

PARTY FORMATION AND ELECTORAL CONTEST IN NIGERIA

The Labour Party and the 2007 Election in Ondo State

N Oluwafemi Mimiko

Dr Mimiko is Professor of Political Science at
Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria

Tel: +234-803-402-6279

e-mail: femi.mimiko@fulbrightweb.org ;

mimikofemi@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

While principles like popular participation, accountability and majority rule, rather than institutions, define the framework of democracy the primacy of political parties therein cannot be overemphasised. Indeed, the effectiveness of political parties is directly proportional to the degree of resilience democracy enjoys. The deepening of the democratic system which should ordinarily accompany the paradigmatic shift in Nigeria's highly restrictive party formation system effective November 2002 was, however, lost through the widespread manipulation of the April 2007 elections by President Olusegun Obasanjo's PDP government. Yet the intervention of the Labour Party in the politics of Ondo State remains undiminished by the widespread abuse of the electoral process, validating the hypothesis that 'the process of party formation is highly dependent on the structural and institutional context of the individual politicians ...' (Perkins 2000); and that the capacity of a political party is largely a function of its organisational structure, itself influenced by the wider prevailing governance structure within which it operates. Even so, the LP faces the challenge of institutionalisation in the context in which it exists virtually in only one state, and in a country where the tortuous democratic transition trajectory is defined and undermined by the mushrooming of political parties.

THE CONTEXT POLITICAL PARTIES, ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRACY

It is in the nature of social interests to be inchoate, nebulous, fluid and unstructured. The management of this maze of special interests, with their sheer number and naturally conflicting outlook, essentially defines state-society relations. The difficulties attendant on managing such interests attain a critical dimension in the context of 'changing societies', enormously challenged by the 'revolution of rising expectations'. In practical terms, these particularistic interests, unstructured as they are, are hardly useful as a basis for the pursuit and deployment of state power via a democratic system. The need to process them into wholesome forms as inputs into the decision-making system, therefore, makes political parties imperative.

As Huntington (1968, p 196) argues, strong political institutions, including political parties, are a desideratum in a democracy. The political order which defines an effective political regime 'requires political structures equal to the task of "mediating, refining, and moderating" societal demands' (Huntington 1968, p 196; Perkins 2000). This precisely underscores the centrality of political parties in a democracy. Indeed, 'without well-developed parties as a buffer, the State is constantly battered and endangered by societal demands' (Perkins 2000). For all their faults, Sklar (2004, p xxi) argues, 'there are no substitutes for voluntary political parties in constitutional democracies'. For these reasons attempts to graft democratic institutions on zero-party (non-partisan) arrangements have historically come to grief. Thus, even in the best of zero-party democratic systems, where they last long enough, identifiable political tendencies in society invariably take on structures hardly distinguishable from those of formal political parties.

There exists, therefore, an organic link between political parties and democracy, such that where parties are weak the democratic process offers limited possibilities for consolidation. Indeed, I argue that the strength and effectiveness of political parties is directly proportional to the degree of resilience democracy enjoys. This is because a credible electoral process is sacrosanct to democracy, and it is in relation to elections that the prospects of (new) democracies are actually gauged, and the degree of their weakness ascertained. Thus the literature defines the periodicity and success of elections in which there is alternation of power between political parties, or what Malamud (nd) refers to as 'a full-fledged polyarchic regime', as a measure of the resilience and sustainability of democracy. Meanwhile, in the absence of political parties elections are difficult to manage, and are inconsequential and thereby ineffectual in modern, representative democracies. Herein lies the unbroken link between political parties, elections and liberal democracies.

The critical areas of focus in any scholarly study of political parties are social base, ideological content and organisational structure (Panebianco 1988, in Malamud nd). While these are all closely interwoven, in practical terms the critical platform through which sense is made of the other variables is organisational structure. A political party with a decrepit organisational structure cannot take advantage of an appropriate social base and make meaning of a clear ideological outlook.

In contradistinction good organisation may serve to overcome the limitations ordinarily imposed by a rustic social base and absence of ideological rigour in a political party. It would thus be appropriate to argue that the capacity or overall effectiveness of a political party is largely a function of its organisational structure, with the latter largely influenced by the wider prevailing governance structure within which such a political party emerges and exists. These provide the conceptual context within which the subject of party formation and electoral context in Nigeria's fledgling democracy is interrogated.

What is the regime of laws governing the formation and operation of political parties in Nigeria? Do they facilitate or impair the effectiveness of the party system? What implications do they have for the electoral system? Do the identified variables – social base, ideology and organisational structure – provide a useful tool for an adequate appreciation of political parties and the party system in Nigeria? These are the key questions this paper seeks to answer using the empirical evidence presented by the emergence and involvement of the Labour Party in the 2007 elections in Ondo State as the principal unit of reference.

Ondo State, one of Nigeria's 36 states, was created in 1976 out of the old Western State in the Yoruba heartland (Mimiko 1995, pp 91-94). It is the fifth-largest producer of crude oil in Nigeria, making it effectively one of the richest states in the country, with an average monthly income of about ₦4-billion since 2003 and a population of a little less than four million. With a long history of Western education Ondo State is widely regarded as one of the most enlightened, critical and politically sophisticated in the country. It also has a robust history of violent resistance to electoral manipulation, which has effectively become a reference point in the study of electoral violence in Nigeria (Apter 1987; Kolawole 1988, pp 135-143). In tandem with the country, Ondo State has passed through bouts of military and civil *democratic* regimes, with very few of them having demonstrated the requisite capacity and governmental effectiveness for institutional legitimisation. Infrastructures are decrepit, poverty is endemic and alienation, underscored by widespread distrust in government, its institutions and operatives, is deep. But in the context of Nigeria's highly prebendal and rent-seeking political economy, this is not regarded as out of tune with the general trend (Mimiko 2006a, pp 1-21).

The participant-observatory framework provided an apposite platform for this study. The author, as Head of the Research and ICT Project of the LP in Ondo State, was a participant-observer in the entire process of the evolution of the party, the development of its platform and the building of its structures. The following therefore effectively amounts to first-hand information, without which a study of this nature might be difficult to conduct.

THE PARTY FORMATION SYSTEM IN NIGERIA

Political party formation has followed a particular pattern in Nigeria's long standing, albeit tortuous, efforts at democratisation. At independence the formal approval of government before a party was allowed to operate was not really required. The requirement for government registration as a condition for operation was introduced via the democratisation programme of the Murtala Muhammed / Olusegun Obasanjo military government in 1978/1979. Two decades later, a pattern similar to that of the pre-military era played itself out with the 8 November 2002 Supreme Court judgement rejecting the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) claim to a constitutional mandate to register political parties. All that was required, the Supreme Court ruled, was that a political party notify INEC of its desire to be involved in the electoral process. This paradigm shift facilitated an increase in the number of political parties in Nigeria from three in 1999 to 52 before the April 2007 elections.

One critical problem with the democratisation programmes the country had been through since 1979 was the suffocation attendant upon official regulation of the number of political parties. This injected a degree of stress into the electoral system that detracted sharply from stability. The *laissez-faire* approach to party formation that has existed since late 2002, on the other hand, has opened up the democratic space, making for less acrimony. The former arrangement made for the existence of distinct tendencies in the same parties, which invariably undermined the basis for harmony. The fact that all tendencies, groups and individuals are free to pursue their political fortune elsewhere if and when a party becomes incapable of providing them with an appropriate platform makes for overall stability in the system. In practical terms, the magnitude of the crisis attendant upon the feud between President Olusegun Obasanjo and Vice-President Atiku Abubakar for much of their second term in office would have been enough to damage fatally the fledgling transition to democracy but for the open space the new party registration schedule provided.

It should be noted that there are administrative constraints even in this relatively freer regime. Political parties are expected to focus on and, indeed, comply with the principle of federal character in appointing their officials. They

are also expected to locate their headquarters in the Federal Capital Territory. Although these fine details are hardly enforced after the formal approval by INEC of the entry of a political party into the electoral process, they nevertheless represent substantive constraints, which limit the freedom of individuals to form and operate political parties, especially those dedicated to special interests which do not necessarily have a national outlook.

It should also be noted that few Nigerian political parties have achieved or put in place a credible degree of internal democracy consistent with the minimum global standard. This is most evident in the candidate selection process, which has constantly changed in orientation, but not in form, from one in which a party mandarin, the presidential candidate or leader simply anoints candidates to one where the conditions for holding internal primary elections are so warped as to make vote rigging and corruption their most significant features. In some cases, even when primaries have been fought and won, the party leadership, which often equates to a single individual or, at best, a tiny caucus reserves the right to substitute such candidates with others who have never participated in such primary elections. Yet, as Gauja (2006, pp 1-8) argues, intra-party democracy remains potentially 'an effective means of increasing political participation, awareness and strengthening the legitimacy of parties as a key linkage between (government) and the electorate'.

Historically, ideology has played a very minor role in the formation and operation of political parties in Nigeria and the role has tended to shrink with the collapse of each transition programme. The difference between the socialism of the Alliance for Democracy (AD)/Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) of the First and Second republics and the capitalism of the Northern Congress (NPC)/National Party of Nigeria (NPN) is therefore merely in the degree of efficiency and effectiveness the former sought to bring to the dominant capitalist orientation of the country. This reality is neatly captured in the 'a little to the left, a little to the right' cliché decreed for the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC) in the nation's Third Republic. This is why Nigeria's political parties have exhibited significantly similar orientation and behaved in identical ways in government over the years, all of them apparently committed to the dominant ideology of the dependent-capitalist enterprise (Mimiko 1999, pp 129-159).

Thus, in the context of limited ideological differentiation, the most important factor informing which party the average politician chooses to align with is the calculation of which of the hordes of parties/candidates is most likely to win an impending electoral contest. It has very little to do with an assessment of which party or candidate best represents the interests of the larger society. In this calculation dispassionate political analysis is as important as the counsel of

stargazers and the prophecies of orthodox and non-orthodox religious leaders. Party politicking inevitably, in the circumstances, becomes strictly a platform for elite negotiation of power as an end in itself, or, at best, a means to attain a degree of personal aggrandisement.

I argue that it is this very limited space for democratic expression in the parties and not as much the absence of clearly defined ideology which promotes the phenomenon of floor crossing and the attendant instability in the Nigerian political system. If fluid ideological orientation makes it easy for individuals and groups to move from one party to another without much stress it is the lack of internal democracy that constitutes the actual trigger-factor for floor crossing. All these realities had important implications for the 1999 elections and the overall outcome of the transition programme, as demonstrated in the next section.

POLITICAL MACHINE AND ELECTORAL CHALLENGE

Considered against the backdrop of the widely perceived, if tacit, endorsement of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) by the democratising military junta in 1999 (Mimiko 2004a, pp 83-97), it was a forgone conclusion that the party would become the single largest, both in terms of membership and, subsequently, in terms of the number of states it won, apart from the presidency – the ultimate prize in the Nigerian political system.

In addition to the presidency it won 19 of 36 states in 1999, 26 in 2003 and 29 in 2007 – establishing a clear pattern of transition from a one-party-dominant state to a one-party state. By the time it was fully settled into government in the early years of President Obasanjo's first term the PDP had paraded the key feature of a political machine – the use of 'public resources to support party and campaign operations', with political 'bosses' using their patronage 'to build stronger, more penetrative party organisations' (Perkins 2000). The insistence of Yar'Adua on a government of national unity and attempts to re-position the PDP by bringing back estranged members who are comfortably ensconced in other parties may further consummate this drive for a single-party system (Obi 2007).

Meanwhile, in line with the tendency for constitutional concentration common to the African political system (Mimiko 2006b, pp 189-202) and the idiosyncrasy of the men at the head of the government since 1999, the PDP succeeded in further consolidating the emergent unitary system, which belies the advertised commitment of the Nigerian Constitution to federalism. The situation today is such that the country is, more than at any other time in its long history of democratic experimentation, more centralised, creating one of its more important contradictions, in which a liberalising economic regime was delivered on the crutches of a centralised political system and in which the space for mass

participation, in spite of the existence of so many political parties, continues to shrink (Mimiko 2004b).

At no time was this tendency more pronounced than in the months before the 2007 election. President Obasanjo deployed the machinery of state to harangue his personal and his party's opponents and announced that the elections would be a 'do-or-die, life-or-death' exercise in which the PDP would brook no opposition and in which any resistance to the all-conquering proclivity of the party would be met with maximum force. Predictably, both local and foreign observers, including the European Union Election Observation Mission (2007, p 1) were virtually unanimous in regarding the election as the worst in the nation's history, falling 'far short of basic international and regional standards for democratic elections'.

The major formation confronting the PDP machine in the elections in Ondo State was the Labour Party (LP). Formed in the state on 1 December 2006, the LP was effectively four months and 14 days old by the election of 14 April 2007. The alacrity with which a defined political constituency (ie, Ondo State citizenry) embraced the LP was phenomenal and unprecedented in the history of party formation in Nigeria, however, its experience in the 2007 elections was not too different from that of the other political parties which stood against the PDP machine in virtually all the states of the federation. I return to this theme below.

LP INTERVENTION IN ONDO STATE

The LP was initially registered (in 2002) as the party for Social Democracy (PSD). Its registration followed the Supreme Court judgement of November 2002, which wholly liberalised the nation's party registration procedure. Its main promoter was the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), with Sylvester Ejiofor, a veteran of many labour struggles, as its first national chairman. Its mission is to 'address the issue of political power not as an end, but as the vehicle for the transformation of the country and for governance consistent with the ideology of Social Democracy' (LP 2006, p 5). It seeks to 'promote and defend social democratic principles and ideals for the purpose of achieving social justice, progress and people's democracy and unity in the country' (LP 2006, p 8).

No specific features distinguish the LP from the average middle-of-the-road political party. Although it identifies itself as socialist, its manifesto captures, at best, an aspiration to social democracy – in line with virtually all the parties in the country. The absence of a clear-cut ideological perspective can be gleaned from the party's view on the economy. While it desires an 'activist developmental role' for the state, with a view to making it 'a major player in the strategic sectors', it nevertheless seeks to 'engage [not oppose] the phenomena of globalization

and liberalization by adopting a cautious and step-to-step approach based on the country's national interest'.

The LP does not oppose privatisation. Rather, it seeks to avoid 'a doctrinaire approach to privatization without compromising a case-by-case privatization'. For the party 'public enterprise privatization needs to be undertaken side by side with establishment of adequate regulatory institutions that would safeguard consumer and employee interests and ensure that the big public enterprises also play the role of responsible corporate citizens' (LP 2006, pp 11-12). The party insists on 'providing basic social welfare services for the socio-economic benefits of the citizens' (LP 2006, p 13). It seeks to 'restore the credibility of the economy not by repeating the dogma of IMF and World Bank but ensuring ... consistent and creative policy measures aimed at genuine reform and transformation of the economy'. Thus, without any ideological purity to speak of, the LP remains essentially a middle-of-the-road formation, albeit one with 'a rich heritage of progressive and labour-based intervention in national politics' (LP 2006, p 3).

With the change in name came a change in the leadership of the party. Barrister Dan Nwanyanwu and Alhaji A A Salam, the personification of the well-educated and cosmopolitan wing of Nigeria's labour leadership, were given custody as national chairman and national secretary respectively. While neither was a prominent national figure by whom the party could be easily identified, they immediately set out to expand its membership base with a view to ensuring credible participation in the 2007 elections.

Unlike the situation at the national level, where the LP could not easily be identified with a leading politician, in Ondo State it made its mark through Dr Olusegun Mimiko, whose participation in politics dates back to 1980, when he joined the UPN soon after graduating from medical school. He was a leader in the Ondo State chapter of the SDP from 1989-1991 and emerged after the general election of 1991 as commissioner for health. Governor Bamidele Olumilua's government, under which he served, was terminated by General Sanni Abacha's military junta in November 1993.

As a foundation member of the AD in 1998 Mimiko returned to public office with the victory of the party in 1999, when he was again appointed to the Cabinet as health commissioner. In November 2002 a number of complex political developments, including what he called 'the limited opportunity for democratic expression' in the AD, made him dump the party for the PDP, where, having contributed substantially to the election of Dr Segun Agagu as governor and Obasanjo as president, he was appointed secretary to the state government in May 2003. By July 2005 Dr Mimiko was Federal Minister for Housing and Urban Development in Obasanjo's PDP government.

In spite of what looked like his steady rise in PDP structures it had become

obvious by the close of 2006 that the party would not serve Mimiko as a platform for the realisation of his ambition to be governor. Incumbent Governor Agagu had reneged on his promise during the campaign in 2003 to remain in office for only a single four-year term. And in consonance with the emergent complex interplay of political forces in the PDP at the national level Dr Agagu insisted on controlling the entire processes of the party in his own state, leaving no space for democratic participation in the choice of the party's flag-bearer for the 2007 elections. Meanwhile, Dr Mimiko's ambitions, which were well known within the party, had earned him official opprobrium and thinly veiled attacks from party apparatchiks and stalwarts already favoured in the governor's distribution of political patronage. By the middle of 2006 it had become obvious that a level playing field for the conduct of a credible primary election was not going to be available within the PDP either for Dr Mimiko or for any other opponent of the governor. Mimiko (2007) puts this in context.

At a point in the year 2003, it became obvious that the basis for democratic engagement no longer existed on the platform on which our State stood then.

The internal democratic mechanism for change within ... AD was abused and sabotaged. We reckoned then that there was no way new ideas for development would have flourished in such a restricted political space. We therefore decided, after the requisite consultations, that it was time to join hands with others to reposition our dear Ondo State if we as leaders must not continue to be limited in our vision and Ondo State hesitant in harnessing the developmental opportunities that beckoned at that historical juncture. That was the context in which we decided to lend our support to the incumbent Governor who was then the candidate of ... PDP.

Though the initial signal of primordial preferences were worrisome, we still thought that the Governor (Agagu) would manage to put Ondo State on a path of sustainable development, especially with the length of time spent on planning. By early 2005, however, it had actually become obvious that the State Government was on the way to making a colossal shipwreck of the vision that produced the electoral victory of April 2003. Unfortunately, the discreet but concerted efforts of men and women of goodwill to salvage what remained of the contract with the good people of Ondo State had not come to fruition before July 2005 when I had to leave office as SSG following my appointment by President Olusegun Obasanjo as the Federal Minister of Housing and Urban Development.

Significantly, this was not the first time Dr Mimiko had found himself in such a political quandary. As an aspirant council chairman in the Ondo local government in 1989, he could not persuade the party (SDP) leaders to support him. In the Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN) in 1998 he had to jettison his gubernatorial ambitions and run for the Senate when it became clear that the party was split down the middle over whom to field. Again, in November 2002, the AD's refusal to permit free primaries for the choice of candidates for elective positions, despite the provisions of the party's constitution, resulted in Mimiko's decision to quit the party. With the unfolding events in the state PDP, it was thus obvious by the middle of 2006 that Mimiko needed a fresh platform on which to present himself to the people of Ondo State if he was to avoid the problem of unfavourable intra-party configurations which made it impossible for him to contest elections even where his mass appeal outside was not in doubt. Contesting the primary election in the PDP only to move from the party after a possible loss of the election would have presented a moral burden for Mimiko. Such a course of action would have brought back memories of November 2002 when he had to withdraw from the Alliance for Democracy (AD) when its leadership decided to simply adopt the incumbent Governor, Adebayo Adefarati, to run for a second term rather than allow a primary election to produce the party's candidate.

The Action Congress (AC), which had emerged as the dominant opposition party with which Vice-President Atiku Abubakar was aligned, was not a viable option for Mimiko. By mid-2006 the party was already well known in most states. It had identifiable structures and the high profile attendant upon its being substantially promoted by a crusading vice-president and by Bola Tinubu of Lagos, arguably the most progressive and successful state governor in the country. While accommodation within the AC would have given Mimiko the advantage of a national platform of support, he felt very strongly that it would be morally indefensible for him to join a party regarded as the major opposition to Obasanjo immediately after withdrawing from the latter's Cabinet.

There was also the possibility that the intra-party crisis consequent upon Mimiko joining the AC might be strong enough to deny him the party's gubernatorial ticket or that if he won the process might be so acrimonious as to give the electorate the impression that neither candidate nor party was to be taken seriously. A struggle would be inevitable in the light of indications that Agagu had planted an acolyte of his, Ademola Adegoroye, an AC governorship aspirant, to stand against Mimiko in the event of the latter deciding to use the party as a platform for contesting the governorship. This fear was subsequently given credibility in June 2007 by Adegoroye's decision to endorse Agagu, albeit to the disgust of many of his party members. He was subsequently suspended from the party.

Finally, the AC could offer no advantage in terms of existing structure in Ondo State which might especially attract Mimiko.

The paradox for Mimiko was that it was precisely the fact that the LP did not exist in the state before 1 December 2006 and that therefore there would be limited interest in the governorship ticket which constituted its main advantage over the established political parties. For Mimiko the choice of a platform which promised relative internal tranquillity was compelling. The situation would reduce the possibility of dissipating energy and wasting funds on a recriminatory primary election and allow the focus to be on the general elections just a few months ahead. An added attraction was the LP's progressive, labour-oriented outlook, largely contingent upon its name and the possibility of its being positioned as a labour-friendly party in an essentially blue-collar (civil service) state like Ondo.

Mimiko's conviction and that of his close aides of his state-wide acceptability and their confidence that the people understand that it is the individual who gives effect to a party's policy made the choice of the LP compelling. By choosing a party which had not existed four months before an election in which he was a candidate, Mimiko, perhaps unwittingly, underscored the viability of independent candidacy, an arrangement that was not provided for in the 1999 Constitution.

His decision taken, Dr Mimiko formally presented the party to a cross-section of his political supporters at Ondo on 1 December 2006. Thirteen days later the party was unveiled at a rally in Akure. National Chairman Nwanyanwu formally presented Mimiko as the party's gubernatorial candidate for Ondo State.

It must be noted that Mimiko's pivotal role in the emergence and growth of the LP in Ondo State was in sync with theoretical expositions on party formation. For, as Perkins (2000) argues, 'the process of party formation is highly dependent on the structural and institutional context of the individual politicians ...' The suggestion that the LP was *merely* four months old before the elections of April 2007 was therefore contextually incorrect. For parties are themselves inanimate objects. It is the people who populate them who inject life and relevance into them. The appropriate way to determine the inherent strength of the LP, therefore, is to look at the entire 'structural and institutional context' of the individual who served as its key promoter rather than the date of its formal presentation to the public.

THE 'INSTANT NOODLES' EXPERIENCE ERECTING A PARTY STRUCTURE *IN* ELECTION

In the taxonomy of political parties four fairly distinct types have been identified – 'machine', 'cartel', 'mass' and 'cadre' parties. The major features that distinguish the party types are the source of their resources and the nature of their mobilisation.

The 'machine' and 'cartel' types both 'rely on State resources but differ in terms of the degree to which their organisation penetrates the electorate' (Perkins 2000). 'Mass' and 'cadre' parties 'do not rely on State resources and vary based on the manner in which they mobilize the electorate' (Perkins 2000). As Perkins (2000) further points out,

Both *machine* and *cartel* parties rely on State patronage for their success ... However, *cartel* and *machine* parties differ in terms of how deeply their organisations penetrate the electorate. Obviously, they also differ in the amount of State resources they require. *Cartel* parties are organisationally weak and rely on indirect contact with the people to win elections whereas *machine* party organisations are more developed and run mass-party type campaigns utilizing more face to face contact with the public.

Just as the *machine* and *cartel* party types are similar in that they both rely on State resources and differ in terms of the degree to which their organisation penetrates the electorate, *mass* and *cadre* parties are similar in that they do not rely on State resources and vary based on the manner in which they mobilize the electorate.

Whereas mobilisation by the 'mass' party type is direct, it tends to be indirect in the case of 'cadre' parties, as the typology below, from Perkins (2000), depicts:

		Mobilisation	
		Direct	Indirect
Derivation of Resources	State	Party Machine	Cartel Party
	Private	Mass Party	Cadre Party

The lack of access to state resources and absence of public patronage in the context of the massive and direct mobilisation strategy of the LP in Ondo State cast it squarely in the mould of a 'mass' party.

To all intents and purposes the LP quickly became a phenomenon in the state. But the instant and wide acceptability it enjoyed immediately it was unveiled was a function of a number of factors. Beyond Mimiko's reputation, integrity, and personal charm was the issue of the governance failure of the preceding four years, during which Governor Agagu presided over the affairs of the state. It was clear that poverty was growing, opportunity was shrinking, and frustration was setting in for an overwhelming majority of the people. That this was happening in the context in which there was a geometric rise in revenue accruing to the state on the one hand and stories of stupendous wealth going the way of the governor

and his immediate family and closest associates on the other, was widely decried across the state. The LP deliberately played up this mass disenchantment with Agagu when it came on board. As Mimiko noted,

just before the advent of democracy in 1999, Ondo State's total budget was ₦3.719 billion. For 2006, it was ₦43.5 billion, a growth of 1,170% over the 1999 figure. Our State has had more revenues at its disposal than at any other time in its history. In fact, in relative terms, the resources available to the current administration are perhaps more than all the revenues the State had from 1976 when it was created, to 2003, when the incumbent Governor assumed office. Sadly, the State has little or nothing to show for it.

The inability and/or refusal of the incumbent State Government to take advantage of this largely favourable macro-economic template has created a fundamental disconnect between the government and our people. It is in this overall context of palpable and pervasive failure of governance in the face of so much promise that we refer, for want of a better phrase, to Ondo State under the current dispensation, as an inexcusable failure. We consider it our responsibility, in the circumstances, to take the relationship between the government and the governed to a new level. For us, mutual trust between the government and the governed is a fundamental condition for good governance.

Olusegun Mimiko 2007

Significantly, Eddy Olafeso, Ondo State commissioner for information and orientation and Agagu's top aide, apparently inadvertently gave vent to this widely-held claim of governmental ineffectiveness when he declared five months after the 14 April 2007 election that 'Poverty is rampant [in Ondo State] and there is so much hardship that people are going through on daily basis' (Olafeso 2007, p 45).

In building the party the leadership of the LP also extensively used secondary organisations already in existence and whose operations were directly or indirectly supportive of Dr Mimiko's aspirations. Some others were organisational relics of his previous attempts to run for office, the most visible being the Forum for the Reinvention of Democracy in Nigeria (FORD Nigeria), the Brighter Days Network (BDN), and the Ondo Study Group (OSG). This is apart from other independent organisations like the Centre for Policy and Democratic Practice (CENPIP), which could not, like those cited above, be dissolved into the LP but which nevertheless provided effective collaboration with the party at either the

group or individual level. Again, this is in line with the character of mass parties, which tend always to benefit from what Huntington (1968, p 70) refers to as evidence of 'revolution from below'.

Party Structure

The immediate challenge faced by the LP at its formation was to put in place a management structure that would be viable enough to trounce the PDP, the party that had ruled the country for eight unbroken years and the state for four years. This challenge comes into bolder relief when seen against the backdrop of the fact that beyond a small and modest national executive council and the bedrock of labour sympathy on which it rode into town, the LP was virtually non-existent anywhere in the country and completely unknown in Ondo State before 1 December 2006.

A few days before the official launch of the LP on 14 December its key leaders across the state, something of a caucus of frontline leaders, met under the chairmanship of Mimiko at a private house in Akure, the capital of Ondo State, and agreed on what became the state executive council of the party. Dr Olaiya Oni and Hon Marshall Omotuyi, from the northern and southern senatorial zones of the state, emerged as chairman and secretary respectively. The other levels of leadership – local government and wards – were to be constituted in the weeks following the public presentation of the party.

The decision to appoint Dr Oni, a technocrat rather than a run-of-the-mill career politician, as the first state chairman of the LP provided an immediate platform of identification for thousands of civil servants in the state, who constitute the single-most articulate and influential segment of the population. In the context of the widely held view that the incumbent governor was a protagonist of retrenchment in the service a party chaired by a man who is not only fond of the service but is highly respected by the average civil servant (Oni 1991; Oni 1999, pp 118-127) gained considerable political capital. Whatever the party lost by not appointing a hardcore politician as its head, therefore, was more than adequately compensated for by the extensive goodwill among civil servants with which Oni came into office.

The LP added a distinctive feature to party organisation in Nigeria when it came up with the idea of mini-wards, that is, breaking down wards into smaller units for organisational purposes. This was a strategic response to the urgent need for massive mobilisation required of a brand-new party determined, a few weeks after its formation, to contest effectively a major election – the context from which the 'instant noodles' characterisation takes its meaning. The mini-ward initiative soon became a platform for grassroots mobilisation, affording

hundreds of members the opportunity for leadership roles in the evolving organisation. It also facilitated the penetration of the party into the nooks and crannies of most of the constituencies in the state.

The LP's platform, entitled 'A Caring Heart', was jointly developed by party chairman Dr Oni, its gubernatorial candidate, Dr Mimiko, and Femi Mimiko, head of the Research and ICT Committee of the Mimiko Campaign. It drew extensively on a similar platform developed for the Mimiko Campaign Organisation under the Alliance for Democracy (AD) party in 2002 and had input from a wide range of individuals and groups across and beyond the state, including a body of retired permanent secretaries, associated at different levels with the party, and at least one independent private consultant based in Lagos. 'A Caring Heart' is an acronym for:

- A - Agriculture and Food Security
- C - Community-driven city and coastal region renewal and general development initiatives
- A - Aggressive capitalisation of our land resource
- R - Roads and Infrastructure
- I - Industrialisation
- N - No-to-poverty programme
- G - Gender equality and women empowerment

- H - Health Care and Housing
- E - Education and Capacity Building
- A - Artisanship development and empowerment programme
- R - Rural Development
- T - Tourism, Sports and Youth Development

Presented by the gubernatorial candidate, Olusegun Mimiko (2007), at a press conference in Akure on 19 February 2007, 'A Caring Heart' became the manifesto of the LP's campaign for the April elections.

Candidate Selection Procedure

The next challenge the LP faced was to pick candidates for the different elective positions across the state. Much of this depended on the gubernatorial candidate's extensive knowledge of the political terrain. His opinion went a long way towards helping the LP to resolve conflicts over candidature across constituencies. One guiding principle imposed by the urgency of the situation was that the time was not auspicious for open primary elections, with all their recriminatory tendencies.

While the place of internal democracy within political parties cannot be overemphasised, suffice it to note that there is a high level of fluidity in attitude to it vis à vis candidate selection procedures across democracies. In countries like the United States, Germany, Finland and New Zealand political parties are, in the words of the New Zealand Electoral Act, expected 'to follow democratic procedures in candidate selection' (cited in Perkins 2000). This is absent from the British and Nigerian systems. Indeed, in the latter, it is the established procedure that a political party reserves the right to decide through what process its candidates for elective positions emerge. Even when a legally nominated candidate is to be substituted all the Electoral Act (Federal Government of Nigeria 2006, A36) requires of a party is that the basis of the submission must be 'credible and verifiable' (s 34(2)).

Time was of the essence and the desire to avoid the bickering that inevitably follows party primaries in Nigeria compelled the LP to go for *consensus* in the selection of its candidates. In all cases, the party was able to beat the INEC deadline for the submission of names of candidates and fielded candidates for all the positions being contested in Ondo State.

Similar factors informed the choice of the party's candidate for deputy governorship, Alhaji Ali Olanusi. Olanusi was the immediate past state chairman of the PDP, with whom Mimiko had built a solid political relationship soon after the latter joined the party in 2002. Olanusi's defection and that of the state secretary, Boluwaji Kunlere, were a masterstroke from which the PDP could not recover before the elections. A key factor in his selection as the candidate for deputy governor was, therefore, to strengthen the impression that the LP had succeeded in decapitating the PDP. Kunlere was later picked as the party's senatorial candidate in the very strategic southern senatorial zone, the immediate geographical constituency of Governor Agagu.

CAMPAIGN STRUCTURE AND FUNDING

A structure for the campaign was put in place under Hon Oye Alademehin, a serving PDP legislator in the State House of Assembly and an arrow head in the Mimiko group's movement out of the PDP in 2006. Its duty was the planning and overall management of the campaign. It reported to the Central Campaign Committee (CCC) headed by the gubernatorial candidate.

The bulk of the party and campaign funding was provided by the gubernatorial candidate, who deployed his extensive contacts across the country to raise funds. And while the LP's capacity to deploy funds was nowhere near that of the PDP the leaders of the LP created the impression that the party had sufficient to fund all its critical programmes. It is, however, difficult to determine how much

each of the political parties/candidates spent and to what extent each complied with the ceiling stipulated in the Electoral Act (s 93).

Appreciating the need for a catchy slogan and jingle for the campaign, LP leaders spent a considerable amount of time selecting one from a host of commissioned jingles. Emphasis was on a fast-paced, danceable and lyrically deep jingle, colourfully packaged for the purpose of audio-visual advertisements. It eventually chose a rendition by an undergraduate in a state university.

The LP chose as its slogan 'Room Enough For All!'. This was inspired by the biblical 'Rehoboth', suggesting that the party would provide something for every citizen in its social welfare programmes. This was in contradistinction to Governor Agagu, who, immediately after coming into office, enunciated the idea of a 'compact government', leaving out many of the party cadres who had worked for his election and creating the impression that government was serving only the interest of the elites and the governor's own family members.

ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

The Deputy Chairman of the LP, Kayode Iwakun, was responsible for outlining issues relating to election administration, among them disbursement of funds/fund administration, deployment of party agents to man units, coordination of security for polling stations, especially where there were credible threats to persons and election materials, and collation and monitoring of results. A total of 3 900 polling units across the state had to be covered.

The LP was also involved in communication on the day of the elections. It was envisaged that the federal government might compel global system of mobile communication (GSM) telephone service providers to shut down operations, ostensibly for security reasons, but actually to limit communication and make it easier for the PDP to succeed in vote rigging. It was thought that even where a shutdown was not ordered the chances of effective service provision were remote, given the inevitable overloading of facilities on election day. In an effort to counteract this, the LP leased 25 mobile phones, each loaded with \$100 worth of airtime. These were distributed to key leaders of the party with a view to ensuring unimpeded communication with the information and communication technology (ICT) centre on the one hand and among party leaders on the other. Significantly, the nature of the violence and insecurity abroad on election day made it impossible for most of these leaders to put the facility to use.

The ICT centre was designed as a results and information collation centre to which all the key agents, through the Thuraya-empowered leaders, were to relay results as they became available. Again, because of the general crisis that defined election day this agency could not achieve much as there was virtually no

communication with the centre from the field except to report the growing spate of violence against LP agents and supporters across the state.

CONCLUSION

THE LP AND THE CHALLENGE OF INSTITUTIONALISATION

The result of the gubernatorial election, as announced by INEC, gave victory to the incumbent governor over Dr Mimiko. Mimiko and the LP are contesting the result before the Election Petition Tribunal sitting in Akure. Whichever way the case goes it will throw up fresh issues for analysis. These can obviously not be addressed in a paper of this nature.

One thing that is clear, however, is that the emergence of the LP in Ondo State politics and the rapidity with which it attained dominance after just four months is unprecedented in the history of party formation in the country. More than anything else, this has validated the theoretical postulation that 'the process of party formation is highly dependent on the structural and institutional context of the individual politicians ...' (Perkins, 2000). It also demonstrates the political savvy of the citizenry of Ondo State, who chose to support an individual (Mimiko) in whom they had confidence despite the newness of his party rather than to pander to the proposition that alignment with an established party or 'the political mainstream' was to be preferred (See Yoruba Progressive Union 2007, p 23 for such an argument). The LP phenomenon is also perhaps a testimony to the effectiveness of the leaders of the party with relation to party formation and organisation and grassroots mobilisation. But while all of these were consequent upon the space provided for political engagement in the country, as represented by the new, freer party formation and administration process, the bungling of the 2007 elections and the wanton deployment of state power in support of the PDP by the Obasanjo government detracted from a deepening of the democratic process that should have been its natural accompaniment.

Apart from the governance challenge a possible victory in the gubernatorial election at the tribunal may confer on it, the LP will continue to face the challenge of institutionalisation in the foreseeable future. Party institutionalisation consists of three broad components: leadership, financing, and candidate nomination, and 'the more routinized and autonomous the procedures for recruiting, promoting and selecting party leaders, for collecting revenues and for nominating candidates to public office, the more institutionalized the party' (Malamud nd).

Because of all the above variables the LP, like most of the relatively new (post-1999) parties, is still at a very rudimentary stage, but the fact that it is set to take control of a key, politically conscious state in the sophisticated Yoruba heartland indicates that it has the potential to build the capacity to endure. The

critical questions that emerge are whether the party will be able to stand alone and extend beyond the frontiers of Ondo State or will be compelled to be absorbed into or align with some of the larger political parties. The prediction of the state chairman that the LP will come to dominate the entire south-west geopolitical zone of Nigeria by the 2011 elections is based on what he regards as the mass appeal of the party's programme and the commitment to good governance on the part of its leaders in Ondo State (Oni 2007) and points to the fact that the party leadership is already engaged in thinking about its future.

The optimism of the leadership must, however, be tempered by the fact that over the years the mushrooming of political parties in Nigeria has successfully undermined any institutionalisation agenda. For many countries the historical abnegation of the democratic system, via military coups, for instance, is not enough to undermine the structures and orientation, if not the names, of political parties, as the cases of the National League for Democracy in Myanmar, Partido Revolucionario Institucional in Mexico, the Union Civica Radical and the Movimiento Peronista or Partido Justicialista in Argentina, and the Pakistan Peoples Party have demonstrated. In Nigeria, however, the high turnover of political parties is underscored by the eagerness of politicians to start the party formation exercise all over again, and with very exotic names for the new parties, each time there is a form of reversal to the democratic system. How these issues will play out vis à vis the LP remains in the realm of conjecture.

— REFERENCE —

- Apter, A. 1987. 'Things Fall Apart: Yoruba Responses to the 1983 Elections in Ondo State, Nigeria'. *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 253, September.
- European Union Election Observation Mission. 2007. *Nigeria: Final Report: Gubernatorial and State Houses of Assembly Elections, 14 April 2007 and Presidential and National Assembly Elections, 21 April 2007*. Brussels: EU.
- Federal Government of Nigeria. 2006. *Electoral Act 2006*. Lagos: The Federal Government Printer.
- Gauja, A. 2006. 'Enforcing Democracy? Towards a Regulatory Regime for the Implementation of Intra-party Democracy'. *Democratic Audit of Australia, Discussion Paper 14/06*, April <www.democratic.audit.anu.edu.au>.
- Huntington, S.P. 1968. *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Kolawole, D. 1988. 'Violence in Nigeria: A Case Study of Ondo State'. In V Ayeni & K Soremkun (eds). *Nigeria's Second Republic: Presidentialism, Politics and Administration in a Developing State, Nigeria*. Lagos: Daily Times Publications.
- Labour Party. 2006. *A Manifesto*. Abuja: Labour Party Secretariat.

- Malamud, A. nd. 'Winning Elections versus Governing: A Two-Tier Approach to Party Adaptation in Argentina, 1983-2003' <www.cies.iscte.pt>.
- Mimiko, N O. 1995. 'Reasons for the Creation of Ondo State'. In A Popoola, Z A Ogundare, K Oni & S O Adelae (eds). *Ondo State in Perspective*. Akure: Ondo State Government Press.
- . 1999. 'Instability and Crisis in the Nigerian Economy: A Survey of Cardinal Economic Policies Since 1960'. In G Ajayi (ed). *Critical Perspectives on Nigeria's Socio-political Development in the 20th Century*. Lagos: Stebak Books.
- . 2004a. 'The Limits of External Support in Transition Dynamics: A Revisit of the Abdulsalaami Abubakar Transition Programme in Nigeria'. In S Agagu & R FOla (eds). *Public Administration and Development in the Nigerian State*. Ibadan: FIAG Nigeria Publishers.
- . 2004b. 'Can Economic Reform Survive on the Crutches of Political Centralism? Critical Notes on the Political Imperative of Economic Deregulation in Nigeria: Comparative Insights from China'. Proceedings of the 3rd Hawaii International Conference on Social Sciences, June, <www.hicsocial.org>.
- . 2006a. 'Census in Nigeria: The Politics and the Imperative of De-politicization'. *African Asian Studies* 51. Netherlands.
- . 2006b. 'Regional Ethnic Diffusion, State Authoritarianism and the Crisis of Post-Colonial Reconstruction in Côte d'Ivoire'. *Journal of Third World Studies* XXIII (2), Fall.
- Mimiko, O. 2007. *A Caring Heart: Advancing the Frontiers of Governance in Ondo State*. Akure: Labour Party Secretariat, February 19.
- Obi, B. 2007. *The Nation; Punch*. Lagos, 23 August.
- Olafeso, E. 2007. 'In Ondo, governance is not business as usual'. *The Nation*, Lagos, 16 September.
- Oni, O. 1991. *Confidential*. Ibadan: Spectrum.
- . 1999. 'Ethics, Professionalism and Welfare in the Civil Service'. In N O Mimiko, A Adewole & M A Popoola (eds). *Democracy and Public Administration in Nigeria*. Akure: ABM Research and Services for Ondo State Committee on Training and Reorientation.
- . 2007. *Daily Sun*, Lagos, 31 July.
- Panebianco, A. 1988. *Political Parties: Organization and Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Perkins, D. 2000. 'When is Political Corruption Good for Democracy?: A Comparative Analysis of Political Machines'. Delivered at the 2000 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Marriott Wardman Park, 31 August-3 September.
- Sklar, R L. 2004. *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation*. Trenton, NJ & Asmara, Ethiopia: Africa World Press Inc.
- Yoruba Progressive Union. 2007. 'Why the Yoruba must stick with the PDP'. *Nigerian Tribune*, Ibadan, 5 March.