

MULTI-PARTY DEMOCRACY AND THE RISE OF A PLURALITY GOVERNMENT IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF THE 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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ABSTRACT

Since the return of multi-party democracy to Nigeria in 1999, there has been a challenge of forming governments that truly reflect the will of the Nigerian people. However, none has been as evident as the Tinubu government produced in 2023, which got elected by 36% of votes. The study examined the relationship between multipartism and the rise of a plurality presidency in 2023. The research was anchored on Duverger's law as its theoretical foundation. The theory argues that plurality systems with single district member representatives tend to produce two parties. The study adopted an *ex post facto* design to study the Nigerian presidential election that had already occurred. The study used surveys and documentary (mixed method) methods to gather data, which were then analysed using simple percentages. The study found that vote splitting between multiple parties was responsible for producing a minority plurality government in Nigeria's 2023 presidential election where the APC won with fewer votes than all opposition parties combined. The study recommended the adoption of a two party system in Nigeria to ensure the production of majority governments.

Keywords: *Multiparty democracy, Plurality government, Popular government and Presidential election*

Introduction

Legitimacy is crucial in any political setting, but it is particularly crucial in multiparty democracy where leaders emerge from

popular choices. It is not enough to hold elections but to have ones that reflect the collective will of citizens in governance, as argued by proponents of liberal democracy

such as Dahl (1998), Dahl (2010), and Haxhiu & Alidemaj (2021), among others. For a very long time, Africa suffered from the problem of producing popular government starting from the 1960s, militaries intervened while others ran authoritarian or one party states. The struggle for many civil society organisations was to propagate the idea of instituting multiparty democracy across Africa. However, Kaya & Wyk (2001) argued that African petty bourgeois in charge of politics across the continent never gave in to the demand for multiparty democracy. They argued that the clamour for multiparty democracy away from what they described as one party rule (which includes military rule) was driven by a multiplicity of external and internal factors in the late 1980s. The external factors included could be divided into two: one was the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe which led to liberal democratic changes. The other is the imperialism demands for multipartism in

order to receive development assistance. Their justification for opposing multiparty democracy was that the idea did not originate in Africa.

The internal factors on the other hand can be divided into three sections: The Western notion of political modernisation forms the basis of one section. The debate over democracy is thus reduced to a choice between one-party and multi-party systems. It contends that whereas multi-party systems are a hallmark of the West and are essentially democratic, one-party systems, which are prevalent in the majority of post-independence African nations, are essentially autocratic. Thus, it is the duty of the West to disseminate what is known as "genuine pluralist parliamentary democracy" across the developing world, especially Africa (Kaya & Wyk, 2001).

One may consider the second section of the internal-centred explanation to be a

"conspiracy" theory. It contends that the petty-bourgeoisie, who established political dominance through the one-party state, halted Africa's democratisation process after political independence, which is why the masses of Africans have chosen to seek democracy. The battle among the many African petty bourgeoisie factions for the exclusive right to political power to profit from independence at the cost of the continent's masses was the reason for the attempt to halt the democratisation process. The one-party system and the crises of African democracy form the basis of the third internal argument for the continent's tendency towards a multi-party movement (Kaya & Wyk, 2001).

Regardless of the opposition of some African leaders to the rise of multiparty democracy in the continent, it was promoted as the solution to Africa's economic stagnation of the 1980s. This gave rise to a wave of democratisation that characterised the continent. Nigeria

returned to democracy in 1999 and adopted multiparty democracy, where thirty associations applied to participate, but only nine were shortlisted to contest the December 5 1998 local government elections. Only three were considered qualified after the proceedings, according to a post-mortem analysis of the parties' participation. They included the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), All Peoples Party (APP (to be known later as All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), and the Alliance for Democracy (AD). Consequently, in later elections for state and national assemblies, governorships, and the presidency, the electorate's options were restricted to the PDP, APP, and AD. The next governorship election saw the PDP winning 21 seats while APP had 9 and AD had 6. The PDP's overwhelming victory on December 5, 1998, in the gubernatorial elections cemented the alliance between the APP and the AD. Together, they fielded Olusegun Obasanjo and Alhaji Atiku Abubakar of the PDP

against Chief Olu Falae and Alhaji Umaru Shinkafi of the APP/AD (Ologbenla, 2007).

The number of political parties in Nigeria has now risen to Nineteen (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2024). However, Ologbenla (2007) argued that the collaboration between the APP and the AD resulted in a confused emphasis, depriving not only the APP/AD of electoral success but also the PDP of a specific and distinct ideology. This seeming lack of ideology may be traced back to the manic haste to remove the military from power in Nigerian politics. Party formation in Nigeria tends to favour elitist parties led by conservative figures. Without a radical ideological base, any political process will unlikely challenge the country's neocolonial and dependent capitalism. This is in addition to the fact that the majority of political parties, save for the United People Party (UPP) and Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), had similar ideological inclinations.

The 1999 presidential election was more or less a contest between two parties. It saw a popular president emerge, and the election was not thoroughly contested. President Olusegun Obasanjo was elected by 18,738,154 Nigerians, representing 62.8% of all valid votes (Toromade, 2023). President Obasanjo maintained his popularity as the 2003 presidential election saw him re-elected by 24,109,157, representing 61.8% of the total valid votes. He did not only maintain his popularity; the voter turnout peaked at 69.1% and has been the highest in the country since the return of democracy in 1999. The election, however, saw a bitter contestation of its outcome by President Obasanjo's closest rival, General Mohammadu Buhari, who went to court to claim that he, rather than Obasanjo, won the election.

2003 saw the peak of a president's popularity as voter turnout continued to plummet, leading the country to produce fewer and less popular presidents. The 1999 presidential

election experienced a 52.3% turnout; the 2003 election peaked at 69.1%, and 2007 experienced a decline from the 2003 high to 57.5%. The 2011 election declined to 53.7%, with the 2015 election declining to 43.7% (Hamalai, Egwu and Omotola, 2017). The 2019 election was one of the lowest recorded 34.75% turnout (YIAGA Africa, 2022). The 2023 presidential election recorded the lowest turnout at 26.72% (Amata, 2023). Nnoli (2023) further added that the President, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, got elected by 36% of the 26.73% that turned out. This represents a mere 9.6% of eligible voters in Nigeria, which may lead to a legitimacy crisis for him. This landed his presidency in some of the problems that plurality presidents face. It is far more worrying that his government was elected by 36.61% of valid votes. At the same time, his three closest Rivals, Former Vice President Atiku Abubakar of the PDP, Former Governor Peter Obi of the LP, and Former Governor Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso

of the NNPP, collectively got 60.7% of votes. This means that the opposition candidates who were all formerly together in the PDP before the split for the 2023 presidential election were more popular than the president.

There are multiple challenges associated with a president emerging from a plurality system where his emergence was a result of a minority vote or emerging with fewer than 50% of votes. Absence of a clear mandate: The president could not have a strong enough mandate to carry out their programme and policies since they were not chosen by a majority of people. Political polarisation: When opposition parties contest a president's legitimacy and refuse to work with them, he or she may experience a higher level of political polarisation. The lack of a strong majority might make it difficult for the president to enact laws through the legislative branch, resulting in deadlock and ineffective government. Building coalitions: To get

support for their plans, the president may need to develop coalitions with other political parties. This can be difficult and may mean making concessions on their agenda. Legitimacy issues: If a president is chosen by a plurality, there may be doubts about their qualifications to hold office and their legitimacy, particularly if there is strong resistance to their leadership. In general, the absence of widespread mandate and support from the people may pose serious obstacles for a president coming from a plurality in a presidential system when it comes to successfully leading and carrying out their programme. Despite these few problems associated with having a plurality government, it is pertinent to understand that how one arose in Nigeria.

Research Question

Extant literature is yet to interrogate how the split among opposition parties in Nigeria produced a minority plurality president in the 2023 presidential election. To fill this gap,

the study is guided by the following research question:

1. Did the split between opposition parties enhance the APC's victory in the 2023 presidential election?

Objective of the Study

This study has both broad and the specific objectives. Broadly, the research assessed how multi-party democracy gave rise to a plurality government in Nigeria in the 2023 presidential election. Specifically, the study aimed to:

1. Ascertain if the split between opposition parties enhanced the victory of APC in the 2023 presidential election.

Theoretical framework

The research was anchored the theoretical foundation of Duverger's law. Duverger's law is a political science theory that was propounded by Maurice Duverger in 1954. The theory was formulated to explain the

relationship between the number of parties and the electoral system in place (McLean & McMillan, 2009). Prior to Duverger, it had been the interest of political scientists to understand how two party systems develop. The theory argues that two-party systems tend to emerge where single-member districts are produced through plurality rule (Fey, 2007). The plurality system is the easiest way to determine the outcome of an election. To win, a candidate has to poll more votes than any other single opponent; the candidate does not have to poll more votes than the entire opposition, as needed under the majority formula (Webb, Eulau, & Gibbins, 2024).

A single-member district is an electoral constituency that elects one person to represent it in the legislature. These members are chosen through elections in which the eligible residents of that constituency vote for their preferred candidate. The winning candidate in such an election subsequently enters the country's legislative system. In a

single-member district system, voters choose 'one' candidate to represent them in the legislature. Technically, it is the most straightforward method to decide the winner of the election process. In these elections, candidates from many political parties compete, and the winner is the one who receives the most votes (i.e., the plurality). This method is known as the single-member plurality (SMP) voting system (Nirula, 2023).

Duverger (1954) provided the following justification for his theory: People will strive to make their vote count by voting for a less preferred party with a higher chance of winning rather than wasting it on a third party with no chance of winning. Known as "strategic voting" or "tactical voting," voters respond rationally to the relative likelihood of success of various candidates (Fey, 2007). Beyond strategic voting, Fey (2007) argued that Duverger's law can be justified with strategic candidates. He said that politicians

driven by policy are driven to operate in a way that creates a two-candidate race even with nonstrategic or "sincere" voters.

There are several possible candidates, but they are all solely driven by policy concerns and lack the ability to deliver on their promises. Duverger's Law reasoning affects the candidates' calculation of values since it is policy-motivated. That is to say, because people cast real ballots, a candidate who decides to run may very easily deduct votes from a contender she would want to win, without having an impact on the percentage of votes for the contenders she would prefer to lose. In other words, in a campaign with several candidates, the withdrawal of one candidate benefits the others who hold similar beliefs and does not benefit the ones who have opinions that differ. Therefore, in many instances, withdrawing from the campaign actually benefits a candidate who is driven by policy but has very little chance of winning since it increases the likelihood

that a desired policy will be implemented. This is how prospective candidates' strategic decisions about whether or not to run for office are similarly affected by the 'wasted vote' logic of strategic voting (Fey, 2007).

Application

The theory explains how a plurality candidate emerged victorious from Nigeria's 2023 presidential election. Nigeria has a single-member district system in place where all elective offices, including executive offices, only produce one occupant at a time. In this case, it is the position of the president. Also, victory is determined by a plurality rule system where the emergence of a winner is determined by scoring the highest vote of any candidate and not necessarily getting higher than other contestants combined. This is the ground upon which the theory said that the emergence of a two party system is consequent.

The history of presidential elections in Nigeria shows that every time multiple strong

parties contend in elections, it tends to split voters and produce a president that is not very popular nationally, usually seen in some regions or candidates contesting the outcome of the result. The reason why the first republic produced a seemingly peaceful outcome was that the NPC and NCNC went into an alliance, making it a more or less contest between two major parties (Mohammad, 2023). President Shehu Shagari won the election in the second republic with only 33.77% of the votes, but all opposition candidates collectively got 66.23% of the votes (Mohammad, 2023). However, when only two parties were contested at the beginning of the fourth republic, the president who emerged was very popular, with more than 60% of the votes (Mohammad, 2023). When some opposition parties united in 2013 to form APC, they were able to wrestle power from the party in power in 2015 successfully. This ushered in an era of a major two-party contest

at presidential elections between the PDP and APC until a split in the PDP camp, which led some to LP and others to NNPP.

Methodology

The study adopts an ex-post facto research design. The ex-post facto research design is a type of survey research that studies events that have already occurred (Aniche & Efanodor, 2018). This particular research design was adopted because it studied an event that has already occurred which is the 2023 presidential election and was interested in uncovering specific facts about the election.

The study involves the entirety of the Nigerian population as of 2023 when the presidential election took place. Worldometer (2024) estimates the population to be 223,804,632. However, the study focused on the 93,469,008 who registered to vote in 2023 and specifically the 87,209,007 who collected their Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) (Suleiman, 2023). The study also

adopted a nonprobability sampling technique where a specific segment of the population was targeted.

A mixed method of data collection was utilised with triangulation that collected both primary and secondary data. 400 questionnaires were distributed across all 36 states of the federation, including the FCT, but only 318 were returned. We also conducted polls on social networks to get people's perspectives. The 400 questionnaires were distributed across Nigeria, but not evenly across states, to collect primary data. States where opposition parties won, especially the third and fourth in the election, LP and NNPP, received more questionnaires. States where LP won specifically received more questionnaires because they were mostly states where PDP traditionally won in presidential elections, except for Lagos. The states LP won included Abia, Anambra, Cross River, Delta, Ebonyi, Edo, Enugu, FCT, Imo, Lagos, Nasarawa,

and Plateau. NNPP won only in Kano. The questionnaires were distributed as follows: 300 questionnaires representing 75% were distributed to states won by LP and NNPP, with LP states receiving more. A total of 288 questionnaires were distributed to LP states (including the FCT); each state received a total of 24 questionnaires that were further distributed as follows: 8 questionnaires were distributed to each of the three senatorial districts in the states. The ones in the FCT were distributed evenly to all 6 LGAs. Kano received 12 questionnaires, and its senatorial districts received 4 questionnaires each. The remaining 100 questionnaires were evenly distributed to the remaining 72 senatorial districts in 24 states. Where each senatorial district got 1 questionnaire. 1 extra questionnaire was distributed to each state capital in those 24 states, leaving an extra 4 distributed to Port Harcourt City in Rivers state, where the contestation was fierce.

Equally, social media surveys were conducted on X (formally known as Twitter) and WhatsApp, targeting demographic groups where supporters of opposition parties, especially LP and NNPP, were prevalent.

Secondary data were obtained from newspapers, magazines, and official publications of political parties, as well as the INEC.

The data were analysed using statistical tools like the simple majority and presented using graphs and charts. Content analysis was also used to analyse publications and speeches of major actors in the Nigerian political scene.

Data Presentation, Analysis, and Discussion

Views have been expressed that the split in the PDP led to a victory for the APC in the 2023 presidential election. The view was that the APC candidate and the party were unpopular in the election owing to some unpopular policies of the party in power, the

rise in inflation, fuel scarcity, insecurity, and the implementation of the Naira redesign, which saw many Nigerians suffer from cashlessness among many. The opinions are that the majority of Nigerians wanted a change from APC and were prepared to vote against them, but the split in PDP displaced many votes into third and fourth parties, which allowed the APC to win with 36% of votes. The Anambra state governor, for instance, shared this view prior to the election through an open letter to the candidate of the LP, Mr Peter Obi, where he emphasised that Mr Obi was misleading the Southeast into obscurity in national politics. He stressed that Mr Obi was inversely campaigning for the candidate of the APC and was going to make their path to victory easier by splitting the vote of the opposition (Soludo, 2022). Looking at the result after, the LP had 6,101,533 or 25.4% of votes, while the PDP had 6,984,520 or 29.07% of votes. If

combined, it would have amounted to 13,086,053 or 54.47% of votes.

The combined result of the PDP and LP shows the potential for the opposition to win if the split had not happened. This is because the candidates of the PDP and LP ran on a joint ticket in the previous election in 2019. If the votes of the NNPP, whose candidate also left the PDP, are added, it becomes even bigger, yielding a total of 14,582,740 or 60.7% of the votes. This figure almost doubles the votes of the APC that won the election, raising concerns about how Nigeria produced such a plurality president at a time when the country is grappling with a multitude of issues. Views differ about the potential of the combined votes of the opposition parties in the 2023 presidential election. The APC had boasted before the election that they would not have lost the election because even when the candidates of the PDP and LP ran a joint ticket with the support of the NNPP candidate, the APC still

defeated them, and as such, a combination of them would not have harmed the APC's chance of winning. However, looking at the results afterward, it is clear that the opposition had more support than the APC.

A chieftain of the PDP and governorship aspirant in the Ogun state in 2023, Mr Shegun Showumi, observed that the mere fact that the combined votes of opposition parties outnumbered that of the APC does not necessarily mean they would have won if they had stayed together. He observed that the fact that a lot of people voted for the LP and NNPP does not mean that those same people would have voted for the PDP if they were combined (Showumi, 2024). To this end, it is pertinent to understand if that would have been the case if there had been no split in the PDP camp. In the bid to understand this, we went to the voters themselves to get their views about what they would have done if the split had not happened.

Respondents were asked what they would have done in retrospect if the opposition had

not split. The following responses were gotten.

Table 1: The parties voted by respondents

| S/N | Question | Options | | | | Total |
|-----|--|---------|-----|-----|------|-------|
| 1 | What party did you vote for in the 2023 presidential election? | APC | PDP | LP | NNPP | |
| | | 28 | 29 | 228 | 33 | 318 |
| | | 9% | 9% | 72% | 10% | 100% |

Source: Authors' questionnaire (2024)

Table 1 above shows the parties voted by respondents. 9% voted for the APC, another 9% voted for the PDP, and 72% and 10% voted for the LP and NNPP, respectively. The LP and the NNPP, the target population for

this study, collectively constitute about 82% of respondents. This shows that the study has a good representation of the target population. The study thus investigated the following:

Table 2: The parties respondents would have voted for if there were only two options

| S/N | Question | Options | | | Total |
|-----|--|---------|-----|------|-------|
| 2 | If you voted for any opposition parties other than the PDP, what party would you have voted for if the party you voted for was not on the ballot and if you were given only two opinions between the two largest political parties in Nigeria? | APC | PDP | None | |
| | | 38 | 183 | 97 | 318 |
| | | 12% | 58% | 30% | 100% |

Source: Authors' questionnaire (2024)

Table 2 above shows the parties respondents would have gone for if the options were only

two and the PDP had not split. 38 people, representing 12% of respondents said they

would have voted for the APC if only two options existed between the APC and PDP. 183, representing 58% of respondents said they would have gone for the PDP in the same situation while 97 or 30% of respondents said they preferred neither of the parties. A further breakdown of the preferences would show how supporters of

each party made their choice between the winner of the election and the runner-up with neither being the control. The implication is that the majority of the respondents who voted for other opposition parties other than the PDP would have voted for the PDP if the other opposition parties had not contested in the election.

Table 3: Preferences of all parties between APC and PDP

| Party | Voted for | Prefers APC | % | Prefer PDP | % | Prefer None | % |
|-------|-----------|-------------|-----|------------|------|-------------|-----|
| APC | 28 | 18 | 47 | 2 | 0.7 | 8 | 8 |
| PDP | 29 | 0 | 0 | 28 | 15.3 | 1 | 1 |
| LP | 228 | 6 | 16 | 142 | 78 | 80 | 83 |
| NNPP | 33 | 14 | 37 | 11 | 6 | 8 | 8 |
| Total | 318 | 38 | 100 | 183 | 100 | 97 | 100 |

Source: Author’s questionnaire (2024)

Table 3 above shows the preferences of all the top four parties in the 2023 presidential election. It shows their preferences between the winner and runner-up supposing it was a two-party race.

It is clear that 18, representing 47% of APC supporters, said they would have gone for the APC. Interestingly, 14 respondents,

representing 37% of the 38 respondents who said they would have voted for the APC, said they voted for the NNPP. While 6, representing 16% of them, said they voted for the LP. Unsurprisingly, 0% of PDP supporters said they would have gone for the APC. 28 or 15.3% of respondents who voted for the PDP said they would have retained their support if it had been a two-horse race.

142 or 78% of respondents who said they preferred PDP to APC said they voted for the LP. 11 or 6% of respondents who said they would have voted for the PDP said they voted for the NNPP. Surprisingly, 2 or 0.7% of respondents who said they would have preferred the PDP said they voted for APC.

The goal of this research is to find out how Nigerian voters would have voted if they had only two choices in the 2023 presidential election between the PDP and the APC. It specifically targets supporters of the second and third runner ups, whose candidates were former members of the PDP. The research isolated their responses, as presented below.

Table 4 Preferences of second and third runner ups

| Party | Voted for | Prefer APC | % | Prefer PDP | % | Prefer None | % |
|-------|-----------|------------|----|------------|----|-------------|----|
| LP | 228 | 6 | 2 | 142 | 62 | 83 | 36 |
| NNPP | 33 | 14 | 43 | 11 | 33 | 8 | 24 |
| Total | 261 | 20 | | 153 | | 91 | |

Source: Author’s questionnaire (2024)

Table 4 above shows the preferences of the supporters of the second and third runner ups in the election in question. Out of the 228 respondents that said they voted for the LP, 142 representing 62% of them said they would have voted for the PDP if they had the option to choose between the party and the APC. 6, representing 2% of them said they

would have gone for the APC while 83, representing 36% of them said they preferred neither of the two parties. This simply means that majority of LP’s voters would have gone for the PDP. A recalculation going by the percentages above would have probably added the following votes to the PDP from the LP. PDP had 6,984,520 while the LP had

6,101,533 votes, if 62% of it or 3,782,950 is added to what the PDP got, it would have been 10,767,470 votes. This may have happened because LP got majority of its votes from regions where PDP had traditionally won with the exception of Lagos.

Out of the 228 respondents who said they voted for the LP, 6 representing 2% of them said they would have voted for the APC if they had the option to choose between the party and the PDP. The APC had 8,794,726 votes, if the same recalculation by percentage is done, the following votes would have gone for the APC from the LP, 122,031 giving rise to a combined vote of 8,916,757.

83 or 36% of respondents who said they voted for the LP said they preferred neither PDP nor APC. It means 2,196,552 of their voters would have voted for neither of the two.

11 or 33% of the respondents who said they voted for the NNPP said they would have voted for the PDP if they only had the option to choose between the party and the APC. NNPP got 1,496,671 votes. 33% of that is 493,901. On the other hand, 14 or 43% of respondents said they would have voted for the APC if they could choose only between the PDP and the APC. This means that most people who voted for NNPP would have voted for the APC if they had only to choose between the party and PDP. Unsurprisingly, the party got 67% of its vote from Kano state, which has voted for the APC since 2015. 43% of the votes for NNPP is 643,569. Furthermore, 8 or 24% of them said they would have voted for neither the PDP nor APC if they had only two options. This amounts to 359,201 votes. These types of votes will be termed neutral.

If the percentages of votes taken from the LP and the NNPP are added to the PDP and APC, the following results may have played out:

PDP would have won the election with 11,261,371 or 47% of valid votes. Conversely, the APC would have come second with a total of 9,560,326 votes or 40% of votes. It is still clear that the PDP would have won but not as a popular choice because it would have just been a victory with 47%; even though it was an improvement from APC's 36% victory, it would still not have produced a majority government. However, if the remaining opposition parties, whose votes amount to 648,490, were added with the 2,555,753 that said they were neutral, it would be discovered that 3,204,243 would have voted for neither of the parties. Since the remaining opposition parties were not tested to find their preference between the PDP and

APC, the ones from the LP and NNPP would be tested. If the 2,555,753 are divided equally between PDP and APC, eliminating 1 to make it even, they would get 1,277,876 additional votes each. This will result in PDP getting 12,539,247, or 52% of valid votes. The APC would have had 10,838,202 votes, or 45% of valid votes.

Beyond this, it is important to also test if respondents' answers to other questions validate the answers given here. This is to ensure that the result gotten here is generalisable. The study will test how voters would have acted now that they had seen third and fourth parties not being strong enough to defeat the larger APC and PDP.

Table 6: How Nigerians would have voted if there was a third force in the presidential election to be reconducted

| S/N | Question | Options | | Total |
|-----|---|---------|--------|-------|
| 3 | If the election was to be re-conducted today, would you vote for a third force party? | Yes | No | |
| | | 93 | 225 | 318 |
| | | 29.25% | 70.75% | 100% |

Source: Authors' questionnaire (2024)

Table 6 above shows that Nigerians were less likely to vote for third-force parties today if the election was to be reconducted. 70.75% of respondents said they would not vote for third-force parties if the election were to be reconducted today. This came as a realisation after seeing their votes not being strong enough to make any third-force parties win but rather pave the way for the APC.

The majority of LP supporters said they would have voted for the PDP if they had only two options between the PDP and the

APC; however, the addition from them could have made the PDP win but will not produce a popular president. There are views that a good number of the LP voters were supporters of their candidate, Mr Peter Obi. It is important to test if his person, in addition to the person and structure of the PDP, would have produced victory and a popular president. We did so by combining them on a PDP ticket like it was in the 2019 presidential election.

Table 5: How Nigerians would have voted if the PDP and LP candidates had a joint ticket

| S/N | Question | Options | | Total |
|-----|---|---------|-----|-------|
| 3 | If the election were to be re-conducted, would you have voted for the PDP if they had run a joint ticket with the LP candidate? | Yes | No | |
| | | 233 | 85 | 318 |
| | | 73% | 27% | 100% |

Source: Authors' questionnaire (2024)

Table 5 above shows how Nigerian electorates would have voted if the candidates of the PDP and LP were combined in a ticket under the PDP. 233 or 73% of respondents said they would have voted for

that option, and only 85 or 27% of respondents said they would not. However, supporters of each party expressed different opinions. The opinions were as follows:

Table 6: Preferences of all parties if the PDP and LP candidates had run a joint ticket

| Party | Voted for | Yes | % | No | % |
|-------|-----------|-----|-----|----|-----|
| APC | 28 | 2 | 1 | 26 | 31 |
| PDP | 29 | 29 | 12 | 0 | 0 |
| LP | 228 | 193 | 83 | 35 | 41 |
| NNPP | 33 | 9 | 4 | 24 | 28 |
| Total | 318 | 233 | 100 | 85 | 100 |

Source: Authors' questionnaire (2024)

LP is the target in this test, so the percentage of LP will be isolated. 228 respondents said they voted for the LP; out of them, 193, constituting 87% of LP voters, said they would have voted for the PDP if they had a combined ticket with the candidate of the LP. 87% of the 6,101,533 that voted for the LP is 5,308,334. If this is added to the 6,984,520 that the PDP got, it would give rise to 12,292,854 or 51% of total votes, making the PDP win and also producing a majority government. To solidify their stand, supporters of the second and third runner ups were asked to identify between the winner and the runner-up, the one who was most similar in terms of ideology, policy prescriptions, and programmes; 79% of the

respondents who said they voted for the LP identified the candidate of the PDP as the one most similar to theirs.

Beyond the number of votes, the second major requirement for winning the Nigerian presidential election is the spread of votes. A prospective winner is expected to get the majority of lawful cast votes and at least 25% of votes in 2/3 of all Nigerian states, including the FCT (Agbakoba, 2022). The candidate of the PDP fulfilled the criterion of nation spread in 21 states (Vanguard, 2023). Going by the fact that the majority of LP supporters said they would have gone for the PDP if they had a combined ticket with the candidate of the LP, the PDP would have

gotten an addition of 11 more states to make it 32 states where the party would have had 25% and above making it possible for the PDP to win based on this criterion.

Conclusion

The study interrogated the relationship between a multiparty system and the production of a minority plurality government in the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. Specifically, it inquired whether the split in the PDP among presidential candidates led to the victory of the APC. The study concludes that the split in PDP led to victory for a minority plurality APC, which only garnered 36% of the votes. The combined votes of all opposition parties were 64%; if they had combined into one, they would have probably won, especially the PDP 'offshoot' parties, LP and NNPP, and more critically, LP. This is seen as such because most of LP's supporters said they would have voted for the PDP if their choice was only between the party and the APC.

More of them said they would have voted for the PDP if there had been a joint ticket between their candidate and that of the PDP. They also saw the candidate of the PDP as the most similar in terms of ideology to theirs.

Also, examples abound in Nigeria where vote splitting between similar parties and candidates led to victory for parties and/or candidates most different from them as well as victory for similar parties and candidates who merged. A vote split between PDP and SDP in Ekiti state led to victory for a plurality APC, which got less than 50% of votes in the 2022 governorship election. A vote split between PDP and LP led to victory for a plurality APC, which got less than 50% of votes in Kaduna state in the 2023 governorship election, among many. On the other hand, a coalition between all opposition parties in Bauchi state against the APC led to victory for an opposition PDP in the 2019 governorship election. The PDP won with more than 50% of the votes.

A merger of four major opposition parties in 2013 also produced a majority victory against the PDP in the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria. The opposition parties had previously split their votes and lost consistently to the PDP. The victory from their merger produced a victory of more than 50% votes. Multipartyism is, therefore, responsible for the rise of a plurality government in Nigeria.

Recommendation

Following its conclusion, the research recommends the following:

1. Nigeria should abandon multi-party democracy and adopt a two-party system in which only two ideologically distinguishable parties compete. This would ensure that winners emerge with more than 50% of the votes and run a majority government.

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