

# **NIGERIA:**

## **A Journey in Socioeconomic and Political Development**

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## **NIGERIA: A Journey in Socioeconomic and Political Development**

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**PART 2:**

**POLITICAL  
DEVELOPMENTS**

# 8

## POLITICAL PARTIES AND LEADERSHIP RECRUITMENT IN NIGERIA: A Case Study of the People's Democratic Party (PDP)

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### Introduction

Political parties and leadership recruitment have been burning issues, not only in developing countries of the world but also in the advanced western countries. The most important function of a political party is the selection of leaders. The process of choosing a leader is informed by the need to have a better alternative. Thus, democracy implies the presence and existence of an informed electorate and an enabling environment for democracy to thrive in. According to Okadigbo (1987), "political leadership is the decision on social policy and resource allocation as exerted by partisan representatives". The leadership process is hinged on the capacity to allocate scarce resources, which determines the focus of power. A society without visionary and committed leaders will retrogress, or at best remain stagnant.

That has been the issue with Nigeria, whose greatest problem is poor leadership, and which is a product of the political elite. A close examination of the attitude and behaviour of leaders of post-colonial Nigeria shows that many of the civilians as well as military leaders, were mired in the pursuit of selfish personal goals at the expense of the broader national interest. Thus, the relationship between political parties and party members remains a major problem for a large and pluralistic society like Nigeria. Nigerian political parties and the political elite survive and thrive on nepotism, godfatherism (favouritism), ethnicity, sentiments and all forms of violence.

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limited by common principles. It is in line with this that Reheemat (2003) writes that political parties serve as the singular most important arena, avenue and medium for political participation everywhere in the world. According to him, "a political party is the door and the key to political participation and the engine room of democracy." The party system is necessary for the operation of a democratic system of government.

A political party is therefore an organization of society's active political agents who are concerned with the control of government power and who compete for popular support with other groups holding divergent views. According to Neumann (1977), "political parties are the lifeline of modern politics." Yet parties are highly misconceived. A party is viewed as an organization for professional politicians. On the contrary, parties are critically important to any democratic process, for it is through the activities of political parties that the dynamic features of any political system can be understood.

The basic function of political parties is to galvanize public opinion. They are brokers of ideas, constantly clarifying, systematizing and expounding the party's doctrine (Tamen, 2012). They represent social groups narrowing the gap between individuals and the community. By educating the voters, parties help to create opportunities for free choice, especially in a competitive party system. A political party is thus seen as the major instrument for facilitating competition.

Political parties also play integrative roles by integrating the individual into the community. Parties ensure that the individual remains within the bonds of group or community interest. For most of the time, parties extract loyalty from the individual, bearing in mind the survival of the whole democratic system. Thus, parties represent the connecting link between government and public opinion. It is a vital element of the party's responsibility to keep open the channel of communication between the leaders and the followers.

Furthermore, all political parties play the role of guaranteeing and protecting a given political and legal order. How this political function is effected depends on the means and procedures the party employs in carrying it out. The means and procedures can be intended for reactionary or progressive ends. For, according to Gramsci (1977), the policing function of a party can be progressive when it tends to keep the dispossessed reactionary forces within the bounds of legality and to raise the backward masses to the level of the new legality. He further argues that a party which is progressive is democratic in nature and operates on the basis of democratic centralism, while the regressive party functions

bureaucratically and operates on the principles of bureaucratic centralism. At times, social groups employ the political party as a vehicle for the expression of their ideological dominance over society.

Succinctly therefore, political parties simplify political issues and often proffer alternatives, recruit leadership, moderate and compromise political conflicts, organize the machinery of government and promote political legitimacy. Above all, a dynamic political party with articulate leadership can give the necessary ideological direction to the people through its programmes (Amdi and Hinjan, 1990).

#### **(ii) Political Parties and Leadership Recruitment**

Political parties perform a variety of roles in any political system. According to Dare (1999), the most prominent role of a political party is that of recruitment of individuals for public office holding. Thus, political parties operate as voluntary organizations whose basic and prime goal is to compete for and hold office at all levels of government. People join political parties in order to vie for public offices and provide the desired leadership needed to move a nation forward.

Political parties thus provide an avenue for leadership recruitment and play the role of presenting qualified citizens for leadership positions. The way and manner in which a leader emerges as holder of public office determines to a very large extent his actions and inactions. Therefore, political parties perform the role of policymaking. It therefore means that political parties aim to capture political power by articulating broad principles and specific policies which may obtain support from individual groups.

The essence of a political party is to create politically active citizens out of the passive ones. The objective is to win elections and take over the leadership of a country. This is done through socialization and recruitment processes. Thus, political parties shape the leadership recruitment process through the selection of party candidates in the primaries at a convention.

According to Okadigbo (1987), leadership is the process through which one individual consistently exerts more influence than others in the pursuit of group behaviour. Political leadership is the decision on social policy and resource allocation as exerted by partisan representatives. Leadership recruitment is the induction of individuals into different roles in the political system to actualize the fullest texture of any democratic enterprise. The political leadership recruitment problem in Nigeria involves a predatory political class that is mainly concerned with power for the sake of it. The

absence of an internally cohesive political leadership led to the country's inability to pursue a vibrant policy and development for the country.

In many African societies and Nigeria in particular, the first group of leaders that had western education and were prepared for leadership were not the cream of the breed at the helm of affairs of the country at independence. The colonial leaders manipulated and recruited people who were loyal and would continue with the structure to maintain the colonial machinery after they might have gone.

Furthermore, the emergent governing class contested the political terrain within the context of ethnic-based political parties in a fragile federal structure. The implication, according to Dele (2004), is frequent leadership change, lack of ideology, policy reversals and weak institutional patterns. This resulted in intense power struggles to access statist structure, private, primitive economic accumulation, flamboyance, corruption, profligacy, poor management of economic resources, ill-conceived projects and programmes etc.

Nobody captures this more correctly than Achebe (1986): "The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, the challenges of personal example which is the hallmark of true leadership". Thus, the failure of policies, programmes, and perceived national decay are usually linked to the nature and character and the quality of personnel that are recruited and placed by political parties in leadership positions in Nigeria.

### **Historical Evolution of Political Parties in Nigeria**

The Macpherson constitution of 1951 was an important landmark in the political development of Nigeria, for it strengthened the political machinery through which Nigerians participated in the management of their affairs. The constitution ushered in an era of party organizations (Price, 1967). However, before the Macpherson constitution, there were ethnic cultural associations which were formed to articulate parochial tribal interests. When it was time for the British to encourage political participation, these tribal associations were converted into outright political parties.

Nevertheless, the Action Group (AG) was an off-shoot of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* - the association of the descendants of Oduduwa founded in 1947 by Chief Obafemi Awolowo (Dudley, 1982). The main objective of the party was to promote the interests of the Yorubas, and to seek control of the Western Nigerian regional government. It was similar to the Northern People's Congress (NPC), which was an offshoot of *Jamiyyar Mutanen Arewa* - the association of people of the North formed in 1948 by A.T. Balewa, to

protect the interests of the North against the fast-changing political scene in Nigeria. No wonder, the motto of the party was "One North, one people".

Herbert Macaulay, together with his nationalist friends, formed the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) in 1944. It was a nationalistic and masses-based party composed of trade unions, ethnic associations and youth movements. After the death of Herbert Macaulay in 1947, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe took over the leadership of the party. However, the pan-Nigerian character of the party was compromised with the formation of the Ibo State Trade Union, an Igbo federation which took over control of the NCNC (Amdi, 1990,88)

It is instructive to note that apart from the major political parties, there were other smaller ones, some of which broke away from the major ones. Those were the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) of J.S. Tarka; Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) of Aminu Kano; United National Independent Party (UNIP) of Eyo Eta; and Dynamic Party led by Chike Obi.

From this point, the tripartite model of the politics of Nigeria was established that gave allegiance to regional political parties thereby throwing Nigeria into dysfunctional sociopolitical variables with dirty politics and tribalism (Richard, 1992).

### **The People's Democratic Party and Nigeria's Democracy**

Party formations in post-military Nigeria are in a crisis. But this much should be expected in a military-assisted democracy and from societies in the throes of traumatic transition from despotic rule to a democratic empowerment of citizens. It is usually a tense process fraught with the possibility of reversal and regression. Thus, according to Alamu (2003), "Since there is no global road map for recovery and recuperation, every nation is unique pathologies. In such circumstances, even the fundamental principles of party formations in modern societies are called to question". However, in countries that have successfully weathered the inclement storm of autocratic and anti-democratic adversities, notably Ghana and South Africa, there have always been one cultural product which makes a signal and significant contribution. That is the quality of human capital at the apex of leadership.

In spite of this, the group that metamorphosed into the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) started as a pressure group protesting against the anti-democratic government of the late Gen. Sani Abacha who had asserted himself for transmission from a military head of state to a civilian president under the five political parties in his own transition programme. The group



joined by another group of 16 Southern leaders, transforming into the G-34 under the leadership of Dr. Alex Ekwueme. The stoic resistance exhibited by members of the G-34 in the face of the tyranny of Gen. Abacha helped to strengthen their resolve (Amadi, 2000).

The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) seeks to consolidate democratic culture, promote constitutionalism, social justice and freedom of the mass media, independence of the judiciary, socioeconomic self-sufficiency and credible leadership. These objectives are in harmony with the elements of democracy and good governance. Commenting on the vision of the party, the National Publicity Secretary, Chief Olisa Metuh opined thus:

*"The heroic efforts of eminent Nigerians from all walks of life to form a credible, nationwide, issue and people based political party were crowned with the official inauguration of our party... 'the vision of the founding fathers of our party, the critical elements of its manifesto, which centred on re-building Nigeria into a pride in the comity of nations, its untrammelled credibility as a truly national party that has been providing a platform for all Nigerians to realize their political aspirations irrespective of religious, ethnic or cultural affiliation differentiate it from its contemporaries'" (The Nation: 2012:23).*

Thus, the formation of the PDP provided a platform and ambience for a series of elections that ushered in the fourth republic. The party offered the best platform for addressing Nigeria's deep-seated national question. It was therefore formed to consummate the spirit and culture of federalism by ensuring fair and equitable distribution of power, resources, wealth and opportunities to conform to the principles of power-shift and power sharing.

However, the extent to which the activities and actions of the party have been undertaken since it came to power in May, 1999 is a different ball game. For a party that has ruled Nigeria for all of the 14 years since the departure of the military, the PDP is nothing short of a national tragedy after the opportunity cost to the nation has been factored in. What is rampant is a story of misery, corruption in high places and criminal neglect of the poor. This can be seen in the areas of power holding, unemployment and security. Perhaps due to the haste with which the party was formed and participated in elections, it suffered some fundamental flaws. These challenges are leadership recruitment, party orientation, internal party democracy, administration and bureaucratic organization, discipline, political accountability and policy articulation.

The fixation of its ranking members on the politics of allocation of

resources devalues politics as a struggle for the allocation of values. The degeneration of politics to a fierce struggle for state loot hobbles everything in its wake because it makes it impossible for political society to operate at a level compatible with the more refined ethos of a truly civilized polity. This subsistence politics with its violent and crude "hunter-gather code of conduct reduces everybody in its orbit to the level of primitive cave dwellers" (Alamu, 2003).

Nothing any longer unfazed a PDP member whatever his level in the party; not thieving of billions of pension funds; not stealing of billion dollars voted for modernization of roads or the power sector, nor are they collectively averse to creaming Nigerians of billions of naira with the claim that ships which never visited any port on the African continent indeed actually delivered petroleum products at Apapa. But it gets far worse, according to Orebe (2013), when a president elected on the platform of such a party looks askance while such rogues are left free to go about their illegitimate businesses.

Given the vacuity and the all round negativity of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) on Nigeria and its people, it will provide the much-needed elixir for the hapless citizens of an abundantly resource-rich country which has, unfortunately, been more than blighted by a succession of rigged-in soporific and inane PDP governments. Lamenting the erosion on the principles on which the party was founded, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar said, "At the outset, our idea was to establish a party committed to democratic values that would be greater than the individual and accountable to the people. —most Nigerians perceive the PDP as the party that does not respect the provision of its own constitution" (*The Nation*: 2013:5).

### **Challenges of the PDP and Leadership Recruitment in Nigeria**

The People's Democratic Party (PDP) as the ruling party in Nigeria, is supposed to be a symbol of the democratization process in the country. As a rule, their leaders for the country are supposed to emerge through a democratic process within the party structure. This internal democracy is the source and beginning of good quality leadership recruitment in any democratic process.

In the party's constitution, there are rules and regulations such as tenure of office, qualification and eligibility for election into the executive council at different levels, and those of elective positions in the public office. All these are made to act as checks and balances and provide a level playing field for all aspirants in the party. For example, Article 2 of the party's

constitution (Supremacy of the Party Constitution) as amended, states that: "subject to the provision of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, this constitution shall be supreme and, if any other laws, rules and regulations of the party are in conflict with the provisions of this constitution, the constitution shall prevail and the other laws, rules or regulations shall to the extent of its inconsistency be null and void".

However, the PDP has suffered over the years from the problem of trying to abide by, and conduct itself within, the provisions of their constitution concerning nomination of candidates for election into public offices and in the area of party leadership. Within the party there has also been serious erosion of democratic values. Its primaries, conventions and congresses, which are the democratic processes for selecting party officials and candidates for election, have little been regarded. For example, at the National Convention of the party in 2007, all the presidential aspirants were coerced to step down for an anointed candidate, Alhaji Musa Yar'Adua. Even in the states, governors were returned "unopposed" in the primaries. Where some managed to win, their names were substituted with others. Rotimi Amaechi of Rivers state is a case in point. It took him almost two years to fight his case up to the Supreme Court.

Thus, according to Eni (2006), the PDP witnessed the development of godfatherism, barbarism, personality cult and garrison politics of the highest dimension. Nobody captures this more correctly than Chief Audu Ogbah, a onetime National Chairman of the party. In an interview in 2002, Chief Audu Ogbah asserted that "the attempt to disregard the wider feelings of the PDP supporters and other lovers of democracy in Nigeria is the most brazen insult to the collective intelligence of the ordinary citizens of the country whose freedom of choice has been restricted, if not illegally taken away by the oligarchy in the PDP leadership". This is quiet true, for President Olusegun Obasanjo had singlehandedly propelled Goodluck Jonathan from the joyous obscurity of his tidal backwater state to the dizzying heights of the Nigerian presidency. The system of preferment he has put in place is as ruinous of true merit as it is redolent of malice and mendacity (Alamu: 2013).

Since we are talking about political party and leadership recruitment, we are talking about a crisis of the nation state. A national crisis is not an opportunity for crude recrimination or insult-vending.

But it must be noted for the benefit of analytical clarity that unlike some of its lesser competitors that can be held down to and measured against some professed ideas, the PDP, despite its array of organic intellectuals and free-floating technocrats, boasts of no ideology apart from a nebulous

pan-Nigerianism which masks its true provenance as a mere power-grabbing machine. It is over this that Alamu (2013) opined that at the moment, the PDP is a prebendal machine for scientific extortion and extraction, a perfect instrument of primitive accumulation based on industrial corruption. When prebendalism, which is a throwback to the old feudal system, becomes a modern phenomenon, and when corruption is industrialized, scientific precision is brought to bear on primitive extractive predation, then the nation is frozen in a time warp and cavemen parade as statesmen.

Perhaps, we should not complain too loudly about the sluggishness of the river in the mainstream without examining its source. It is only through this kind of holistic analysis that we can achieve a true illumination of our precarious predicament. Like its old forebears, the PDP is a product of certain structural political and economic configuration of Nigeria as engineered by the dominant faction of the military and as designed by the colonial conquerors of modern Nigeria. For them, ideology does not matter, and neither does a master plan nor even democracy. For them, it is a modern manual for political and economic bankruptcy and a cover for anti-democratic gaming. We all but agree with Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo, the superintending military Caesar of Nigeria, who rumbled that "it was not always the case that the best man would win a political contest" (*The Nation on Sunday*, January 20, 2013). And that is what we have lived with since 1999: a systematic theft of elections which has enthroned, arguably, the most irresponsible ruling elite on the African continent today.

The PDP is suffering the fatigue and degeneracy associated with a long residence in power. What unites its members are not grand ideas, but marked, irresponsible and unalienable power in order to facilitate grand larceny against the Nigerian people (Kawu, 2013). Unfortunately for the Nigerian people, in all these marked expressions of power politics, not for once will the political gladiators give themselves a pause to think about our best interests. The people just do not matter in all the calculations to acquire power and hold it firmly any which way.

It is with this that elder statesman and prominent member of the party, Chief Edward Clark raised an alarm that the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) would soon explode, as the governors elected on the platform of the party had hijacked it and were driving the country to madness with their selfish interests. He warned that if Nigerians and PDP must achieve the desired democratic principles, the overbearing nature of the governors at the state who imposed candidates must be checked (Umoru, 2013).

What the party is looking for are not visionary idealists or

transformative leaders who can take Nigeria to the next level, but politically correct journeymen sworn to protect the status quo. It is then that we are faced with the conundrum of a party which was not founded on the premises of national development or rapid transformation, but on the platform of sheer racketeering and privilege-pimping. While the PDP must be commended for its policy of demilitarization through co-option, it has also remilitarized the polity through its politics of harsh regimentation and its garrison mentality (Alamu, 2003).

#### **Effect of the PDP's Actions on Nigeria's Democracy and Development**

The dividends of democracy are good governance, participatory government, the freedom of the people to speak their minds and question their leaders, respect for life and the freedom of the individual to pursue his or her legitimate happiness, and the rights of the individual to expect a better future day after day. If these are lacking then you have an unproductive democracy. That was exactly what we were in fourteen years of PDP rule in Nigeria.

The last fifteen years, through the medium of the central administration that has been under the control of the largest party in Africa, have been nothing but depressing for the masses. Unemployment has shot through the roofs. Security is an unrealizable dream. Missed targets of set goals for power generation have been as predictable as the daily occurrence of incessant power failure itself. Poverty is on the rise just as a few continue to swim in undeserved opulence, no thanks to the unjust system of fraudulent reward (Gbadegesin, 2013).

Democracy is on a life support in Nigeria. We are degenerating very fast, declining to barbarism where young men have to go to the graveyards, dig up corpses and sell parts to make a living; where a young man kills his mother and keeps the corpse in the house for 10 years, practising some oriental voodoo ritual. Baby factories abound in Nigeria; young girls are kept in them and impregnated and babies are taken and sold.

There appear to be many major challenges confronting the country and threatening its survival as a result of the shortcomings of the PDP leadership recruitment process in Nigeria. We shall however, highlight a few.

The economy is comatose, with millions of our youngsters roaming the streets years after they have left school. The factories are not growing, and many of the multinational corporations, citing challenges, are relocating to neighbouring West African countries.

The pervasive insecurity in the land has firmly planted Nigeria on the map of terrorism and raised fears of possible disintegration. In many parts

of the North, gun-toting men strike at will. The guns of insurrectionist have felled even the well-heeled. General Mohammadu Shuwa, a war veteran, was killed in his home in Maiduguri, thus spreading the fear that no one is safe.

Generator business continues to thrive as power supply remains epileptic. This is taking a toll on the socioeconomic life of the country. Small-scale businesses are the worst hit, thus depriving the people of prosperity and frustrating any move to upgrade the county as a true giant of Africa. Corruption has become a badge of honour under the PDP administration. Those who have been convicted by the courts are cleverly let off the hook by the government once they pledge their support to the national ruling party and the narrow political interest of the president. A number of others convicted for pillaging the treasury were allowed to slip through the dragnet of the law by merely pleading guilty. A few who were convicted and jailed have bounced back into reckoning as officials of the ruling party. Others undergoing trial are helped to stay on course under the guise that the rule of law adjudges one innocent until he is found guilty by a competent court of law. Graft cases that have been charged to court for years are still at the stage of taking pleas. Defence lawyers, to frustrate the dispensation of justice, explore technicalities. And in all this, it appears the office of the Attorney General and Minister of Justice of the federation merely looks on, suggesting complicity.

The political scene underlines the incompetence more than anything else. For example, the political crisis imposed on Rivers state by the powers that be and the May 24 election of the Nigeria Governors Forum (NGF) exposed the huge joke that the PDP administration is, and made nonsense of its commitment to true democratic ethos. It is a matter for regret that in the presidency's desperation to remove the chairman of the forum, lies were told and illegalities were committed while the president continued to play the ostrich, insisting that he had no hand in the NGF crisis.

Furthermore, all national institutions are deliberately undermined, and free speech has been under assault as media houses and journalists have been consistently harassed. It is not out-of-place to conclude that the PDP government is a democratic disaster. While other African countries like Ghana are growing and engendering the confidence of the people in the state and government, Nigerians are told by the actions of their government that they must fend for themselves in all circumstances.

No wonder the rate of crime is very high. Insecurity has enveloped the country. From armed robbery and kidnapping, the county has graduated



into a full-blown intractable insurgency in the entire Northeast. The Nigerian Army which had received accolades for its valour outside the country, has become mired in accusations of extra-judicial killings due to creeping incompetence in its efforts at crushing the rebellion.

The PDP administration is one of the bloodiest eras since the civil war. The administration, more than any in Nigeria, continues to rely heavily on force to put down security challenges that they believe threaten their tenure. Though, we have the biggest peacetime deployment of soldiers since the civil war, private armed groups have multiplied and become bolder under the regime, and this is a reflection of the loss of confidence in the government, which many see as biased and self-serving in some of their policy agenda (Editorial, *The Nation on Sunday*, June 2, 2013, p.15).

The party cannot even complete her office headquarters in Abuja that was started 7 years ago after an elaborate fundraising event at which ₦6billion was realised since 2008. President Goodluck Jonathan, who was the Vice President, was the Chairman of the committee charged with the project. If PDP cannot even complete its own much-advertised building, if such conspicuous and showpiece edifice can be abandoned, it thus says something about how the country is being run. Therefore, under the party it seems there are no rules of engagement - nobody raises eyebrows and questions are better swallowed. What pervades is a conspiracy of silence in the face of remorseless incongruity.

### **Conclusion/The Way Forward**

Nigeria's major problem since independence has been a leadership question, which is that of getting someone with the ability, dedication, patriotism, and who is most capable to carry the generality of the people along and unite the country. A political party plays a crucial role for achieving this leadership recruitment challenge. However, this is not the case in Nigeria since parties serve as agents of tribal and ethnic groups to gain access to power for selfish and tribal interests. This is killing democracy in Nigeria.

Thus, a major care to focus on is the quest for deepening internal democracy at the party level. Nigerians have severally expressed their frustration over the failure of internal party democracy to thrive as the central pilot of multi-party democracy in a plural society. Without internal democracy, it is difficult or even impossible to achieve democracy at a larger level. It is important therefore, that those in positions of authority must as a matter of political necessity respect the views of party members in the process of recruiting leaders into various positions within the party.

It is my opinion therefore, that reforming a system that is comatose is necessary if the rejuvenation that will propel growth and development in the party is to be achieved. This can be realized when politics of principles and ideology forms the kernel of democracy as is obtained in other climes.

Therefore, leadership must be involved in policy articulation, policymaking and implementation in order to keep its government at various levels faithful to the objectives and interests of Nigerians.

The PDP should stick to her slogan, "Power to the People." The party must develop a mass-oriented and direct approach, since politics is a struggle for power. It is not enough therefore, to shout: "Power belongs to the people" when, in reality, power belongs to a few godfathers, individuals and a cabal that determines who gets what, when and how.

Members of the political class should learn to develop the spirit of sportsmanship in politics. Life is a game of give and take. The game of politics, leadership and power should not be regarded as a do-or-die affair. Thus, the spirit of sportsmanship is a major way to curb indiscipline, as it enhances the elements of democracy and good governance in a society.

In conclusion therefore, for the good people of Nigeria who have been sidelined as usual and forced to become idle spectators at this unfolding play of giants, the good news is that there is time for everything. Given the current power configuration in the nation and the dispersal of political authority within the dominant, residual and emergent hegemonic blocs, one individual, however powerful and pre-eminent, can no longer singlehandedly determine who will rule Nigeria. As 2015 beckons, we call on all Nigerians to put the present government on its toes and insist on full-scale electoral reforms that will put a true government of the people, by the people and for the people in power.

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