and

experienced one exceptional constitutional succession through the Doctrine of Necessity following the death of a sitting president. Each transition has presented its own political challenges, yet together they have contributed to the gradual institutionalisation of constitutional governance and electoral politics in Nigeria.

The country now stands at the threshold of another important democratic milestone. The political transition leading to the 2027 General Elections represents the ninth transition process of the Fourth Republic. Unlike previous transitions, however, it is unfolding within an increasingly competitive multi-party environment characterised by shifting political alliances, coalition-building, party defections, growing public expectations, and evolving electoral dynamics. Consequently, the 2027 transition offers not only another opportunity for the peaceful renewal of democratic mandates but also an important test of the maturity, resilience, and assured future trajectory of Nigeria's democratic institutions.

Nigeria's Transition to the 2027 General Elections Gathered Momentum

Nigeria's political history demonstrates that almost every democratic transition has been characterised by heightened political competition, uncertainty, intense elite contestation and, in some cases, electoral violence before, during or after general elections. Although the circumstances surrounding each election have differed, the struggle for political power has consistently placed enormous pressure on political parties, the electoral institutions, the judiciary, the security agencies and other organs of government responsible for managing the transition process. As the political and economic stakes continue to rise, so too do the expectations and anxieties surrounding electoral contests. The transition to the 2027 General Elections is no exception. Indeed, available evidence indicates that preparations for the elections commenced much earlier than in previous electoral cycles, reflecting the rapidly evolving dynamics of Nigeria's multi-party system and the growing importance of coalition politics. Consequently, the contest for political power in 2027 has already entered an active phase.

The growing momentum towards the 2027 General Elections is evident in a number of important developments:

- i. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) released the timetable for the 2027 General Elections in May 2026, together with detailed guidelines governing party primaries and the timetable for their completion;
- ii. Most political parties intending to participate in the elections subsequently issued their own guidelines and schedules for the conduct of party primaries in accordance with the INEC timetable;
- iii. In compliance with the electoral timetable, the majority of political parties submitted their membership registers to the INEC and successfully conducted their

primaries, leading to the emergence of candidates for various elective offices through either direct or indirect primary elections.

iv. By July 2026, political parties were required, in accordance with INEC guidelines, to upload the names of their nominated candidates to the Commission's electronic portal within the stipulated period and in accordance with prescribed procedures;

v. The electoral timetable also provided a limited window within which political parties could substitute candidates in exceptional circumstances, such as death or voluntary withdrawal, subject to the provisions of the Electoral Act and INEC regulations; and

vi. Full campaign for Presidential, National Assembly, Governorship and House of Assembly members are expected to commence in August to September 2026.

However, unlike previous electoral cycles, where coalition negotiations gathered momentum only shortly before the commencement of election campaigns, preparations for the 2027 General Elections followed a markedly different pattern. In fact, long before INEC formally released the electoral timetable, political consultations, elite negotiations, coalition-building efforts, defections and merger discussions had already commenced among major political actors across the country. Taken together, these developments demonstrate that the transition to the 2027 General Elections differs significantly from earlier electoral cycles. Political alignments and strategic calculations preceded the formal commencement of the electoral process, while coalition-building emerged as one of the defining characteristics of Nigeria's pre-election politics. Competition among political actors therefore shifted beyond routine electoral preparations to broader questions of party survival, elite realignment, opposition cooperation and the consolidation of political power.

Consequently, two broad and discernible tendencies have emerged during the early stages of the 2027 transition. On the one hand, opposition political leaders have intensified efforts to regroup, negotiate alliances and build a broad coalition capable of challenging the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC). On the other hand, the APC simultaneously embarked upon a strategy of political consolidation and expansion by strengthening its organisational structures and attracting prominent politicians from opposition parties. These parallel developments have come to define the political landscape leading to the 2027 General Elections.

Three Decades of Party Realignment: The Atiku Abubakar Approach

As we noted earlier on, one of the most significant political developments preceding the 2027 General Elections has been the early regrouping and realignment of opposition politicians. Long before the Independent National

Electoral Commission (INEC) formally released the electoral timetable, consultations, strategic meetings and coalition-building efforts had commenced among leading political actors outside the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC). The principal objective of these efforts was to construct a broad political platform capable of mounting a credible challenge to the APC in the 2027 elections.

Among the prominent figures involved in these consultations were former Vice President Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, former state governors, former ministers, former members of the National Assembly and other influential political leaders drawn from different political parties and geopolitical zones. Here, political parties were not involved in these processes of coalition and mergers. What initially began as discreet political consultations gradually evolved into an open campaign for opposition unity. The coalition argued that the APC administration had failed to address many of Nigeria's pressing political, economic and security challenges and therefore called for the emergence of an alternative political platform.

Within this unfolding political process, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar emerged as one of the principal and leading architects and driving forces behind the opposition coalition. His long political experience, extensive national network and consistent presidential aspirations made him a central figure in the coalition negotiations. Atiku Abubakar's political career also provides an illuminating case study of Nigeria's evolving party system. Over the last three decades, Atiku Abubakar has contested for the presidency under several political parties, illustrating both the fluidity of party alignments and the strategic calculations that increasingly characterise Nigerian politics.

His first presidential contest took place in 1992 under the platform of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) during the transition programme of General Ibrahim Babangida. Although he lost the party's presidential primary to Chief Moshood Kashimawo Abiola, the experience established him as a politician with national presidential ambitions.

Secondly, it was widely believed that in 2003, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, then serving as the Vice President of President Olusegun Obasanjo attempted to step out and contest for the Presidency under the same PDP platform. He was prodded and promised support by some of the Governors in the country. This raised a lot tensions and acrimony within the PDP before the primaries, at a time President Olusegun Obasanjo himself was also set to seek for a second term in office. Ultimately, Atiku Abubakar did not contest for the primaries and President Obasanjo was fielded by the PDP and he won both the primaries and the General elections in 2003.

In 2007, Atiku contested the presidency under the Action Congress (AC), challenging the PDP candidate, Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, and the ANPP candidate, General Muhammadu Buhari. Although unsuccessful, the election

demonstrated his determination to pursue the presidency outside the PDP when political circumstances demanded. He subsequently returned to the PDP and contested the party's presidential primaries in 2011 but lost to the incumbent President, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. Three years later, amid widespread internal disagreements within the PDP, Atiku joined other influential politicians in leaving the party to participate in the formation and consolidation of the APC. In 2014, he sought the APC presidential nomination but lost to General Muhammadu Buhari, who subsequently won the 2015 presidential election. After the elections, Atiku once again returned to the PDP, where he secured the party's presidential nomination for both the 2019 and 2023 General Elections. On both occasions, however, he was defeated in the presidential election.

Despite these repeated setbacks, Atiku Abubakar remained politically active and continued to pursue his presidential ambition. His resilience and persistence have made him one of the most enduring political actors in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. From an analytical perspective, Atiku Abubakar's political journey illustrates several important characteristics of Nigeria's party system. First, political parties frequently function as electoral platforms rather than rigid ideological organisations, making party defections and realignments relatively common. Secondly, coalition-building has become an increasingly important electoral strategy in a highly competitive multiparty environment. Thirdly, the personal ambitions of leading political actors often interact with broader institutional and electoral considerations, producing complex patterns of alliance formation and party restructuring.

As discussions on the opposition coalition intensified in 2025, several important questions emerged. Would the coalition succeed in transforming itself into a unified political party, or would it adopt an already existing platform? Would Atiku Abubakar ultimately emerge as its presidential candidate? Would other influential coalition leaders remain united throughout the transition process? Above all, could the coalition successfully mobilise sufficient national support to challenge the electoral dominance of the APC? Surprisingly, within a relatively short period of only one year, many of these questions received practical answers as the coalition gradually consolidated around a common political platform, thereby opening a new chapter in Nigeria's evolving multiparty politics.

Opposition Coalitions and the Adoption of the African Democratic Congress (ADC)

Following several months of intensive consultations, negotiations and political bargaining, the opposition coalition eventually adopted the African Democratic Congress (ADC) as its preferred political platform for the 2027 General Elections. This decision marked a significant turning point in Nigeria's evolving party system

and demonstrated once again that coalition politics has become an increasingly important feature of democratic competition in the Fourth Republic.

The adoption of the ADC was accompanied by a series of high-profile political realignments. Alhaji Atiku Abubakar resigned from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) to join the coalition, while other prominent political figures-including Senator David Mark, former President of the Senate; Chief Rauf Aregbesola, former Governor of Osun State; Rt. Hon. Rotimi Amaechi, former Governor of Rivers State; Mallam Nasir El-Rufai, former Governor of Kaduna State; and Babachir David Lawal, former Secretary to the Government of the Federation-also became leading participants in the new political arrangement. Senator David Mark and Chief Rauf Aregbesola were subsequently appointed Protem National Chairman and Protem National Secretary respectively, reflecting an effort to establish an interim leadership structure capable of managing the coalition.

An important question naturally arises: Why did the coalition choose the ADC rather than establish an entirely new political party? It appears, the decision to adopt the ADC in preparation for the 2027 elections reflected both strategic and institutional considerations. Registering an entirely new political party would have required considerable time and administrative procedures under Nigeria's electoral laws. By adopting an already registered political party with nationwide recognition and existing organisational structures, the coalition was able to concentrate its efforts on political mobilisation rather than institutional formation.

This development illustrates an important characteristic of Nigeria's multiparty democracy. Smaller political parties should not be dismissed merely because they possess limited electoral strength. Under changing political circumstances, they may become valuable institutional vehicles through which broader political alliances, elite realignments and opposition coalitions can be organised. Their strategic importance often exceeds their immediate electoral performance.

The African Democratic Congress (ADC) was registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in 2005 as one of the country's recognised political parties. It was led by Ralph Oke Nwosu who was the pioneer National Chairman, a position he retained for twenty years until 2025. Although ADC remained relatively small for many years, the party gradually developed organisational structures across the federation and maintained its legal status as a registered political party.

The party gained increased national visibility in 2018 when it became the political platform associated with the Coalition for Nigeria Movement (CNM), an initiative promoted by former President Olusegun Obasanjo. Although the movement did not fundamentally alter Nigeria's electoral landscape, it significantly enhanced the public profile of the ADC and demonstrated that smaller political

parties could serve as credible platforms for political alliances and reform-oriented coalitions.

As the coalition expanded, it attracted additional prominent political actors, including Peter Obi of the Labour Party (LP) and Rabiuna Musa Kwankwaso of the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP), both of whom had been presidential candidates in the 2023 General Elections. Their entry initially strengthened the coalition by broadening its geographical reach and electoral appeal. However, coalition politics also revealed its inherent contradictions. Differences emerged over leadership, presidential ambition, power-sharing arrangements and the future direction of the coalition. These disagreements eventually resulted in the withdrawal of both Peter Obi and Rabiuna Musa Kwankwaso from the ADC, after which they moved to another political party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC).

At the conclusion of the nomination process, Atiku Abubakar finally emerged as the presidential candidate of the ADC, while Rotimi Amaechi was nominated by Atiku Abubakar as the Vice-Presidential candidate. These developments illustrate an enduring lesson from comparative coalition politics. All successful coalitions require far more than shared opposition to a governing party. They depend upon mutual trust, institutional discipline, clearly negotiated agreements, inclusive leadership, effective conflict-management mechanisms and a willingness among participants to subordinate individual ambitions to collective political objectives.

However, subsequent administrative, legal and organisational disputes emerged within the ADC, further exposing the challenges confronting coalition politics in Nigeria. Internal disagreements generated litigation, factionalisation and uncertainty, thereby diverting attention from broader electoral mobilisation. Such developments also highlighted an important institutional reality: the electoral timetable established by INEC is fixed and applies equally to all political parties. Internal party disputes cannot delay or stop the constitutional electoral process.

The experience of the ADC also reinforces a critical historical lesson. As earlier discussions in this paper have shown, the coalitions and alliances that emerged in the periods: 1959-1960; 1964-1965; 1979 -1981; 1998-1999; and 2013-2014, achieved varying degrees of success largely because of their capacity-or inability-to negotiate sustainable power-sharing arrangements, build internal consensus and establish effective organisational structures. It is a binding rule that coalitions built primarily around personalities, personal ambitions and immediate electoral calculations are generally more fragile than those founded upon shared political objectives, institutional discipline and enduring organisational frameworks.

Obstacles and Hurdles Facing the Opposition in Nigeria

The opposition political forces in Nigeria currently face formidable obstacles in their efforts to mobilise citizens, build sustainable political organisations, and successfully challenge the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) in the 2027 general elections. To begin with, as was already shown, virtually all the major presidential contenders in the 2023 general elections have encountered serious difficulties within their respective political parties. The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), once widely regarded as Nigeria's strongest political party, has become deeply embroiled in leadership disputes and other internal organisational challenges, thereby weakening its cohesion and electoral strength. The situation has been further compounded by the steady wave of defections from the PDP to the APC.

As of June 2025, the PDP controlled ten state governments. However, just one year later, by July 2026, it no longer had a single serving governor, with many federal and state legislators either following their governors into the APC or joining other political parties. The defection of the Governors of Bauchi and Oyo States on May 2, 2026 to the Allied Peoples Movement (APM) marked a significant turning point in the fortunes of the party. This unprecedented development has considerably diminished the organisational capacity and national reach of the party.

The Labour Party (LP), the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP), and several other opposition parties have faced similar internal difficulties. Leadership disputes, prolonged litigations, and factional conflicts have weakened their organisational structures and undermined public confidence. At the same time, these parties have also experienced significant defections to the ruling APC. On 31st December, 2025, Peter Obi formerly announced his departure from the Labour Party to join the ADC. However by 3rd May, 2026, Peter Obi had left the ADC and moved to NDC with his followers. Similarly, Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso abandoned the NNPP and joined the ADC on 30th March, 2026. But less two months later in May 2026, he defected to NDC.

Another major challenge for the opposition arose from disagreements over presidential zoning ahead of the 2027 elections. Within the PDP, intense debates centred on which geopolitical zone should produce the party's presidential candidate. Many influential leaders within the PDP strongly insisted that, in the interest of equity and political balance, the ticket should be zoned to Southern Nigeria. Following extensive consultations, the party eventually adopted that position. Although the Governor of Oyo State, Seyi Makinde, initially indicated interest in contesting for the presidency, the PDP ultimately settled for former President Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan as its presidential candidate. The anticipation of this outcome appears to have accelerated former Vice President

Atiku Abubakar's decision to leave the party and join the African Democratic Congress (ADC).

Before these developments, there had been widespread political speculation that if the emerging opposition coalition succeeded in adopting a common political platform and Atiku Abubakar secured its presidential ticket, Peter Obi might accept the position of Vice-Presidential candidate, based on an understanding, that Atiku would serve for only one term of four years before supporting Obi's presidential ambition. However, this political calculation did not materialise. Peter Obi also maintained his own presidential aspiration for the 2027 election, making such an arrangement not only difficult but impossible to achieve. The inability of the opposition leaders to harmonise their individual presidential ambitions further complicated efforts to present a united political front ahead of the elections.

Opposition Political Parties Have Won Elections in Africa

One of the defining features of democracy, both in Africa and across the world, is the possibility of political alternation through the ballot box. Democracy rests on the fundamental principle that no political party has a perpetual mandate to govern and that citizens retain the sovereign right to choose, retain, or peacefully replace their leaders through periodic, free, fair, and competitive elections. Within a multi-party democratic system, opposition parties perform an indispensable role by presenting alternative policies, programmes, and leadership choices to the electorate. Contrary to the widespread belief that ruling parties are almost impossible to defeat in Africa, the continent's democratic experience since the early 1990s demonstrates otherwise.

Across several African countries, opposition parties have successfully challenged and defeated incumbent governments through democratic elections, thereby strengthening democratic institutions and promoting peaceful transfers of political power. The first notable example was the Republic of Benin in 1991, where President Mathieu Kérékou lost power following the country's transition to multi-party democracy. This democratic breakthrough was followed by Senegal in 2000, when Abdoulaye Wade brought to an end four decades of rule by the Socialist Party through a historic electoral victory.

That same year, Ghana witnessed another important democratic milestone when John Agyekum Kufuor, representing the opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP), defeated the governing National Democratic Congress (NDC), resulting in the country's first peaceful transfer of power between rival political parties. Two years later, in 2002, Kenya experienced a similar democratic transition when Mwai Kibaki led the National Rainbow Coalition to victory over the candidate of the long-ruling Kenya African National Union (KANU).

The pattern continued in subsequent years. In Ghana's closely contested 2008 presidential election, Professor John Evans Atta Mills of the National Democratic Congress defeated Nana Akufo-Addo of the governing New Patriotic Party after a highly competitive electoral process. In The Gambia, the 2016 presidential election produced another landmark democratic transition when Adama Barrow defeated the incumbent President, Yahya Jammeh, bringing to an end more than two decades of his administration. Liberia also witnessed a peaceful democratic transition in 2017 when George Weah won the presidential election following the completion of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's constitutionally permitted tenure.

Malawi added another remarkable chapter to Africa's democratic history in 2020 when Lazarus Chakwera defeated the incumbent President, Peter Mutharika, in a court-ordered re-run election that was widely regarded as a victory for constitutionalism and judicial independence. Likewise, Zambia's 2021 presidential election produced another significant opposition victory when Hakainde Hichilema defeated the incumbent President, Edgar Lungu, reaffirming the growing resilience of democratic processes on the continent.

Nigeria's experience in 2015 remains one of the most significant examples of democratic alternation in Africa. For the first time since independence, an opposition party defeated a sitting President at the federal level when General Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC) defeated the incumbent President, Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Equally important was President Jonathan's statesmanship in accepting the outcome of the election even before the final results were formally declared by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). His decision contributed significantly to a peaceful transfer of power and further strengthened Nigeria's democratic credentials in the eyes of the international community.

These examples clearly demonstrate that the electoral victory of opposition political parties is neither unusual nor exceptional in Africa. Rather, it is an inherent feature of democratic competition wherever democratic institutions are allowed to function freely. Nevertheless, electoral outcomes are rarely determined by a single factor. They are shaped by a complex interaction of governance performance, economic conditions, leadership quality, party organisation, coalition-building, electoral credibility, public confidence, and the prevailing political mood of the electorate. Historical experience therefore offers valuable lessons, but no election is ever an exact replica of another. Every electoral contest reflects the unique political, economic, social, and institutional realities of a country at a particular moment in its democratic evolution.

The relevance of these African experiences to Nigeria's political transition towards 2027 is both clear and compelling. They remind political actors that democratic competition is meaningful only when all parties - whether in

government or in opposition - operate within the framework of constitutionalism, the rule of law, credible elections, and respect for the sovereign will of the people. Ultimately, the consolidation of democracy depends not on the victory of one political party over another, but on the collective commitment of all political stakeholders to democratic values, peaceful competition, and the orderly transfer of political power whenever the electorate so decides.

The Consolidation and Expansion of the All Progressives Congress (APC)

To appreciate the dynamics of Nigeria's political transition towards the 2027 general elections, it is important to examine the deliberate efforts made by the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) to consolidate and expand its political base. One of the most striking features of this process has been the steady influx of prominent political actors and elected public office holders from other political parties into the APC.

At the inauguration of the Tenth National Assembly in June 2023, the APC controlled 59 seats in the Senate and 175 seats in the House of Representatives. Collectively, the opposition parties held 50 Senate seats and 182 seats in the House of Representatives. However, this political balance has changed considerably. By mid-June 2025, the APC's representation had increased to 68 Senators and 207 Members of the House of Representatives. During the following year, from 2025 to 2026, the composition of the National Assembly changed even more dramatically.

These changes resulted from a combination of by-elections, judicial decisions arising from the 2023 general elections, and, most significantly, the defection of legislators from opposition parties to the APC. Consequently, by May 2026, the APC's combined membership in both chambers of the National Assembly had risen to 275, while the combined strength of all opposition parties had fallen to 194 members. This development firmly established the APC as the dominant political party in the National Assembly, significantly widening the gap between it and its nearest rival.

A similar trend is evident at the state level. Following the 2023 general elections, the APC won 21 state governments, while the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) governed 12 states. The Labour Party (LP), the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), and the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP) each controlled one state. However, following a series of defections between May 2025 and May 2026, the APC increased its number of serving governors to 31. During the same period, the PDP lost all its serving governors. The remaining state governments were controlled by APGA in Anambra State, the Labour Party in Abia State, the APM in Bauchi and Oyo States, and the Accord Party in Osun State. As provided under the

Constitution, the Federal Capital Territory is administered by a Minister appointed by the President rather than by an elected governor.

The unprecedented movement of governors, legislators, and other political office holders from the PDP and other opposition parties to the APC generated intense national debate. Many commentators expressed concern that Nigeria might gradually be drifting towards a dominant-party or even a one-party political state. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that the defection of elected governors and members of the National Assembly is not new or unique to the APC era. Party defections have been a recurring feature of Nigeria's democratic politics since the country's return to civilian rule in 1999.

Nigeria Not Moving Towards a One-Party State

Political defections, commonly referred to in Nigeria as "decamping," are by no means a recent development. Rather, they have been a recurring feature of the country's democratic experience since the return to civilian rule in 1999, affecting virtually all the major political parties at one time or another.

An investigative report by Nuruddeen M. Abdallah, published in the 21st Century Chronicle, revealed that between 1999 and 12 December 2021, no fewer than twenty-three serving governors from eighteen states defected from the political parties on whose platforms they were elected to other political parties. This figure excludes governors who changed political parties only after completing their constitutional tenure in office.

The report further showed that these defections affected more than ten political parties, including the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the All Progressives Congress (APC), the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), the Progressive Peoples Alliance (PPA), the Democratic Peoples Party (DPP), the Alliance for Democracy (AD), the Action Congress (AC), the Labour Party (LP), and the Zenith Labour Party (ZLP). Some of these parties eventually merged with, or were absorbed into larger political organisations. According to Abdallah, thirteen of the defecting governors came from Northern Nigeria, while the remaining ten were from the southern part of the country (Abdallah, N. M. 2021).

Historical evidence also demonstrates that political defections were widespread long before the emergence of the APC. Between 1999 and 2015 alone, twelve serving governors changed political parties while still in office. Five of these defections occurred between 1999 and 2007, while another seven took place between 2007 and 2015. In one particularly remarkable case, Governor Abdulfatah Ahmed of Kwara State changed political parties twice during his eight-year tenure—first from the PDP to the APC in December 2013 and later from the APC back to the PDP in July 201, (Abdallah, N. M. 2021).

From 1999 until about 2012, the PDP was the principal beneficiary of political defections. However, the political landscape changed significantly in 2013 when several PDP governors and many members of the National Assembly left the party to join the newly formed APC. Since then, the balance has shifted decisively in favour of the APC. The highest number of political defections was recorded during the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari between 2015 and 2023.

A separate investigation by Chibuzo Ukaibe and Kunle Olasanmi, published by Leadership Newspapers, reached similar conclusions. Their study found that within twenty-four years of Nigeria's return to democratic governance, more than twenty-three serving governors had defected to other political parties while retaining their constitutional mandate as elected governors (Ukaibe, C. & Olasanmi, K. 2024).

These developments have prompted renewed public debate over whether a serving governor who defects to another political party should automatically vacate office. While this position has attracted considerable public interests, it is not supported by the provisions of the Nigerian Constitution. Under the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), a serving President or a serving State Governor may cease to hold office only under clearly defined constitutional circumstances. These include death, voluntary resignation, permanent incapacity, or removal through the constitutional process of impeachment. The Constitution does not provide that defection from one political party to another constitutes a ground for the automatic loss of office. Although the practice of "cross-carpeting" was more commonly associated with Nigeria's earlier parliamentary system of the 1960s, it does not, under the current presidential system, constitute a constitutional basis for the removal of a serving Governor or a serving President.

Political Party Coalitions and Alliances in Nigeria: The Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Approach

An important dimension of Nigeria's evolving political landscape is the political strategy adopted by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu and the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC). While considerable attention has been devoted to the emergence of opposition coalitions and alliances ahead of the 2027 general elections, comparatively less attention has been paid to the political experience, organisational capacity, and strategic networks built by President Tinubu over several decades.

From this perspective, it could be argued that the architects of the various opposition coalitions may have underestimated the political experience of a leader widely regarded as one of Nigeria's most accomplished political organiser and coalition builder. Throughout his political career, Tinubu has demonstrated a

capacity for long-term strategic planning, political negotiation, alliance-building, and organisational development.

Writing in *The Graphic* of 13 February 2025 under the title; *Tinubu: A Chronicle of Sacrifice for Northern Nigeria*, Yusuf Ali argues that President Tinubu consistently placed national political cooperation above narrow regional considerations. According to Ali: "In the annals of Nigeria's political evolution, the name Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu resonates as a unifier, a strategist, and a selfless leader who prioritized the collective good of the nation over personal ambition. His sacrifices for the North, often overlooked, played pivotal roles in shaping the political landscape of Nigeria." (Ali, Y. 2025).

Ali further argues that Tinubu's approach to coalition politics was evident during the 2007 presidential election when he actively supported the presidential ambition of former Vice President Atiku Abubakar under the platform of the Action Congress (AC). According to Yusuf Ali, Tinubu committed considerable political resources and organisational support to Atiku's campaign without demanding any political concessions in return.

A similar pattern emerged during the 2011 presidential election when Tinubu strongly supported the candidacy of Nuhu Ribadu, the former Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), now the National Security Adviser (NSA). According to Ali, Tinubu not only endorsed Ribadu's candidature but also deployed his political structures in support of his presidential campaign. Perhaps the most significant demonstration of Tinubu's political influence came during the formation of the APC in 2013 and the subsequent 2015 general elections. As one of the principal architects of the merger that created the APC, he played a central role in building a broad opposition coalition capable of challenging the then ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP).

He also openly and strongly supported the emergence of General Muhammadu Buhari as the party's presidential candidate. The APC subsequently won the 2015 presidential election, ending sixteen years of PDP rule at the Federal level. President Buhari went on to serve two constitutional terms of eight years, 2015 - 2023, before handing over to President Tinubu following the 2023 general elections. According to Yusuf Ali, these successive political decisions reflected what he describes as Tinubu's commitment to fostering national unity and building political bridges across Nigeria's diverse regions. In Ali's view, these actions contributed significantly to strengthening Tinubu's political relationships, particularly in Northern Nigeria, and may have been among the factors that enhanced his electoral support in the 2023 presidential election.

Another aspect of Tinubu's political career that deserves attention is the timing of his own presidential ambition. Although he played important roles in the formation and development of several political parties - including the Alliance for

Democracy (AD), the Action Congress (AC), the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), and later the APC - he did not personally seek the presidency until 2023, after President Muhammadu Buhari had completed his constitutionally permitted two terms in office. This sequence of events has been cited by some political observers as evidence of a long-term and carefully sequenced political strategy.

As discussions increasingly focus attention on the 2027 general elections, several political factors appear to favour the incumbent President and the APC. First, as of July 2026, the APC had consolidated an overwhelming advantage at the state level, controlling thirty-one state governments, while the remaining five states were shared among the Labour Party, APGA, the APM, and the Accord Party. For the first time since the return to democratic rule in 1999, the PDP no longer controlled any state government in the country.

Second, the APC successfully concluded its presidential nomination process and formally adopted President Bola Ahmed Tinubu as its candidate for the 2027 presidential election without the internal disputes, litigation, or prolonged controversies that often accompany party primaries in Nigeria.

Third, President Tinubu enters the campaign with extensive political networks built over several decades in public life. His longstanding relationships with governors, party leaders, elected officials, and influential political stakeholders provide the APC with a significant organisational advantage as it prepares for the 2027 elections.

These developments undoubtedly have strengthened the electoral position of the ruling party. It is however important to state that, history has demonstrated that electoral dominance should never breed overconfidence or complacency. Democratic politics remains inherently competitive, and electoral success ultimately depends on the confidence and support freely given by the electorate. Consequently, while the APC may enjoy considerable structural and organisational advantages, the outcome of the 2027 general elections will ultimately be determined by the choices made by Nigerian voters.

Challenges and Vulnerabilities Facing President Tinubu.

Some of the challenges and obstacles the APC and President Bola Ahmed Tinubu might face as Nigeria approaches the 2027, General elections are many and complex. We can only present a brief summary of these issues. In the first place, securing the nomination of his political party, the APC, as a presidential candidate, is one thing, but getting elected by Nigerians in a general election is another issue altogether. It is common knowledge that Nigerians are generally impatient with their leaders. Virtually all past Nigerian leaders, have been criticised, demonised, and branded with all kinds of negative names. This is partly because the level of political consciousness in Nigeria is very high, and expectations on political

leaders, both elected and non elected, are also very high. That is perhaps why most past Nigerian leaders might often be received with euphoria when they assume office, but not long later, they begin to face serious criticisms and even condemnation from the very people who voted for them.

It is widely known that even in the US, where we refer to often as our model of democracy, elected Presidents tend to lose their popularity almost immediately after assuming Office. The reasons are many and differ from one President to another, but they generally include early unpopular decisions, unfulfilled expectations arising from the gap between campaign promises and political reality, citizens alienation, slow process of decision making, and escalation of partisanship. That's perhaps why we often hear at some point, that the honeymoon for the President is over, usually after the first 100 days in office.

In the case of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, honeymoon with Nigerians, did not last long due to the sudden and unexpected removal of the fuel subsidy on the day of his Inauguration as Nigeria's President. The impact was immediate, dramatic, and intense.

Second, the Federal Government's subsequent decision to float the National currency, the Naira was overnight significantly devalued, adding great pressure on citizens.

Third, again, the federal government's decision to increase tariffs and taxes, especially on essential social goods and services such as electricity. All these evoked a lot of resentment among Nigerians.

Fourth, the issues of insecurity and the economy appear to be the central concern of all Nigerians. The loudest voices appear to be coming from the North, where the issue of insecurity is daily, assuming alarming dimensions. Incidentally, this was and still is Tinubu's strongest political base.

Fifth, many Nigerians perceive that some of the economic and social policies were inspired by the World Bank and IMF and these policies have led to the escalation of prices of food, fuel, and transport services both in the urban and rural areas. While the government has been insisting the economic reforms were essential and therefore calling for patience and understanding, the opposition has been exploiting these issues maximally to gain attention and traction.

Sixth, there appears to be a disconnect between the President and the Northern political establishment. This might be mere perception, but in politics, to many people, perception is reality.

And finally, there appears to be silent voices from the old elements and tendencies that pulled their people and resources together from the ANPP, CPC, and nPDP to form and sustain the APC since 2014. Some of the old members of these old parties appear to feel alienated and abandoned. All these issues and many more suggest that there is a lot of work to be done before Nigeria decides in January 2027.

Recommendations:

One: The Ruling Party Must Avoid the Mistakes of the PDP

In other words, inspite of all the advantages the incumbency factors confer on President Tinubu, the APC as a party, and the President should not take things for granted. It is often said that one day is very long in politics. So, even though it might appear difficult, it is not impossible for the political arithmetic to change before January 2027, when General elections are expected to hold. In other words, the first most important step is that the ruling party should not underestimate the opposition,

Thus, despite all the excitement about the defections of elected officials, there is no guarantee that a sitting President would not lose his re-election. This is precisely why the ruling party has to be careful and strategic in its political calculations. The ruling party must be more careful, vigilant, and tactical so that history does not repeat itself.

Of course, APC is not PDP, but as the ruling party prepares for the 2027 Presidential elections, it should be mindful and watchful not to be taken by surprise. It appears, as part of the strategies for strengthening the political base of the APC, there were a number of activities that started since May 2025 to shore up support for the President. At different occasions, the APC Governors' Forum, the APC National Assembly members under the President of the Senate and Speaker of the House of Representatives and the Leadership of the APC at the Zonal and National levels took their turn to publicly endorse President Bola Ahmed Tinubu for a second term in 2027. These are good moves by the various strata of the APC to demonstrate their loyalty and solidarity to the President. The timing was also appropriate since the opposition politicians have also been strategising and mounting pressure on the Federal Government.

Yet, one of the enduring lessons of democratic politics is that no political party remains electorally dominant forever. History demonstrates that ruling parties often begin their political journey with popular legitimacy, broad public support, and ambitious reform agendas. However, over time, some become vulnerable to electoral defeat when they lose touch with public sentiment, become excessively

complacent, or begin to perceive political power as a permanent entitlement rather than a temporary mandate from the electorate. The experience of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Nigeria offers an important lesson in this regard.

From 1999 to 2015, the PDP dominated Nigeria's political landscape and exercised control over the Presidency, the National Assembly, and a majority of state governments. Its extensive political reach led many observers to regard it as Africa's largest political party. Yet, despite its formidable organisational structure and electoral advantages, the party suffered a historic defeat in the 2015 presidential election.

Several explanations have been advanced for this outcome. Among them were perceptions of growing public dissatisfaction with governance, internal party divisions, elite defections, concerns over insecurity, economic challenges, and an apparent disconnect between sections of the political leadership and ordinary citizens. Whether these factors were real or imagined, they combined to weaken the party's electoral appeal and ultimately contributed to its loss of power at the federal level.

For the All Progressives Congress (APC), which has governed Nigeria since 2015, the broader lesson is clear. Electoral success in two election cycles do not automatically guarantee victory in subsequent elections. Democratic legitimacy must be continuously renewed through effective governance, responsiveness to citizens' concerns, internal party democracy, respect for constitutional institutions, and the ability to adapt to changing political realities.

It is widely known that dominant parties frequently encounter challenges associated with incumbency. These include complacency, factionalism, over-centralisation of decision-making, weak internal consultation, and an over-reliance on state power rather than popular support. When such tendencies become entrenched, they can gradually erode public confidence and create opportunities for opposition parties to mobilise electoral support.

The approaching 2027 general elections therefore present both a challenge and an opportunity for the APC. The challenge lies in avoiding the pitfalls that have historically weakened long-serving ruling parties. Nonetheless, it should be expected that as elections approach, leading political leaders and powerful political interest groups within and outside each political party will be struggling for supremacy and political control. This often happens before, during, or even after party primaries. Internal tensions and divisions often associated with large political parties, especially during primaries, are therefore common and inevitable. What matters is how each political party manages the fallouts of the primaries.

It should therefore not come as a surprise when the loyalty of some Governors, National Assembly members, Ministers, and other key APC leaders begin to shake or shift especially, among those who lost out during the primaries. However, APC

must avoid what happened in the PDP. APC must effectively manage issues arising from primaries at all levels to ensure that there are no fractures in the party, the type of which we witnessed in 2013 - 2014 that led to the collapse of the PDP and ultimate failure in 2015 Elections. APC must avoid divisions and internal conflicts, especially with governors and powerful blocs like Northern APC leaders and the APC Governors Forum.

One of the best ways to avoid crisis is that the party should proceed to next stages of reconciliations, compromise and accommodation after the primaries. No matter what the party does, members of the party who contested various political offices and lost would always accuse the leadership of the party of imposition of candidates. These members should not be ignored or abandoned. They should be engaged in the process of rebuilding confidence and trust to produce a win-win situation for all party members. Some of them could be mobilised during campaigns. These steps would greatly reduce the incidences of divisions within the party that could lead to litigations and anti-party activities and sabotage.

The opportunity lies in demonstrating that democratic governance is strengthened when political parties remain accountable, responsive, and attentive to the aspirations of the electorate. Ultimately, the fate of any ruling party in a democracy depends less on its past achievements than on its capacity to address contemporary realities and retain the confidence of the people. The Nigerian electorate has already demonstrated, particularly in 2015, that it possesses the power to reward performance and sanction perceived failure through the ballot box. This remains one of the most important foundations of democratic accountability.

Two: Government of the Ruling Party Must Learn from History

The foregoing analysis suggests that Nigeria's transition to the 2027 General Elections presents both significant opportunities and considerable challenges for the country's democratic development. While the outcome of the elections will ultimately be determined by the electorate, the actions of government, political parties, electoral institutions, security agencies, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders will profoundly influence the credibility and stability of the transition process.

For the incumbent administration, successful governance remains the strongest foundation for electoral success. As preparations for the 2027 General Elections gather momentum, the Federal Government should continue to prioritise effective policy implementation, inclusive governance, economic recovery, and improved public confidence. In this regard, the following recommendations are proposed:

Strengthen internal party democracy. Political parties, particularly the ruling party, should conduct free, fair, transparent, and credible primary elections in accordance with the Electoral Act, the guidelines of the Independent National

Electoral Commission (INEC), and their respective party constitutions. Candidate imposition should be avoided, while comprehensive post-primary reconciliation mechanisms should be instituted to minimise internal divisions, litigation, defections, and anti-party activities.

Review and refine economic policies where necessary. Government should undertake periodic reviews of its major economic policies with a view to mitigating unintended hardships. Where policy adjustments become necessary, they should be implemented promptly to sustain economic stability while protecting vulnerable citizens.

Address insecurity challenges through comprehensive strategies. Security remains one of the foremost concerns of Nigerians. Government should strengthen security operations against banditry, terrorism, kidnapping, and other violent crimes, particularly in the North and the South-East. At the same time, greater emphasis should be placed on non-kinetic approaches, including dialogue, intelligence gathering, community engagement, poverty reduction, and youth empowerment.

Government should design and implement policies aimed at moderating the prices of food, medicaments, fuel, transportation, and other essential commodities in both urban and rural communities in order to alleviate the economic burden on citizens. Existing social safety net programmes should be strengthened and expanded to support households affected by inflation and rising living costs, while increased investment should be directed towards healthcare, education, and other essential public services. Government should also expand and escalate family support programmes.

Government should promote macroeconomic stability. There should be greater coordination between the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and the Federal Ministry of Finance should be encouraged to strengthen monetary and fiscal policies capable of stabilising the value of the national currency, the Naira, improving investor confidence, and promoting sustainable economic growth.

Strengthen political consultation and coalition management. The ruling party should sustain broad-based consultations with its traditional political support base while consolidating existing alliances and building new partnerships across the federation.

Maintain internal cohesion and accommodation of diverse interests within the governing coalition to sustain peace and harmony within the party and government. Promote constructive engagement with organised labour and civil society. Government should institutionalise continuous dialogue with labour unions, the private sector, civil society organisations, and the media to facilitate timely negotiations on wages, working conditions, and other socio-economic issues, while strengthening conflict-resolution mechanisms to minimise industrial disputes.

Strategic investments should be directed towards productive sectors of the economy capable of generating employment, increasing government revenue, expanding infrastructure, and stimulating inclusive economic growth.

It is also important to improve public communication. Government should communicate its reform agenda clearly, consistently, and transparently. Regular reporting on policy implementation and deliverable outcomes will help reduce uncertainty, strengthen public confidence, and enhance democratic accountability.

Three: Nigeria's Opposition Must Learn from their Past Mistakes

While considerable attention is often focused on the responsibilities of ruling parties in democratic systems, opposition parties also have important obligations. Democracy flourishes not simply because governments are held accountable, but because credible and well-organised alternatives exist to offer citizens meaningful political choices.

The lessons arising from the experience of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) following its loss of power in 2015, and the various similar cases in Africa are therefore relevant not only to the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC), but also to opposition political parties seeking to govern Nigeria in the future. The fortunes of the PDP over the past decade demonstrate that the challenges of democratic politics are not confined to parties in government alone.

The defeat of the PDP in the 2015 presidential election confirmed an enduring principle of democracy: political power is neither permanent nor guaranteed. At the same time, the years that followed demonstrated that public dissatisfaction with a ruling party does not automatically translate into electoral victory for the opposition. Opposition parties must do far more than criticise government policies. They must convince citizens that they possess the competence, credibility, vision, and organisational capacity required to govern effectively.

One of the greatest challenges confronting opposition parties in Nigeria has been persistent internal divisions, leadership disputes, factional rivalries, and organisational instability. The truth is that political parties weakened by internal conflict often struggle to project unity, discipline, and credibility before the electorate. Any political party aspiring to national leadership must first demonstrate its ability to manage its own internal affairs in a democratic, transparent, and inclusive manner.

Another important lesson from the Africa's democratic experience is the need for a clear ideological identity and coherent policy direction. In many emerging democracies, political competition is often driven more by personalities and personal ambitions than by programmes and ideas. Increasingly, however, citizens expect political parties to provide practical and well-thought-out solutions to

pressing national challenges such as economic growth, unemployment, insecurity, poverty reduction, education, healthcare, and infrastructure development.

Opposition parties are therefore more likely to strengthen their electoral prospects when they present realistic and credible policy alternatives rather than relying exclusively on criticism of the government. Equally important is their ability to cultivate broad national appeal. Given Nigeria's remarkable social, ethnic, religious, and regional diversity, political parties must consciously build coalitions that transcend sectional interests. Parties that are perceived as representing only particular regions or groups may find it difficult to attract the nationwide support required to win presidential elections.

Successful democratic competition therefore demands inclusive leadership, national outlook, and an unwavering commitment to national integration. The experience of the PDP since 2015 also illustrates the importance of political resilience. Electoral defeat, although significant, does not necessarily mark the end of a political party. Across Africa and other democratic societies, many political parties have successfully returned to power after periods in opposition by rebuilding their organisational structures, renewing their leadership, refining their policy platforms, and reconnecting with the electorate. The ability to renew and reinvent a political party is often one of the strongest indicators of institutional maturity.

As Nigeria approaches the 2027 general elections, opposition parties face both enormous opportunities and significant responsibilities. Their opportunity lies in presenting a compelling alternative vision for national development and democratic governance. Their responsibility lies in demonstrating that they are prepared not merely to oppose those in power, but also to govern effectively and responsibly. Ultimately, the strength of any multi-party democracy depends not only on the quality of the ruling party, but equally on the competence, credibility, preparedness, and patriotism of the opposition.

The future of Nigeria's democracy will therefore be shaped by the conduct of both the government and the opposition. While those in government must remain accountable, transparent, and responsive to the aspirations of the people, opposition parties must provide constructive engagement rather than destructive confrontation. They must demonstrate policy innovation, organisational discipline, national inclusiveness, and a clear commitment to democratic values. Only under such conditions can political competition contribute meaningfully to democratic consolidation, political stability, good governance, and sustainable national development.

Nonetheless, recent developments across Africa's evolving multi-party democracies demonstrate that, despite the serious challenges presently confronting opposition parties in Nigeria, no ruling party should assume that its continued hold

on political power is guaranteed. In every democracy, electoral success ultimately depends on the confidence freely reposed by the electorate.

While the ruling party bears the primary responsibility of governing effectively, the opposition political parties also have an equally important constitutional responsibility in strengthening Nigeria's democratic system. A vibrant and responsible opposition is indispensable to the sustainability of any multi-party democracy.

Accordingly, opposition political parties should deepen internal democracy, strengthen party institutions, promote issue-based campaigns, and present credible policy alternatives capable of addressing the country's socio-economic and governance challenges. Electoral competition should be anchored on ideas, programmes, and performance rather than ethnic, religious, or sectional narratives.

Where opposition parties seek to build coalitions, mergers, or electoral alliances, such arrangements should be guided by clearly defined principles, shared policy objectives, and transparent organisational structures capable of ensuring long-term political stability beyond electoral victories.

Furthermore, opposition parties should continue to perform their constitutional role of constructively scrutinising government policies, holding public office holders accountable, and contributing meaningfully to national development. At the same time, they should reject violence, misinformation, hate speech, and other undemocratic practices capable of undermining national unity or the credibility of the electoral process.

Four: Both the Ruling Party and the Opposition Must Take Full Responsibility

For both the ruling party and the opposition, the ultimate objective should extend beyond merely winning political office. In every mature democracy, both government and opposition are indispensable pillars of democratic consolidation. While the government is expected to govern responsibly, the opposition must provide constructive criticism, credible policy alternatives, and effective oversight. Democracy flourishes when both discharge these responsibilities in the national interest.

Again, for both the ruling party and the opposition, the ultimate objective should extend beyond merely winning political office. Greater emphasis should be placed on strengthening democratic institutions, promoting peaceful political competition, respecting the will of the electorate, and ensuring that elections are free, fair, credible, and widely accepted by the Nigerian people.

In most advanced and modern democracies, ruling parties and opposition parties work in the spirit of bi-partisanship, especially in the areas of national security, foreign affairs, and in periods of National emergencies. This is also one of the

lessons African political parties should learn in order to consolidate democracy on the continent.

Five: All Strategic Electoral Stakeholders Must be Fully Accountable

The country's electoral history demonstrates that political transitions are often characterised by high expectations, intense political competition, uncertainty, and public anxiety. Nevertheless, these challenges can be successfully managed through strong democratic institutions, respect for the rule of law, and unwavering commitment to constitutional principles.

As the electoral process unfolds, political parties, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), security agencies, the judiciary, all have critical responsibilities to discharge. Their collective commitment to professionalism, neutrality, transparency, and accountability will largely determine the credibility and peaceful conduct of the elections.

Similarly, the media, civil society organisations, and election observer groups (both local and international) and citizens should continue to discharge their responsibilities with professionalism, fairness, and objectivity while avoiding actions capable of inflaming political tensions through misinformation, hate speech, or inflammatory propaganda, political violence, intimidation, and electoral malpractice must be rejected before, during, and after the elections, while political leaders should be held accountable for the conduct of their supporters.

Conclusion

Nigeria's journey towards the 2027 General Elections has begun in earnest. This transition represents another important milestone in the country's democratic evolution. Just like previous political transitions, the process presents both opportunities for democratic consolidation and challenges that require careful management by all stakeholders.

Ultimately, democratic governance is strengthened when political parties remain accountable, responsive, and committed to the aspirations of the electorate. As African democratic experience has repeatedly demonstrated, in a number of African countries, the electorate possesses the constitutional authority to reward effective governance or sanction perceived under-performance through the ballot box. This principle remains the cornerstone of democratic accountability and should continue to guide political actors as the nation approaches the 2027 General Elections.

It should be noted that the success of Nigeria's political transition to 2027 will not be measured solely by the emergence of electoral winners and losers, (important as these are), but by the extent to which the process strengthens

democratic governance, promotes national unity, reinforces public confidence in democratic institutions, and advances the country's long-term political stability and socio-economic development. If these objectives are achieved, the 2027 General Elections will constitute yet another significant step in Nigeria's continuing democratic journey. At this stage, it is important to state that this paper has achieved its primary objectives.

First, it has contributed to the growing literature on Nigeria's democratic development by providing an elaborate analysis of the country's evolving political transition towards the 2027 General Elections within the broader context of multi-party democracy. It combines theoretical perspectives on political parties and party systems with an examination of contemporary political developments, including party mergers, alliances, electoral competition, governance, and democratic accountability.

Secondly, the paper has provided one of the most elaborate syntheses of Nigeria's democratic transitions from 1999 to the emerging 2027 political transition. As part of this, the paper traced the origins and the history of coalition, alliances, and mergers since the era of the First and Second Republics.

Thirdly, the study has further highlighted the opportunities and challenges confronting Nigeria's democratic institutions and proposes practical directions for government, political parties, electoral management bodies, security agencies, civil society organisations, the media, and citizens.

Fourthly, the paper has also made a number of recommendations that should contribute to informed public discourse, enrich scholarly engagement, and support policy initiatives aimed at strengthening democratic governance, promoting peaceful political transitions in Nigeria, and ensure the consolidation of the democratic Governance in Nigeria.

Finally, this paper has confirmed the central thesis of this paper anchored on my long-held proposition that Nigeria's presidential politics is shaped by a number of interrelated strategic variables which collectively, influence electoral outcomes before, during, and after elections. Unless and until these critical strands are carefully understood, calibrated, and effectively managed by political actors, the prospects of attaining presidential power remain significantly constrained, irrespective of personal popularity or available political resources.

Historical experience has demonstrated that successful presidential candidates in Nigeria, have generally emerged through carefully negotiated political compromises, inter-regional cooperation, and broad-based alliances rather than through individual popularity alone. Even where strong personalities have played significant roles, their electoral success has ultimately depended upon the existence

of extensive political networks and institutional support built over many years. Ultimately, the long-term sustainability of a multi-party democracy depends not merely on the number of political parties that exist, but on the strength of their internal institutions, the quality of their organisational structures, adherence to internal democracy, respect for the rule of law and the emergence of principled, visionary and accountable political leadership. These remain indispensable conditions for democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

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