

OPPOSITION PARTIES IN EMERGING DEMOCRACIES: PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC PARTY AND PROMOTION OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the critical role of opposition political parties in emerging democracies, focusing specifically on the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in Nigeria following its transition to the principal opposition party in 2015. The research aimed to explore how the dynamics of opposition politics influenced the broader democratic process and how the PDP promotes accountability and good governance. Anchored in Pluralist Theory, the study examined how opposition parties represent diverse interests, foster democratic debate, and prevent the concentration of power. The findings reveal that the PDP has employed several key strategies to fulfill its watchdog role and position itself as a credible alternative to the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC). Despite these concerted efforts to hold the incumbent government accountable, the study identified significant challenges that undermine the PDP's effectiveness. Internal conflicts, allegations of corruption, and ad-hoc strategic planning have hampered the party's institutional resilience. The study concludes that while the PDP has successfully established mechanisms to scrutinize the ruling party and represent public grievances, it must resolve its internal discord and offer more proactive, innovative policy alternatives to fully consolidate its credibility as a government-in-waiting.

Keywords: *Opposition Parties, Accountability, Good Governance. PDP*

Introduction

The establishment of democracy is greatly influenced by how competitive political parties are, particularly the role and responsiveness of opposition parties. Opposition parties are essential for maintaining a balance of power and introducing dynamic qualities to democratic systems, which are crucial for the legitimacy of governments. The stability of authority and the dynamism of democratic operations depend significantly on political oppositions, as the roles and functions of opposition parties are crucial in a democratic regime.

Dahl (1966) argues that opposition is an essential component of democratic representation, stating that "a political party is the most visible manifestation and surely one of the most effective forms of opposition in a democratic country." He highlights that the absence of an opposition party can serve as compelling evidence for the lack of democracy. However, the rise of electoral

autocracy represents a common form of contemporary authoritarianism. Thus, democracy encompasses both opposition and government.

Consequently, opposition parties that lack political influence often reduce their levels of fragmentation to become more competitive (Maeda, 2015). A study on the European integration process across ten Central and Eastern European democracies reveals that fragmented opposition diminishes political competition and may undermine popular support for democracy (Merkal, 2021). In a democratic context, opposition parties are free to engage with the masses, drawing attention and support while signaling to the incumbent government their potential as viable alternatives (Akhtar, 2013).

It is widely recognized that opposition parties play a crucial role in the political processes of democratic societies (Andeweg, 2013; Dahl, 1966; Garritzmann, 2017). Thus, democratic governance, particularly in emerging democracies like Nigeria, is largely a product of vibrant opposition parties that consistently check and constructively criticize governmental policy deficiencies. These efforts by opposition structures aim to establish themselves as credible alternatives for democratic governance.

While political opposition is vital for balancing power and enhancing the dynamism of democratic governance, there has been limited research on the role of opposition parties in transitional democracies like Nigeria, especially in recent times. Most studies on Nigerian opposition parties have focused on brief periods, primarily during the first, second, and aborted third republics, which were limited to initial transitional elections. However, the fourth republic offers a nuanced opportunity to study opposition parties due to uninterrupted transitional elections since 2003. Since 1999, various parties have served as opposition, either individually or through coalitions. The 2015 general elections marked a turning point in Nigeria's democracy, as the ruling party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP), transitioned to opposition status for the first time following an electoral defeat.

The PDP has historically played a central role in Nigeria's political landscape, founded in 1998, the party quickly rose to prominence, winning the presidency in the 1999 elections. However, the party faced internal challenges, including leadership disputes and allegations of corruption, which ultimately contributed to its decline in public support.

In the 2015 elections, the PDP faced a formidable challenge from the All Progressives Congress (APC), a coalition of opposition parties. The APC's victory marked a significant turning point in Nigeria's democratic journey, as it demonstrated the potential for opposition parties to unseat a ruling party. This shift in power dynamics raised questions about the future of the PDP and its ability to adapt to the changing political landscape.

Against this backdrop, this study investigated how the dynamics of opposition politics influence the broader democratic process in Nigeria, focusing on the role of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in promoting good governance and accountability in Nigeria. Exploring the dynamics of opposition within this context, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of this role.

Conceptual Review: Opposition Political Parties

The importance of opposition parties becomes more pronounced in the age of world-wide political changes where populism and authoritarianism are on the ascendant, an understanding of the political machinery at work in opposition party politics can shed light on its potential to help shape governance and democracy amid difficult circumstances. Arguably, the literature on

opposition political parties is abundant and varied, a testament to their relevant role in democratic systems. Through this conception of opposition, scholars can offer a nuanced understanding of political processes and the importance of opposition parties for ensuring accountability in governance.

Kiiza (2005) views opposition political parties through the lens of their functions, which include interest aggregation, promoting responsible and reasoned debates, maintaining communication with voters, demonstrating the relevance of politics to ordinary citizens, and providing a viable alternative form of government. Without credible opposition political parties, a fully democratic society is unattainable. The absence of political opposition means there are no choices for the masses, hindering their ability to exercise their right to rule. This notion is supported by Bybee and Dahl (1989), Lindberg and Lindberg (2006), and Omotola (2014), who emphasize the critical role of opposition in a democratic framework.

The importance of opposition in democracy is further underscored by Ottaway (1997), who asserts that no political system can be deemed democratic without a strong alternative center of power, represented by vibrant opposition parties. Webb (2009) and Omotola (2014) argue that democracy loses its meaning if it fails to provide citizens with opportunities for meaningful choice in public affairs. This perspective highlights the necessity of opposition parties in ensuring that the political landscape remains competitive and representative of diverse viewpoints.

Opposition political parties are typically established to challenge the ruling party while pursuing legislative and executive positions. They often function as a minority administration without executive power, acting as watchdogs over the government. The definition of opposition varies widely, leading some analysts to suggest that it should be limited to institutionalized opposition within established liberal democracies. Consequently, opposition parties are often seen as those outside the government who did not achieve majority status.

Young (2018) defines an opposition party as one that has representation in parliament but is not in power, either independently or as part of a coalition. Bhargay (2018) posits that opposition serves to prevent majoritarian decisions in government, functioning under the principle of checks and balances. Its primary role is to monitor government actions and constructively oppose proposed laws, ensuring that diverse perspectives are considered in the legislative process.

Friedman (1999) describes political opposition as the credible and legitimate voice within a state, holding the government accountable. Joseph (1998) highlights that transparency is essential for bureaucratic accountability, public scrutiny of all accounts and audit reports to prevent government errors and corruption. This accountability is vital for maintaining public trust and ensuring that government actions align with the interests of citizens.

Various scholars agree that opposition parties are tasked with protecting citizens' rights and interests, monitoring government performance, and exposing corruption. They also stimulate public debate on political issues and policies, allowing society to question governmental actions and choices. In this regard, opposition parties play a crucial watchdog role, acting as a restraint on government power. According to PLO (2012), their role is instrumental in fostering a healthy democratic environment where government accountability is prioritized.

However, challenges persist, particularly in contexts like Nigeria. Adeyeye (2012), notes that prior to the alternation of ruling parties, there was little ideological difference between the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and other opposition parties. This lack of distinction highlights a significant challenge for effective opposition in the country, raising questions about the capacity of opposition parties to fulfill their roles in a meaningful way.

Role of Opposition Political Party

Opposition political parties play a significant role in any democratic setting. They help to consolidate and deepen democracy; when there is no opposition, the masses or electorates are often denied the opportunity to make choices during elections. A very strong opposition political party is needed to create effective checks and accountability on a backsliding or authoritarian regime (LeBas, 2003; Teshome-Bahiru, 2009).

The main task of the opposition is to scrutinize various government activities, criticize the government's policy agenda, and present credible alternatives to government proposals (Helms, 2008). The opposition party in a democratic system is tasked with representing interests that may have been overlooked by the ruling party, providing unavailable information to the government about public reactions to particular policies, and offering criticism and useful alternatives to government policies (Apter, 1970).

According to Friedman (1999), political opposition is the credible and legitimate voice in a state, whose views are listened to and which holds the government to account. Joseph (1998) posits that in modern democracies, transparency is a key element of bureaucratic accountability, which entails making available for public scrutiny all public accounts and audit reports, thus protecting against government error, misallocation of resources, and corruption. Rapoo (2004) affirms that since the advent of multiparty systems in the 1990s, the opposition has positioned itself as a major contender to the ruling party in most African countries by raising "uncomfortable issues and questions" about government decisions, accountability, and corruption.

Opposition parties are crucial to the democratic regime, as they set up partisan movements aimed at challenging and opposing the party in power during elections, which lends legitimacy to those elections. According to Amos (2023), opposition parties have also been viewed as watchdogs, supporters of good governance, and potential replacements for established governments.

Opposition parties represent alternatives to the party in government or the ruling party (in the case of a coalition government) and are responsible for challenging government policies and producing different policies where appropriate (Khan, 2017; Kishore, 2018). Demirkaya (2017) argues that the function of political opposition goes beyond providing alternatives for discontented voters; it also involves providing information about government policies, pointing out their weaknesses, expressing the demands and interests of their constituency, and contributing to the translation of these demands into policy.

Randall and Svasand (2002) argue that opposition political parties are central, especially during democratic transitions when authoritarian precedents and habits may still significantly influence the behavior of the ruling party. Despite the important functions attributed to opposition political parties, there is a perception that they have very little, if any, chance of directly influencing policy decisions (Demirkaya, 2017).

The opposition political parties usually appeal to the interests of the electorate, thereby gaining public trust that propels them to win elections (Joseph, 1998). In democratic states, periodic elections offer citizens the chance to elect political parties that align with their interests. Bonaventure (2001) posits that opposition political parties provide the governed people with a voice to judge the government, ensuring they are properly and democratically governed. The rights to freedom of assembly and association have been formally enshrined in the constitutions of almost all sub-Saharan countries. According to Peter (2008), concerted efforts by opposition parties have shaped human rights culture in countries such as Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Kenya, long before the adoption of constitutions that secure legal recognition of human rights.

The Concept of Accountability

Scholars have advanced numerous and sometimes competing definitions of accountability, reflecting the concept's multidimensionality. Schedler (1999), in one of the most frequently cited formulations in comparative politics, argues that accountability encompasses two principal dimensions: answerability and enforcement. Answerability involves the obligation of power holders to provide information, explain, and justify their conduct to their principals be they citizens, legislative assemblies, judicial bodies, or oversight institutions. Enforcement refers to the capacity of the principal to impose sanctions for misconduct or failure to meet obligations, thereby giving the concept its coercive and consequential character.

Robert Dahl (1971), whose foundational work anchors the theoretical framework of the paper under review, embeds accountability within his broader conception of polyarchy — a regime characterised by the right to vote, freedom of expression, competitive elections, and associational autonomy. For Dahl, accountability is inseparable from political competition; it is through the continuous threat of electoral removal and the scrutiny of organised opposition that elected officials are compelled to remain responsive and responsible. This insight is particularly germane to the analysis of PDP's opposition role: the party functions as an institutional mechanism through which the answerability dimension of accountability is operationalised.

Bovens (2007, 2010), writing from a public administration perspective, distinguishes between accountability as a virtue — a normative ideal of responsible governance — and accountability as a mechanism — a structural arrangement involving a forum to which an actor must answer, explain, and potentially be sanctioned. This distinction is instructive for the study at hand, because it draws attention to the gap between formal accountability structures and their practical efficacy, a gap that remains acutely visible in the Nigerian political context. The PDP's efforts to hold the APC government to account must therefore be evaluated not merely as rhetorical exercises but as contributions to the institutionalisation of accountability mechanisms within Nigeria's fragile democratic architecture.

Concept of Good Governance

The definitional terrain of good governance is broad and contested, reflecting the diverse disciplinary and institutional perspectives from which it has been elaborated. Three foundational definitions warrant extended consideration for their relevance to the Nigerian context: The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1997) defines governance as 'the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels,' identifying good governance with nine core characteristics: participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus orientation, equity, effectiveness and efficiency, accountability, and strategic vision. This multidimensional framework has been enormously influential in shaping governance assessment frameworks across sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria.

The World Bank (2007) operationalises good governance through the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI), which assess six dimensions: voice and accountability, political stability and absence of violence, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption. This framework reflects a predominantly technocratic and managerial conception of governance — one that privileges institutional performance over political contestation. Its application to Nigeria consistently reveals significant governance deficits across all six dimensions, providing an empirical backdrop against which the PDP's opposition activities must be evaluated.

Fukuyama (2013), approaching good governance from a political science perspective, argues that it rests on three foundational pillars: the rule of law, state capacity (effective and competent bureaucratic institutions), and democratic accountability. This tripartite framework is particularly useful for contextualising the Nigerian case because it makes explicit the interdependence of institutional, technical, and political dimensions of governance — dimensions that tend to be disaggregated in the World Bank's technocratic framework.

The relationship between effective opposition and good governance is theoretically robust and empirically supported. Strom and Muller (1999) demonstrate in their comparative study of parliamentary systems that the presence of a credible, organised opposition reduces information asymmetries, constrains incumbents' rent-seeking behaviour, and improves the quality of policy deliberation. Przeworski et al. (2000) provide empirical evidence that democratic accountability mechanisms, including opposition scrutiny improve economic governance outcomes by aligning government incentives with citizen preferences.

In the Nigerian context, Omotola (2010, 2016) argues that opposition parties have historically been more effective at identifying and publicising governance failures than at presenting credible alternative governance programs, a pattern that the paper under review confirms in its assessment of the PDP's post-2015 opposition performance. The party has been more proficient at the 'negative' accountability function such as exposing corruption, highlighting inefficiencies, and monitoring government actions than at the 'positive' governance function like developing innovative, evidence-based policy alternatives that would distinguish it as a genuine government-in-waiting.

This distinction between negative and positive contributions to good governance resonates with Kitschelt's (1995) conceptualisation of opposition strategies along a competitive–collusive spectrum. Purely competitive opposition focuses on differentiation and critique; constructive opposition contributes to governance improvement through policy alternatives, legislative engagement, and institutional strengthening. The PDP's opposition record since 2015 falls predominantly in the former category, consistent with the paper's finding that the party's strategic planning has been 'reactive rather than proactive.'

Theoretical Framework

The pluralist theory was adopted as the theoretical framework of the study and the early proponents often associated with the development of pluralist ideas was Robert A. Dahl, whose influential works began to shape modern pluralist theory in the mid-20th century. Dahl's seminal contribution, particularly in his books "Who Governs?" (1961) and "Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition" (1971), helped solidify pluralist theory as a significant perspective within democratic theory. He argued that democratic governance involves competition among various groups and interests, rather than being dominated by a single elite or faction. Dahl emphasized the importance of political pluralism, where multiple groups and organizations compete for influence and power within the political system.

Pluralist theory provides a valuable perspective on the role and function of opposition parties within democratic regimes. At its core, pluralism asserts that society is composed of multiple groups with varying interests and values, and that political power is dispersed among these groups rather than concentrated in the hands of a few (Lindberg, 2021). This framework is particularly relevant when examining how opposition parties operate within democratic systems.

Pluralist theory emphasizes the importance of competition and contestation in politics. Opposition parties play a crucial role in providing voters with alternatives to the ruling party or

coalition. By presenting different policies, ideologies, and leadership styles, opposition parties contribute to the diversity of political discourse and promote a healthy democratic debate (Katsambekis, 2022). This competition helps prevent the concentration of power and encourages accountability among those in government.

Pluralism highlights the idea of representation as Thuo, (2021), revealed that Opposition parties often represent segments of society that may feel marginalized or underrepresented by the ruling party, by articulating the concerns and interests of these groups, opposition parties ensure that diverse voices are heard in the political process. This inclusivity is fundamental to the democratic principle of equality and ensures that decision-making reflects the plurality of societal perspectives.

Moreover, pluralist theory underscores the role of civil society and interest groups in shaping political outcomes. Opposition parties frequently collaborate with civil society organizations, advocacy groups, and grassroots movements to amplify their influence and mobilize support for their agenda and these collaborations fosters civic engagement and strengthens democratic participation beyond formal electoral processes (Biekart, et al., 2020).

Furthermore, pluralism acknowledges the inevitability of conflict in democratic politics. Opposition parties serve as a mechanism for expressing dissent and challenging governmental decisions or policies perceived as detrimental to the public interest. This constructive conflict encourages compromise, negotiation, and consensus-building, essential for effective governance in pluralistic societies (Martinsen, 2021).

Pluralist theory links closely with the politics of opposition in democratic regimes by emphasizing the diversity of interests and viewpoints that opposition parties represent. It posits that a healthy democracy requires robust competition among political parties to ensure accountability, responsiveness, and representation of varying societal concerns. (Schumaker, 2021). Pluralism underscores the role of opposition parties in challenging incumbents, promoting alternative policies, and safeguarding against the concentration of power. This dynamic interaction fosters democratic debate, checks governmental authority, and ultimately enhances the legitimacy of democratic governance by ensuring that multiple perspectives are heard and considered in the political decision-making process (Parkin, 2022).

One out of several weaknesses of pluralist theory regarding opposition parties in democratic regimes is its idealistic portrayal of equal access to political power. In reality, certain structural barriers such as campaign finance disparities, media influence, and incumbent advantages restricted the ability of opposition parties to effectively compete (Buffie, 2022). Moreover, the theory's focus on interest groups and civil society may underestimate broader societal inequalities that limit the representation and influence of marginalized groups within opposition parties, these factors could lead to unequal political participation and hinder the pluralist ideal of diverse and equitable representation in democratic decision-making processes (Bernstorff, 2021). Thus, while pluralism provides valuable insights into political diversity and competition, its application to opposition parties should consider these inherent challenges and structural limitations within democratic systems.

Nevertheless, the study found pluralist theory relevant because, it posits that power in a democratic society is distributed among various interest groups that compete to influence public policy and governance, this competition ensures that no single group dominates, it also promotes a balance of power that reflects the diverse interests and views within a society. However, the

theory underscores the importance of multiple centers of power and the dynamic interaction between different groups to achieve democratic governance.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, which is particularly appropriate for investigating the nuanced, context-dependent processes through which political parties promote or undermine accountability and good governance. Qualitative methodology allows for an in-depth exploration of the perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of political actors and stakeholders in ways that quantitative approaches cannot adequately capture (Creswell, 2014). The study is anchored in an interpretive epistemological stance, which recognises that political phenomena are constituted through the meanings that actors attribute to their actions and institutional contexts (Marsh and Furlong, 2002).

The study population comprised PDP officials at state, local government, and ward levels, members of the National Assembly representing PDP constituencies, civil society activists and political analysts engaged with opposition politics, and academic researchers with expertise in Nigerian party politics. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select respondents who possessed direct, first-hand knowledge of the PDP's organisation and opposition activities.

The primary data for this study was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. An interview guide was developed based on the study's research questions and theoretical framework, covering themes including the PDP's internal organisational practices, communication and mobilisation strategies, mechanisms for monitoring government conduct, coalition-building activities, and respondents' assessments of the party's effectiveness as an accountability agent.

The interview data was analysed using thematic analysis, following the six-phase framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Initial codes were generated inductively from the interview transcripts to capture the range and diversity of respondent perspectives. These codes were subsequently organised into higher-order themes, which correspond to the analytical categories structuring the findings section of this paper: internal organisation, communication, strategic planning, grassroots engagement, monitoring government actions, highlighting governance shortcomings, and citizen engagement through town hall meetings and rallies.

Evolution of Opposition Parties in Nigeria

A truly democratic system is incomplete without the existence of viable opposition parties. Opposition politics represents an ideological stance taken by a group of politicians whose party fails to secure a convincing majority in elections. These parties play a crucial role in maintaining the health of a democracy by offering alternative policies and serving as a check on the ruling government. Often, opposition parties structure themselves to resemble a shadow government or alternative cabinet, projecting a coherent set of policies that distinguish them from the incumbent administration. This enables them to articulate an alternative course of action that diverges from the government's current policies, providing constructive criticism when necessary. The exercise of opposition power within the legislature serves as a form of advertisement to the electorate, presenting an alternative government with distinct policies and ideals that could be realized in future elections, should voters choose to endorse them (Aborishade, 2013; Ojo, 2021).

Historically, the first political party to assume the role of an opposition party in Nigeria was the Action Group (AG), led by Obafemi Awolowo during the First Republic. The AG emerged as a

dominant force in the southwestern region, advocating for regional autonomy and social welfare programs. However, political intrigues and infighting among major political factions weakened the AG's influence. The era was marked by increasing intolerance, suspicion, and bitterness, which ultimately led to the military intervention in Nigerian politics on January 15, 1966. This coup d'état was a significant turning point, as it dismantled the democratic framework established after independence (Victoria, 2020; Suberu, 2019). Following the dissolution of the AG, the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) emerged as its successor and served as the main opposition party during the Second Republic, continuing the legacy of advocating for social justice and regional interests (Aiyede, 2018).

Role of PDP in the Promotion of Accountability and Good Governance in Nigeria

In contemporary Nigerian politics, the presence of robust opposition parties is essential for fostering accountability and transparency in governance. Scholars argue that effective opposition is not merely a function of electoral competition but is also critical for the promotion of democratic values and practices (Omotola, 2016). As Nigeria continues to navigate its complex political landscape, the role of opposition parties remains pivotal in shaping policy debates and ensuring that the voices of various segments of society are represented.

a. Enhancing Internal Organization

As leading opposition party since 2015, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) has implemented several reforms aimed at enhancing its internal structures and promoting effective governance. For example, in 2019, the PDP introduced a new membership registration system that utilized digital technology to maintain accurate membership records and streamline party operations. This system not only improved transparency but also facilitated better communication among party members. Additionally, state chapters of the PDP have organized regular training workshops for members to clarify roles and responsibilities, fostering greater participation and reducing internal disputes. These initiatives have collectively strengthened the party's organizational framework and improved its ability to address political challenges effectively.

The party's commitment to internal democracy is reflected in its electoral processes, emphasizing fairness and inclusivity during primaries and conventions. This approach not only enhances the party's legitimacy but also helps to retain membership loyalty and reduce defections. The PDP has recognized the importance of unity among its members, especially following past electoral defeats. Efforts to cultivate a cohesive party culture include establishing reconciliation committees to address conflicts and promote dialogue among different factions. By fostering collaboration across various demographic groups, the PDP aims to strengthen its identity as a national party.

Effective communication has been another critical aspect of the PDP's strategy, the party has adopted a multi-channel approach to disseminate its messages, utilizing both traditional and social media to engage with the public and hold the ruling party accountable. This proactive communication strategy has helped to rebuild trust with constituents and maintain the party's visibility in the political landscape.

The People's Democratic Party (PDP) has highlighted issues of economic mismanagement and insecurity to reinforce its grassroots engagement. In 2020, the PDP criticized the ruling party for rising unemployment and inflation, proposing a comprehensive economic recovery plan focused on boosting local industries and creating jobs through infrastructure development. Regarding insecurity, particularly in northern Nigeria, the PDP advocated for a revamped security strategy

that includes community policing and increased funding for law enforcement. These proposals aim to position the PDP as a responsible alternative to the current government, directly addressing citizens' pressing concerns.

The People's Democratic Party (PDP) has engaged in coalition-building with several opposition parties, including the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), to strengthen its position against the ruling party. Together, they called for reforms aimed at enhancing the transparency and credibility of elections. Key proposals included adopting electronic voting and using technology for voter verification to reduce electoral fraud. However, the ruling party resisted certain provisions, expressing concerns over the security and reliability of electronic voting, the potential disenfranchisement from mandatory biometric verification, and the enhancement of the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) autonomy. Additionally, calls for greater transparency, such as real-time publication of results, faced opposition due to fears of disputes and unrest. This resistance underscored the ongoing challenges in achieving meaningful electoral reform in Nigeria.

To regain its status as a formidable political entity, the party has focused on strengthening its internal governance mechanisms, enhancing member engagement, and fostering a culture of accountability and transparency, as respondent illustrated that:

The People's Democratic Party (PDP) has consistently worked to strengthen its internal structures and mechanisms to function effectively as a major opposition party in Nigeria. At the state level, leaders like the State Secretary of the PDP in Katsina have spearheaded reforms aimed at enhancing internal organization. These reforms include restructuring party offices, maintaining accurate membership records, and ensuring that responsibilities are clearly defined across different cadres of leadership. By putting in place a well-coordinated system, the PDP has been able to reduce internal conflicts, improve decision-making, and make the party machinery more efficient. Strong internal organization ensures that the PDP can respond promptly to political challenges and remain competitive in Nigeria's dynamic political landscape (Interview, 2024).

From his side, another respondent alluded that:

Internal organization is strengthened through adherence to internal democracy in the conduct of primaries, congresses, and conventions. While challenges remain, the PDP has increasingly emphasized fairness, inclusivity, and transparency in its internal processes. By conducting elections that reflect the will of the majority of members, the party not only reduces defections but also builds legitimacy in the eyes of supporters and the electorate at large (Interview, 2024).

To conclude on internal organization the PDP has strong structure that makes better alternative for Nigerians as respondent narrated:

The PDP's deliberate effort to enhance its internal organization has been instrumental in preserving its relevance as Nigeria's leading opposition party. Through structural reforms, capacity building, technological integration, and commitment to internal democracy, the party continues to position itself as a credible alternative to the ruling party (Interview, 2024).

Despite all efforts for the role as leading opposition party, the party suffered the internal conflicts and allegations of corruption within the People's Democratic Party (PDP) that occurred during the leadership of Uche Secondus as National Chairman. In 2020, several party members publicly accused Secondus of misappropriating funds meant for party activities, leading to a power struggle within the party. This conflict intensified when key figures, including former governors and party stalwarts, called for his resignation, citing a lack of transparency and accountability in financial dealings. Moreover, during the 2019 general elections, reports emerged of significant discrepancies in the management of campaign funds. These issues not only created divisions within the party but also contributed to a growing perception of corruption, undermining the PDP's credibility as an opposition party.

Scholars emphasize that strengthening internal organization is critical for the survival and effectiveness of political parties in Nigeria's democracy. Ezeani, Ikpegbu, and Ezeani (2024) argue that the imposition of candidates within the PDP has consistently undermined internal democracy, creating intra-party conflicts and defections that weaken the party's stability. Similarly, Ndubueze (2018) shows in his study of PDP in Imo State that poor internal structures, fueled by godfatherism and lack of transparent candidate selection, generated instability and eroded the party's grassroots strength. Oji (2024) further highlights that PDP's organizational weaknesses such as concentration of power in the hands of a few elites and ineffective conflict-resolution mechanisms pose major challenges to its role as a credible opposition. Together, these studies demonstrate that enhancing internal organization through transparent processes, inclusivity, and strong conflict-resolution frameworks is essential for the PDP's institutional resilience and competitiveness.

b. Improving Communication

Following a period marked by internal strife and public discontent, the PDP has acknowledged that clear, transparent, and consistent communication is essential for rebuilding trust among its members and with the electorate. This respondent makes it clear that:

Communication has been a critical strategy in the PDP's role as an opposition party, effective communication ensures that the party's message resonates with the public while also holding the ruling party accountable. The PDP employs a multipronged communication approach, including traditional media, press releases, and social media platforms, to amplify its voice. Through these channels, the PDP highlights government failures, policy shortcomings, and instances of corruption, while simultaneously presenting itself as a more competent alternative (Interview, 2024).

A central aspect of the PDP's communication strategy is its emphasis on issue-based opposition instead of resorting to confrontational or disruptive methods. The PDP prioritizes highlighting unmet commitments, such as the lack of improvements in electricity supply, stabilization of fuel prices, and the failure to tackle insecurity as promised by the ruling APC. By basing its criticisms on factual evidence, the PDP enhances its credibility and establishes itself as a responsible opposition. This focus on internal communication not only strengthens the party's cohesion but also complements its overall strategy of promoting issue-based opposition, ensuring that all members are equipped to highlight unfulfilled promises and engage constructively in the political discourse.

Moreover, this respondent opined:

PDP has improved internal communication to ensure that grassroots members are aligned with national messaging. Regular updates from party headquarters to state and local chapters keep members informed, motivated, and coordinated. This internal communication system helps avoid mixed signals and ensures consistency in the party's narrative nationwide. In an era where social media drives public opinion, the PDP's investment in communication strategies has helped it remain relevant and visible across Nigeria's political landscape (Interview, 2024).

Communication has been a powerful tool for PDP's opposition strategy as party's national publicity secretary issues regular press releases to spotlight government failures, particularly on insecurity and the economy. PDP has also embraced social media platforms like Twitter/X and Facebook, enabling it to reach millions of young Nigerians directly and amplify its criticisms of the ruling party. These methods illustrate how the PDP uses structured communication to remain visible and influential.

Effective communication is a cornerstone of opposition politics, enabling parties to shape public opinion and hold incumbents accountable. Omotola (2010) notes that Nigerian opposition parties often fail to mobilize effectively because of weak communication strategies, but highlights that issue-based messaging strengthens democratic competition. Similarly, Aniche and Uchenna (2021) observe that the PDP's use of media briefings and statements has been central to framing government shortcomings and presenting itself as a credible alternative. In addition, Innocent, Eikojonwa, and Yusoff (2020) emphasize that internal communication within parties linking grassroots members to national leadership enhances organizational coherence and improves public messaging. These studies collectively show that for PDP as an opposition party, improving communication both internally and externally is vital to maintaining visibility, mobilizing support, and shaping Nigeria's political discourse.

c. Strategic Planning Initiatives

In response to past electoral setbacks and changing political dynamics, the PDP has embarked on a comprehensive strategic planning process aimed at defining clear goals, identifying key priorities, and outlining actionable steps for achieving its objectives. Part of the respondent proved that:

PDP has embraced strategic planning as an essential tool for strengthening its opposition role and preparing for future elections. The party develops long-term strategies that guide its organizational development, candidate selection, and electoral campaigns. For example, careful attention is paid to identifying credible, popular, and experienced candidates during primary elections to increase the chances of electoral victory and minimize post-primary disputes (Interview, 2024).

Another respondent cleared that:

PDP's strategic planning is voter education, the party organizes sensitization campaigns to encourage citizens to register, collect their Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs), and participate in elections. This initiative not only expands the party's voter base but also reinforces democratic participation in Nigeria. Strategic planning also involves analyzing electoral trends, studying public opinion, and

conducting internal assessments of past performances. Learning from both victories and defeats, the PDP continuously refines its approach to politics. (Interview, 2024).

Despite claims of strategic planning being central to the PDP's electoral survival, the party's initiatives have often been viewed as reactive rather than proactive. The launch of "The Covenant with Nigerians" appeared more as a desperate attempt to regain relevance than a genuine commitment to governance. Additionally, while the party adopted more inclusive candidate selection processes, these efforts failed to significantly minimize defections or strengthen loyalty, as many members continued to leave for rival parties. Furthermore, the PDP's involvement in the debates leading to the 2022 Electoral Act raised questions about its effectiveness, as it struggled to secure key reforms like electronic transmission of results. Overall, these initiatives suggest that the PDP may be more focused on addressing immediate challenges rather than implementing a coherent long-term strategy for electoral success.

Strategic planning enables opposition parties to adapt to electoral dynamics and strengthen their chances of survival. Omotola (2010) argues that effective opposition requires foresight, policy alternatives, and electoral preparedness, noting that Nigerian opposition parties often struggle because of ad hoc strategies rather than long-term planning. In the case of PDP, Aniche and Uchenna (2021) emphasize the importance of deliberate initiatives such as inclusive candidate selection, voter education, and advocacy for electoral reforms, which enhance its credibility as a government-in-waiting. Similarly, Okafor and Aniche (2017) highlight that PDP's post-2015 evolution demonstrates a shift toward more strategic coalition-building and institutional reforms aimed at regaining power. These studies collectively show that strategic planning is vital for PDP to consolidate its role as Nigeria's leading opposition party and to compete effectively against incumbents.

d. Strengthening Grassroots Connections

Recognizing that a robust connection with local communities is essential for electoral success, PDP has prioritized initiatives aimed at engaging citizens at the grassroots level. A respondent illustrated:

PDP has always recognized the importance of grassroots mobilization as the foundation of its political strength. With structures across all 774 local government areas in Nigeria, the party has built one of the most extensive grassroots networks in Nigeria. This widespread presence allows the PDP to connect directly with citizens and remain relevant even in areas where it does not hold executive power (Interview, 2024).

To his understanding, a respondent detailed:

Grassroots engagement involves mobilizing local leaders, youth groups, and women's organizations to build a strong support base. Party officials conduct outreach through ward meetings, community visits, and localized campaigns that address the specific needs of communities, by making governance and opposition politics people-centered, the PDP enhances its legitimacy and credibility. The party invests in grassroots leadership development, ensuring that community leaders are empowered to articulate local concerns and channel them to higher levels of the party structure, bottom-up approach ensures inclusivity and reinforces the PDP's image as a people-oriented party. Maintaining strong

grassroots ties has allowed the PDP to survive political setbacks and remain a significant force in Nigeria's political arena (Interview, 2024).

PDP's strength lies in its grassroots presence, and the party has worked to reinforce this network since 2015. With active structures across all 774 LGAs in Nigeria, the party maintains a unique ability to connect with citizens. In states like Rivers and Oyo, grassroots consultations have been used to shape policies and budget priorities, keeping the party closely tied to local needs. The PDP also conducts regular ward-level congresses, ensuring members at the grassroots have a voice in leadership selection. These grassroots engagements sustain PDP's identity as a people-centered political party.

Grassroots connections remains a defining feature of opposition party survival in Nigeria. Adeyemi (2019) observes that political parties that sustain strong ward and local government structures are better able to translate citizen grievances into political capital, a factor that has kept PDP relevant even in opposition. In a related study, Okorie and Ojukwu (2021) stress that grassroots participation enhances inclusivity, builds trust between parties and communities, and strengthens electoral competitiveness. Likewise, Ezeani (2022) highlights that effective grassroots connections provide opposition parties with legitimacy by ensuring their policies and criticisms of government are grounded in everyday realities of citizens. These perspectives show that PDP's wide presence across Nigeria's 774 LGAs and its consistent use of ward congresses and local consultations are key to maintaining its strength as the leading opposition.

e. Monitoring Government Actions

In light of ongoing concerns regarding accountability, transparency, and governance practices, the PDP has committed to closely scrutinizing the actions and policies of the ruling government. A respondent expatiates:

As Nigeria's foremost opposition party, the PDP takes its responsibility of monitoring government actions like, close scrutiny of government budgets, policies, and programs to identify gaps, failures, or mismanagement, PDP regularly issues press statements, organizes press conferences, and leverages social media to highlight governance challenges, monitoring government performance, the PDP fulfills its role as a watchdog of democracy, ensuring that ruling authorities remain accountable to the people. For instance, the party has consistently challenged the government on issues such as insecurity, economic mismanagement, rising debt levels, and corruption scandals. This active monitoring helps shape public discourse and ensures that Nigerians are aware of how government policies impact their daily lives (Interview, 2024).

In addition to above a respondent pointed out that:

PDP often presents alternative policy proposals, showcasing its readiness to govern. This proactive approach goes beyond criticism to demonstrate responsibility and maturity in opposition politics, consistently monitoring and evaluating government actions, the PDP reinforces its role as the voice of the people (Interview, 2024).

As the major opposition party, the PDP actively monitors government policies and performance. In 2018, it issued repeated statements condemning the APC's failure to address herdsmen attacks and rising insecurity. The party also criticized the sharp rise in Nigeria's debt, particularly when

the country's public debt stock ₦49 trillion (approximately \$128 billion) 2024. Furthermore, PDP lawmakers in the National Assembly opposition caucus consistently challenged government expenditures and borrowing practices. These actions illustrate PDP's role as a watchdog of democracy.

Monitoring government actions is a central responsibility of opposition parties in democratic systems, ensuring accountability and responsiveness. Adebisi (2019) emphasizes that in Nigeria, opposition parties play a watchdog role by questioning government budgets, exposing corruption, and pressing for transparency. In a similar vein, Chima and Iroanya (2021) argue that sustained opposition monitoring through press statements, legislative debates, and media engagement contributes to deepening democratic accountability, even when ruling parties dominate institutions. More recently, Adebanwi (2023) highlights how PDP, as the major opposition, has shaped public narratives by consistently critiquing APC's handling of insecurity and economic management, showing that opposition oversight is not just reactive but helps frame policy alternatives. Collectively, these studies confirm that PDP's monitoring of government actions strengthens its relevance as the leading opposition party in Nigeria.

f. Highlighting Shortcomings and Inefficiencies

Following its significant electoral losses in recent years, the PDP has faced scrutiny regarding its internal operations, strategic direction, and responsiveness to the electorate. A respondent highlighted that:

A critical aspect of PDP's opposition strategy is to highlight the shortcomings of the ruling party and contrast them with its own achievements while in power. For example, members frequently point to rising inflation, increasing fuel prices, and growing insecurity under the APC, reminding citizens of the more stable periods under PDP administrations. By drawing comparisons, the party creates a narrative of competence and reliability (Interview, 2024).

To his understanding, a respondent said:

PDP has exposed inefficiencies in public service delivery, corruption scandals, and the government's inability to fulfill campaign promises. This strategy not only discredits the ruling party but also builds the PDP's credibility as an alternative. Importantly, the PDP frames its criticism in terms of tangible effects on ordinary Nigerians such as unemployment, poverty, and deteriorating infrastructure making its message more relatable by consistently highlighting these failures, the PDP positions itself as the defender of democratic accountability and a party that prioritizes the welfare of the people. (Interview, 2024).

Beyond monitoring, the PDP highlights inefficiencies by contrasting APC's record with its own past governance. For example, it points to the fuel price increase from ₦145 in 2015 to over ₦600 by 2023, labeling it a direct failure of APC's economic management. It also reminds Nigerians of APC's unfulfilled promise to create 3 million jobs annually, contrasting this with PDP's record of reducing unemployment. Moreover, the PDP often cites Obasanjo's debt forgiveness achievements compared to APC's rising debt profile. These examples reinforce its credibility as an alternative government.

A central role of opposition parties is to expose the failures of incumbent governments in order to inform voters and strengthen democratic accountability. Olorungbemi (2019) notes that Nigerian opposition parties, particularly the PDP, have consistently highlighted governance

inefficiencies such as corruption, poor service delivery, and rising insecurity as part of their strategy to challenge the ruling party. Similarly, Akinola (2021) argues that by drawing attention to broken promises such as APC's unfulfilled commitments on employment and fuel subsidies PDP has positioned itself as a credible alternative and fostered retrospective voting behavior among citizens. More recently, Musa (2022) emphasizes that opposition critiques of government economic mismanagement, including inflation and debt accumulation, have shaped public discourse and created pressure on the ruling party to improve performance. These studies affirm that highlighting shortcomings and inefficiencies is not only a tool of electoral competition but also a democratic necessity in Nigeria's political process.

g. Engaging with Citizens through Town Hall Meetings and Rallies

Recognizing the importance of direct interaction, the PDP has prioritized organizing these events to provide a platform for open dialogue and feedback from community members. Town hall meetings allow party leaders to present their policies, address local issues, and listen to the concerns of constituents in a more personal setting as a respondent opined that:

Citizen engagement is a central pillar of PDP's opposition strategy, the party regularly organizes town hall meetings, rallies, and community consultations to interact directly with Nigerians. These platforms allow the PDP to listen to citizens' grievances, share its vision for governance, and build trust with the electorate. Town hall meetings provide a forum for policy discussions where citizens can ask questions and offer suggestions, fostering participatory democracy, rallies, on the other hand, serve as platforms to mobilize large numbers of supporters, create visibility for the party, and build momentum ahead of elections. (Interview, 2024).

On the other hand a respondent opined that:

Consistent engagement not only sustains the party's visibility but also strengthens its grassroots ties and voter loyalty, by making citizens feel included in the political process, the PDP enhances its democratic credentials and keeps itself positioned as a people-centered party (Interview, 2024).

Direct engagement with citizens is one of the PDP's most visible strategies. Ahead of the 2019 elections, presidential candidate Atiku Abubakar embarked on nationwide town hall meetings and consultative rallies, directly listening to Nigerians. In PDP-led states like Oyo, Governor Seyi Makinde institutionalized town hall sessions as part of budget consultations. The party also stages mega rallies in Port Harcourt, Lagos, and Kano, drawing massive crowds and energizing supporters. These engagements demonstrate how PDP connects accountability with mass mobilization.

Direct engagement with citizens through town halls, rallies, and community consultations remains a vital strategy for opposition parties to sustain relevance and legitimacy. Ajayi (2020) argues that opposition parties in Nigeria use rallies and consultations not only for mobilization but also as platforms for political education and issue-based discussions with voters. In a related study, Nwankwo and Okafor (2021) emphasize that town hall meetings foster participatory democracy by creating spaces where citizens can voice grievances and interact directly with party leaders, thereby strengthening trust. Similarly, Yusuf (2022) highlights that PDP's town hall engagements and mega rallies ahead of the 2019 elections were crucial for reconnecting with grassroots supporters and countering the dominance of the ruling APC. Together, these studies show that

citizen engagement through rallies and town halls is essential for opposition parties like PDP to maintain visibility, legitimacy, and strong voter linkages.

Discussion

The findings of this study illuminate the PDP's role as an accountability mechanism in Nigeria's Fourth Republic democracy in substantive, if uneven, ways. Accountability in democratic theory encompasses two core dimensions: answerability, the obligation of power holders to explain and justify their conduct and enforcement, the capacity of oversight actors to impose consequences for misconduct (Schedler, 1999). The empirical evidence gathered in this study suggests that the PDP has been considerably more effective at operationalising the answerability dimension than the enforcement dimension of accountability.

The findings on communication, monitoring of government actions, and highlighting of shortcomings collectively demonstrate that the PDP has sustained a consistent and credible answerability function since 2015. By regularly issuing press statements on economic mismanagement, publicly criticising the APC's security failures, and leveraging social media to amplify governance deficits, including Nigeria's rising public debt profile the PDP has contributed to the circulation of accountability-relevant information in the public sphere. This aligns with O'Donnell's (1998) concept of diagonal accountability, wherein opposition parties and civil society actors serve as informal oversight agents, generating public pressure on incumbents in the absence of effective formal horizontal accountability mechanisms. Several respondents confirmed this pattern: R3 (PDP National Assembly member) noted that the opposition caucus consistently challenged government expenditure and borrowing practices in legislative sessions, while R5 (Political Analyst) observed that PDP's public communications had demonstrably shaped media discourse on governance failures.

However, the findings also reveal significant constraints on the PDP's accountability effectiveness. The enforcement dimension of accountability such as the capacity to impose meaningful sanctions on the ruling party for governance failures remains structurally limited by the PDP's status as an opposition party without access to executive power or control of state institutions. The party can expose misconduct and mobilise public opinion, but it cannot directly prosecute corruption, withhold appropriations, or compel institutional reform. This structural limitation is compounded by the PDP's own accountability deficit: the data consistently surfaces allegations of internal corruption and elite capture within the party itself, findings that critically undermine its moral authority as an accountability champion. As Bovens (2007) argues, the credibility of accountability claims depends fundamentally on the institutional legitimacy of the party making them a condition that the PDP's internal governance record continues to erode.

Theoretically, these findings partially confirm and partially challenge the pluralist framework adopted in this study. Pluralism's core prediction, that competition among multiple political actors produces accountability is supported by the evidence of PDP's watchdog activities. However, the findings also reveal the limits of pluralist optimism: in a context characterised by neopatrimonialism, weak institutions, and structural inequality, the mere existence of an opposition party is insufficient to guarantee substantive accountability. The PDP's effectiveness as an accountability mechanism is contingent not only on its opposition activities but on the broader institutional environment, including judicial independence, press freedom, and the integrity of electoral administration within which those activities occur.

The relationship between the PDP's opposition activities and the promotion of good governance is more complex and contested than the paper's current framing suggests. Good governance, as

elaborated in the UNDP (1997) framework, encompasses nine interrelated principles: participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, equity, effectiveness, efficiency, accountability, and strategic vision. The findings of this study indicate that the PDP's opposition role has made discernible, if partial, contributions to several of these principles, while simultaneously falling short of others.

The most consistent contributions to good governance identified in the data relate to participation and responsiveness. The PDP's extensive grassroots network, encompassing all 774 local government areas and its institutionalisation of town hall meetings and community consultations have created spaces for citizen engagement with political processes that would otherwise be dominated by the governing party. Respondents from both party and civil society backgrounds (R2, R6, R8) agreed that these platforms had enhanced citizens' sense of inclusion and provided channels for articulating community-level grievances. In PDP-led states such as Oyo, the institutionalisation of town hall sessions as part of the budget consultation process represents a concrete, institutionalised contribution to participatory governance that extends beyond opposition rhetoric.

The findings are more ambiguous with respect to the good governance principles of transparency, rule of law, and effectiveness. While the PDP has vocally advocated for electoral reform and transparency including support for electronic transmission of results under the 2022 Electoral Act, the data suggests that these advocacy efforts have yielded limited concrete outcomes. The ruling APC's resistance to key provisions of electoral reform, as documented by multiple respondents (R3, R4, R7), illustrates the structural constraints on what opposition advocacy can achieve in the absence of legislative majority or executive power. Moreover, the PDP's own transparency record, particularly regarding campaign finance management during the 2019 elections complicates its positioning as a champion of good governance transparency.

Perhaps most significantly, the findings reveal a fundamental tension between the PDP's good governance narrative and its institutional practice. The party presents itself as a 'government-in-waiting' committed to better governance, yet the empirical evidence consistently surfaces patterns of candidate imposition, godfatherism, and elite capture that contradict the principles of participatory, transparent, and equitable governance that the party espouses publicly. This gap between normative claim and institutional practice is not merely a political inconsistency, it is a substantive threat to the PDP's credibility as a good governance advocate, and it resonates with Fukuyama's (2013) argument that good governance requires not just institutional design but genuine political will and leadership commitment.

In sum, the findings suggest that the PDP's contribution to good governance is real but conditional: real in the sense that its opposition activities have generated accountability pressure, expanded citizen participation, and placed governance failures on the public agenda; conditional in the sense that these contributions are constrained by the party's own governance deficits, the structural limitations of opposition in a dominant-party system, and the weakness of supporting institutions in Nigeria's democratic architecture.

Concluding Remarks

In summary, since becoming the principal opposition party in 2015, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) has aimed to promote accountability and good governance in Nigeria by enhancing its organizational structure and member engagement. Key reforms, like a digital membership registration system, have improved transparency and communication, while internal democracy fosters unity and reduces defections. The PDP employs a multi-channel communication strategy

to highlight government failures and rebuild trust, maintaining grassroots structures across all 774 local government areas for direct citizen engagement. As a watchdog of democracy, it monitors government actions and contrasts the ruling party's shortcomings with its past achievements, positioning itself as a credible alternative focused on citizens' welfare. Direct engagement through town hall meetings and rallies further enhances trust and demonstrates the PDP's commitment to strengthening its role as Nigeria's leading opposition party.

Despite the People's Democratic Party's (PDP) efforts to promote accountability and good governance since becoming the principal opposition party in 2015, it has faced significant failures that undermine its credibility. Internal discord and a history of corruption have marred its reputation, and while reforms like the digital membership registration system aim to improve transparency, they do not effectively address deeper governance issues. The party's emphasis on grassroots mobilization and communication strategies often seems superficial without substantial policy proposals to back them up. Additionally, its criticisms of the ruling party can appear reactive, lacking innovative solutions to Nigeria's pressing challenges. Ultimately, the PDP struggles to convincingly demonstrate that it has learned from its past mistakes, which hampers its ability to present itself as a genuine alternative focused on citizens' welfare.

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