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# Between Nation-Building and Contestation for Power: The Place of Party Politics in Nigeria, 1923–2019

**Abstract:** By May 29, 2019, Nigeria's Fourth Republic and democracy had achieved an unprecedented 20 unbroken years of active partisan politics and representative democracy. The First Republic had lasted barely three years (1963–1966); the Second Republic and its democratic institutions lasted just four years (1979–1983) while the Third Republic (1992–1993) could barely hold its head for one year. Hence, by mid-2019, not many analysts have congratulated Nigeria for its longest democratic experience since its independence from Britain in 1960, but hardly did any of them identify the core reasons for such a sustained rule of democratic ethos for two decades. In this paper, we show the origin and practice of political parties in Nigeria. We argue that the country had succeeded in its Fourth Republic as a democratic country because its law and constitution together with the political culture of the people had permitted multiparty democracy by which governments had been formed, political inclusion and popular participation ensured, and public policies initiated. We also present an analysis of party politicking in the country from its beginning in 1923 and conclude that Nigeria has achieved meaningful and sustainable dividends of democracy in her Fourth Republic because of a maturing culture of partisan politics.

**Keywords:** *nation, nation-building, power, party politics, Nigeria*

## Introduction

Nigeria has a very long history of party politicking. As far back as 1923 and under the elective principle enshrined in the Hugh Clifford's Constitution of 1922, the political and social elite of the Metropolises of Lagos in the West and Calabar in the East had begun to organize themselves into parties to win the four elective seats provided for in the constitution (Adigwe, 1975, p. 545). Political parties and the systems by which they are run have, since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, formed an integral part of liberal democratic societies. They are, actually, associations of citizens who desire to gain political power by freely entering into an agree-

ment among themselves based on the ethics and principles of representative government and civil rights. That explains why the famous 18<sup>th</sup> century British historian and political thinker, Edmund Burke, defined a political party as:

A body of men, united for promoting by their joint endeavors, the national interest upon some particular principles in which they are all agreed (Hill, 1975, p. 156).

In other words, to Burke and as it has continued to be shown in modern democratic societies, the distinguishing features by which political parties may be identified and distinguished from other social groupings remain that they are free associations of legal majors with identical philosophy, founded on the promotion of their common interests and to gain political power. Appadorai insists these features make political parties different from pressure groups within a geo-polity (Appadorai, 1942). Whereas pressure groups only seek to influence government decisions in favor of their members, political parties aim to gain political power with which to form governments and direct the affairs of the state in a predetermined course of motion. But parties are not often made of the same stuff. They defer in structures and systems depending on the historical experiences of states that practice them.

## Typologies and Systems of Political Parties

Political parties may come in different forms, and they operate under different systems. The forms of political parties define their “typologies” while the ways or processes of their operations show their “systems”. Hence, to Duverger, there are four types of political parties, namely: (i) Mass Party (ii) Elite Party (iii) Ideological Party and, (iv) Militia Party (Duverger, 1954, p. 62). These typologies are distinguishable from the systems by which they are run. It explains why Ostrogorski and Sartori, in their separate studies, identified four systems of parties, namely: (i) One Party System (ii) Two-Party System (iii) Multi-Party System and, (iv) Zero-Party System (Ostrogorski, 1902; Sertori, 1976).

However, a party is described as ‘mass’ if it recruits its members from all classes of people but mostly from the ordinary folks in a country. Such a party type, Duverger contends, does not discriminate in its membership recruitment drive as it welcomes all into its fold without regard to religious, income, wealth, gender or race permutations. The Convention People’s Party (CPP), formed by the erstwhile Ghanaian leader, Kwame Nkrumah in 1948, was a classic example of a mass party. The same was true of Nigeria’s Action Group (AG) and Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), formed respectively in 1951 by Chief Obafemi Awolowo and in 1979 by Mallam Aminu Kano.

An elite party is unlike a mass party. It discriminates in its membership recruitment, preferring to enlist only the powerful and influential members of the society as its card-carrying members rather than the ordinary folks. The Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) of Nigeria’s First Republic, which was formed in December 1949 under Alhaji Ahmadu

Bello's leadership, was a good example (Ige, 1995). Other veritable examples of elite parties in West Africa are the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) and the National Council of British West Africa (NCBWA) which were formed in the former Gold Coast (now Ghana). The NCBWA was formed and led by the very influential Gold Coast Lawyer, Casely Hayford in 1917, while the UGCC was formed and led by another Gold Coast Lawyer, Dr. J. B. Danquah in 1947 (Adigwe, 1975). They were both elite parties made up of professionals, very conservative and restrictive in their membership drives. However, the irony of elite parties is that, during elections, they call on the ordinary citizens who are not allowed to be members to vote for them. It was very true of Nigeria's NPC, though its membership limited to the *crème de la crème* in Northern Nigeria relied on an army of northern 'talakawa' (ordinary citizens) for votes and support. It always got them in most parts of the North, whipping up sentiments of religious, geographic, cultural and social differences of the North from the South. That party gained political power and formed the first post-independence government under Sir Tafawa Balewa in Nigeria's First Republic (1963–1966) (Awolowo, 1987, pp. 131–137; Adigwe, 1975, p. 213; Coleman, 1958, p. 376).

There is the third type of party, the Ideological party. This type of party has not been very common in Nigeria. Although, to some extent, the socialist orientation of Mallam Aminu Kano's Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) and Dr. Tunji Braithwaite's Nigeria Advance Party (NAP) during the Second Republic may permit one to classify them as ideological parties, because they too called on and secured membership from all strata of the Nigerian society not necessarily on ideological grounds makes such a classification rather hazardous. Nevertheless, ideological parties are those based essentially on a resolve to radically change the *status quo ante* in a polity in the manner dictated by their ideologies. Most of the time, such ideologies are socialist-Marxist driven, while some may be based on religious ethos. Examples of ideological parties are the: Communist Party of China, Socialist Party under Fidel Castro's Cuba, the Libyan *Jamahiriyah* (Peoples) Party under the erstwhile leader, Muhamah Gaddafi, and so forth. The former Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) of Algeria and the Islamic Brotherhood of erstwhile Egyptian President, Morsi, also qualify as ideological parties

Finally, there is the Militia Party. A party is described as "militia" if, rather than the conventional practice by which parties seek to gain political power through the ballot, it seeks to achieve the same through the bullet. Militia parties believe in and use violence to gain power. They usually use counter-revolutionary insurgency methods and they operate on the foundations of terrorism, blackmail and sabotage. A classic example of a militia party is the *Shein Fein* of the United Kingdom with its military wing called the "Irish Republican Army". The *Shein Fein* uses violence in its agitation to excise Northern Ireland from Great Britain or, in the alternative, force London to grant it legislative and local autonomy over the affairs of the majority Catholic region of Northern Ireland as separate and different from the parliament in England. It has achieved the latter objective, for, Northern Ireland now has its separate parliament, which enjoys wide latitude over legislative matters in its affairs

as different from the deeply protestant parts of the United Kingdom – England, Scotland and Wales.

However, the systems by which parties function in a polity can be distinguished from their typologies. Party systems refer to the number of parties legally or conventionally permitted to exist in a state (Ostrogorski, 1902). That is, the political and legal framework, within which parties may canvass for votes and outside of which they cannot. Hence, a one-party system speaks of a polity in which the number of political parties permitted to operate is only one. No other party, howsoever altruistic is permitted to canvass for votes in such a polity. The communist and socialist parties of China and Cuba, respectively, are good examples.

The second form of the party system is the two-party system. Between 1991 and 1993, Nigeria showed the world how to put into practice, a two-party system. The parties that were legally permitted to operate during these three years of Nigeria's history were the social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC) (Nwosu, 2008). These parties canvassed for and won votes from the local to national levels of political leadership. Their candidates represented Nigerian electorates in those years except at the presidency until they were dissolved and outlawed in November, 1993, by the Military Government of General Sani Abacha.

However, multiparty systems have been shown to be more common in modern democracies than either the one or two-party systems. It is because they do not only provide a wider spectrum of choices between political alternatives; they also widen popular participation and the democratic space. Hague and Harrop maintain that multi-partyism is key to the building of liberal democratic societies and as such, akin to the very essence of democracy (Hague, 2007). Nigeria's First and Second Republics were examples of periods in the country's history when multi-partyism was operated. In the Second Republic for instance, six political parties were registered and allowed to canvass for votes. They were the: (i) National Party of Nigeria (NPN) (ii) Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), (iii) Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) (iv) Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP), (v) Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) and, (vi) the Nigeria Advance Party (NAP) (Ige, 1995). No less than fifty parties in the Current Fourth Republic (an unprecedented number in Nigeria's history) are registered (INEC, 1998).

Note, however, that initially, in 1998, when the Military Government of General A. A. Abubakar removed the ban on party politics, only three (3) political parties were permitted to exist and were registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) i.e. the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), All Peoples Party (APP) and Alliance for Democracy (AD). But this decision limiting the number of parties to three was challenged in the courts from 2000–2002 by the Lagos Lawyer, Chief Gani Fawehinmi, who won the suit and had the court pronounce that the refusal to register more political parties by INEC was unconstitutional as it infringed on the constitutional right to freedom of association. Since then, INEC has had cause to register as many as fifty or more political parties in Nigeria. But the most visible and electorally relevant are the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). All

Progressives Congress (APC), All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), Labor Party (LP) and the ACCORD party.

Yet, there is a fourth system of political party formation and operation called the Zero-Party System (Hague, 2007, pp. 233–234). A country operates a zero-party system if politicians seek elective seats on their cognition and merit instead of doing so on a political party's platform. They do not seek to gain power on any party's pedestal, but they appeal for votes directly. Such a party politicking system was used in Nigeria in 1989 when the Federal Military Governments under president Ibrahim Babangida conducted local government elections into the then existing 449 local councils in Nigeria without using any political party's platform. Uganda too, under President Yoweri Museveni, runs a zero-party system.

The significance of party politics cannot be under-emphasized in the development of democratic societies. It is because and as verifiable evidence has shown, modern democracies can hardly be successfully run without it (Bertolini & Mair, 2001, pp. 327–344). The case of Nigeria from 1922 up to 2014 and especially in the periods within this epoch during which the military permitted partisan politics to hold, has shown that political parties have been relevant in building blocks of national consensus, solidarity and integration for peace and orderly government. Since 1959, the diverse peoples inhabiting what is today called the south-south political zone of the country have always sought for built political alliances and solidarity accommodating the peoples and leaders of Northern Nigeria to gain for themselves prominent positions in Nigeria's political landscape. Those political alliances such as the ones between the NPC and the NDC in 1959 and 1979 have helped convert the demographic disadvantage of the minorities of the south-south into partners of majority players in Nigeria's politics. This master-stroke of political calculation which has worked to the eternal advantage of the south-south, has led to their gaining a vital political advantage over their more numerous and politically more compact southern neighbors as the Igbo and the Yoruba with whom they have hardly gone into any meaningful alliances since 1959.

Today, due to its long association with the north, the south-south region has schemed to produce at different three times, people who have occupied Nigeria's second-highest political leadership from 1986 to 2010. That is: (i) Admiral Augustus Aikhomu, who was Vice-President to General Ibrahim Babangida (1989–1993), (ii) Vice-Admiral Mike Akhigbe, who was next in command to the then Head of State, General Sani Abacha (1996–1998) and (iii) Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, who was Vice-President to Alhaji Umar Yar'Adua (2007–2010). From March 2010 – May 2015, the highest political leader in the country, President Goodluck Jonathan, an advantage that would have been impossible but for its long political collaboration with the north. Such a cross-country system of political solidarity has been useful in preventing a break-up of the Nigerian federation and the maintenance of its geographic integrity.

Thus, it can be validly posited that political parties perform various functions that make them better placed than individuals in giving vent to the democratic ideals of political par-

ticipation, mass mobilization and popular sovereignty. Nigerian political parties, since 1923 have performed such vital roles as political mobilization of the citizenry, interest aggregation and articulation and have given vent to various shades of opinions howsoever minute in the overall objective of building a strong polity of liberty and egalitarianism (Mair, Muller & Plasser, 2004). Therefore, our next discussion shifts to an examination of the historical development of party politics in Nigeria from the colonial period until the present.

## **PARTY POLITICKING IN NIGERIA, 1923–2012**

### ***The Colonial Period, 1923–1960***

We have shown earlier in the introductory paragraphs that party politics began in Nigeria due to the provision for an elective principle in the 1922 Hugh Clifford's Constitution. The party that resulted from an attempt to consummate the elective principle in that constitution was the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP). The party was formed on June 24, 1923 and led by Herbert Macaulay, in Lagos (Coleman, 1958, pp. 196–197). It dominated the political landscape of Nigeria but particularly of Lagos from 1923 to 1938. It always won all the three elective seats allotted to Lagos in the Nigerian Legislative Council until another party, dominated by a more youthful and fairly more radical group of Nigerian elites, the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), was formed.

The NYM was formed in 1938. Its foremost founders and influential leaders were: Dr. Kofo Abayomi, Ernest Ikoli, H.O Davies, J.C. Vaughan and Samuel Akinsanya (Coleman, 1958, pp. 216–217). The party had branches all over Nigeria but its followership which was nonetheless 'mass' in orientation was restricted to major urban centers. The party seized control of Nigeria's political space from the NNDP and won all the Legislative Council seats from 1938 to 1944. But internal crises caused by ethnic and particularistic tendencies amongst the followers of two of its foremost leaders – Samuel Akinsanya and Ernest Ikoli – destroyed the party. Its cohesion could no longer be upheld by 1944. Loyalists of Nnamdi Azikiwe, who were mostly of Igbo ethnic nationality, left the NYM over a disagreement on who should lead the party (Coleman, 1958, p. 227). But regardless of the internal dissension which destroyed it, the NYM's contribution to the evolution of modern Nigeria was massive. It welded together into a formidable force of social organization and solidarity, disparate elements for progressive change all over Nigeria.

However, on August 26, 1944, a party known as the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons was formed. It was, by all known standards, the biggest mass political party that was ever formed in colonial Nigeria up to 1950 (Coleman, 1958, p. 225; Ige, 1995, pp. 137–174). It was bigger than the NYM and more pan-Nigerian, drawing its members from urban dwellers in the Northern and the Southern Protectorates. Its chief movers were the legendary Herbert Macaulay and Nnamdi Azikiwe. The party's main mouth-piece was the two Lagos-based newspapers owned by Azikiwe – the *Comet* and the *West African Pilot*.

The party won all the elective seats into the Legislative Council until the Action Group party began to seize such leadership from it from the early 1950s. Its main achievement was its mobilization of support throughout the country against the 1946 Arthur Richard's Constitution, forcing the Nigerian colonial authorities to call for an all-party constitutional conference in Ibadan in 1950.

The overall result of the political activities of the NCNC in the 1940s was that greater numbers of Nigerians were elected into the Nigerian House of Representatives and the government thenceforth ensured that Nigerian leaders were consulted on all constitutional amendment matters before they were legitimated. Governors Bourdillon and Richards (1931–47) had, before World War II, carried on as if Nigerians and their leaders never mattered. But within just six years of the NCNC's establishment, Nigeria's political landscape changed for the better, bringing into the political space more political parties with increasingly radical programmes for the country's decolonization.

For instance, in December 1949, the Northern People's Congress (NPC) was formed. It was led by Sir Ahmadu Bello (Olusanya, 1980, p. 568). In 1951, another party, the Action Group, was launched at Owo, in Western Nigeria (Olusanya, 1980, p. 566). Both the NPC and the AG made no pretensions of their ethnic/regional agenda and, as such, appealed for support principally from the Northern and Western Regions, respectively. It was no surprise that they did. The NPC, which motto was "one north, one people" rather than "one Nigeria, one people", had only emerged from a northern regional cum-cultural organization called the "*Jama'a Mutanen Arewa*" (assembly of northern peoples) (Dudley, 1968). The Action Group was a product of Yoruba ethnic and cultural association called the "*Egbe Omo Oduduwa*" (Oduduwa Descendants Association). Hence, at the onset of the decolonization period, which began in 1953, Nigeria's political space was occupied by three main parties – the NCNC, NPC and the AG. These were the parties that 'mid-wifed', principally, the transfer of power from colonial rule to indigenous leadership at independence in October 1960. The same political parties were at the center of Nigeria's political development until the dissolution of Nigeria's First Republic on January 15, 1966.

### ***Competing Political Alliances in the First Republic***

The history of party politics in Nigeria will be grossly deficient if it does not include that of the utterly rancorous and almost violent and antagonistic groups of alliances among big and marginal or 'minority' parties in Nigeria before 1966. The big parties were the NPC, which held sway in the Northern Region, the NCNC which, after the Lagos Constitutional Conference had begun to be limited to the Eastern Region and, the AG, which was unmistakable, a Western Region dominated party, membered by the mostly by Yoruba ethnic group although with noticeable presence in the Middle Belt Area and in the Mid-western part (after 1963) where it was in the opposition. But there were other minor parties formed either as break-away groups from the major parties or as political

platforms for venting the opinions of some minority ethnic nationalities or even some urban particularistic interests. The nine most prominent of such marginal parties were the: (i) Ibadan Peoples Party (IPP) which later changed its name to Mabolaje/NCNC Grand Alliance, (ii) Zamfara Commoners Party (ZCP) (iii) Kano Peoples Party (KPP) (iv) Igala Union (IU), Igbira Tribal Union (ITU) (v) Lagos State United Front (LSUF) (vi) United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), (vii) Niger Delta Congress (NDC) and (viii) the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU).

The Ibadan People's Party was formed and led by the maverick Ibadan politician and elite, Alhaji Adegoke Adelabu, who was in fierce opposition to Chief Obafemi Awolowo and was committed to Ibadan cause in all intents and purposes. He was a local potentate and secretary of the *Egbe Omo Ibile* Ibadan (Association of Ibadan Indigenes). The party, which was formed in 1951 and as the name suggests was limited to Ibadan city (which was the capital of Western Nigeria) and its environs. Although Adelabu himself was an educated elite of significant financial means, he was a street politician and mass mobilizer of no mean order. His IPP can be described, judging by its cause, formation, membership and methodology, as a Mass Party. The party contested the Regional elections held in 1951 and succeeded to the chagrin of the AG and its followers in getting all its six (6) nominees elected into the Regional House of Assembly. These were: Adegoke Adelabu himself, Meredith Adisa Akinloye (who, in the Second Republic became the Chairman of the NPN), Chief S. O. Lanlehin, Chief S. A. Akinyemi, and Chief Tayo Akinbiyi (who later became the Olubadan of Ibadan). Adegoke Adelabu died in an automobile accident along Ibadan-Lagos Road in Ode Remo, on March 25, 1958.

The UMBC was formed in June 1955 as an opposition political party to the NPC in Northern Nigeria. Its prominent leaders were: Pastor Lot, Mr. Rwang Pam and Joseph Tarka, all from the Benue-Plateau district of Northern Nigeria (Ige, 1995, p. 114). The party's main objective was to counteract what its members perceived as the domination of the northern minority groups by the majority Hausa-Fulani ethnic nationality which dominated the NPC. Since politics is, in the golden words of Harold Lasswell, all about "who gets what, when and how?" (Lasswell, 1951). The UMBC began to strategize for a better deal for the middle belt people by collaborating with the major southern parties to negotiate a sizeable degree of representation for the northern minority in Nigeria's political equation.

NEPU, on its part, was formed on August 8, 1950, much earlier than the UMBC. Its member were core Hausa-Fulani of the North but they diverged from the NPC on the grounds of their advertised perception that the latter was too conservative and its political objective too elitist to accommodate the genuine interests and concerns of the 'talakawa' (common man). The leader of the party was the socialist-inclined Mallam Aminu Kano, a distinguished Nigerian nationalist. Aminu Kano advocated in Nigeria's First Republic just as he did in the Second Republic, what he called "people's revolution" (Oniororo, 1979, pp. 98–118). To him, it was necessary to install in Nigeria what he called "democratic humanism", by which he meant in practice, welfarism (Oniororo, 1979, p. 101).

In Northern Nigeria, before independence, there were marginal parties too, unlike the very wrong conception that only the NPC existed in that part of the country. In fact, there were the Igala Union (IU) and the Igbira Tribal Union (ITU). These two marginal/minority parties were formed by the two minority groups in the Middle Belt Region of Nigeria – the Igala and the Igbira. They, incidentally, are constituents of Nigeria's Kogi State. However, the IU and the ITU went into an alliance with the NPC in the 1959 General Elections into the House of Representatives against the AG, which was the opposition party in the then Northern Nigeria. The two parties, individually, secured one (1) seat apiece in the House of Representatives, while their NPC counterpart got 134 seats in the 312-member House. In other words, the NPC/IU/ITU Alliance got for the group, a total of 148 seats in the Nigerian House of Representatives during the 1959 Elections (INEC, 2014).

There was also a minority party in what we may today in Nigeria's political description call the "South-South". That party was the Niger Delta Congress (NDC). The party was formed in response to the 1957 and 1958 constitutional conferences' failure to allay the fears of domination by Igbo of non-Igbo ethnic nationalities in the Eastern Region. The minority groups in that area had demanded a separate Regional Government of their own. The NDC was led by Chief Dappa Biriye, a man of Ijo (Ijaw) ethnic nationality. They advocated forming what they called Rivers or 'COR' state to include nationalities such as the Ijo, Ibibio, Efik, Anang, Ogoni, etc., who were almost as populous when taken together as their more homogenous and allegedly dominant Igbo neighbors in the Eastern Region.

Thus, between 1963 and 1964, critical alliances were formed by the major and minor political parties for various self-interest purposes. But the greatest purpose was the 1964 general election. Hence, the NPC went into alliance with a renegade political party in the West called the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), formed by a splinter AG group led by the Western Region's premier, Chief S.L. Akintola. The Alliance was called the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA). Chief Akintola had disagreed with the leader of his party, AG, Chief Awolowo, who was the opposition leader at the center (Ige, 1995, p. 195). The disagreement was on the methodology with which to approach the relationship with the federal government then under the NPC's control. Chief Awolowo had favored a confrontational methodology while his deputy, Chief Akintola preferred constructive engagement based on the numerical superiority of the Northern Region and the need to make the Yoruba have their own share of the national largesse. The NCNC also had earlier gone into alliance with the NPC to form the first post-independence government of Nigeria, but had left the alliance over disagreements with the NPC in respect of the 1963 census. Other parties within the NNA fold were marginal parties such as the Republican Party (RP), Dynamic Party (DP), Midwest Democratic Front (MDF) and the Lagos State United Front (LSUF).

Another party alliance was the one struck between the AG, NCNC, NEPU and the UMBC. This latter alliance was called UPGA, that is, the United Progressive Grand Alliance. Thus, two antagonistic alliances – NNA and UPGA were at the center of all political activities in Nigeria from 1963 up to January 1966. With the benefit of hindsight today, the antagonistic

alliances can be blamed for the political problems that befell Nigeria in the 1960s. These problems arose from the: (i) Action Group crisis of 1963, (ii) census crisis of 1962/63, (iii) federal election violence of 1964 and, (iv) the Western Region election violence and the killings of 1965 in the Region. A discussion of the effects of some of these crises shall be done in the next section of this paper. But it is sufficient to show that the NNA won the majority of seats in parliament and formed the Government in 1964 while the UPGA was defeated and its leaders became opposition leaders in parliament. However, all the parties were outlawed on January 16, 1966 after a military *coup d'état* launched a day earlier took over the reins of power in Nigeria. Party politics did not resume in Nigeria until September 21, 1978 the date that ushered in the birth of the political processes leading to the Second Republic's proclamation on October 1, 1979 (Daily Times, 1978, pp. 1–3).

### **Party Politics in Nigeria's Second Republic, 1979–1983**

Between August and November of 1978, party politicking in Nigeria started again after thirteen years of the ban on it by the military governments that ruled Nigeria from 1966–1978. General Obasanjo's military government lifted the ban on party politics on September 21, 1978 (Ige, 1995, p. 400). But the first party to be publicly announced was the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) (Ige, 1995, p. 400). It was in August 1978. The party's core founders were those who had led the erstwhile NNA in the first Republic together with their loyalists and sympathizers. The party's chairman was Chief Meredith Adisa Akinloye, while the prudential candidate was Alhaji Shehu Shagari. Alhaji Shagari was the person who had taken over from Chief Obafemi Awolowo as Nigeria's Finance Minister when the latter resigned from the military government of General Yakubu Gowon in 1970. The second publicly announced party was the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), a party formed by Chief Awolowo on September 22, 1978 (Ige, 1995, p. 400). Chief Awolowo was both the party's chairman and presidential candidate. His vice-presidential candidate was Mr. Phillip Umeadi. Still, in October 1978, two other parties were founded, namely, the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) and the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) (Ige, 1995, p. 400). Chief Adeniran Ogunsanya was elected chairman of NPP while Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe was chosen as its presidential candidate. Apart from few middle-belt members such as Solomon Lar and Paul Unongo and a negligible number of supporters in the south-west especially from Ikorodu town, the NPP was predominantly an Igbo party. It is noteworthy that most of the NPP leaders were also those of the former NCNC, while those who led the First Republic's NEPU were the principal founders of the PRP. The PRP was led by the socialist, Malam Aminu Kano.

However, in 1983, another (the sixth) political party was founded and registered by the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO). The party, the Nigeria Advance Party (NAP), was led by the Lagos Lawyer, Dr. Tunji Braithwaite. In other words, the total number of parties in Nigeria's Second Republic was six. A multiparty system was allowed by the then extant 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Electoral Decree (Act) of 1979.

But the NPN formed the government in the two general elections held in 1979 and 1983. Although the party did not win an absolute majority of seats in the National Assembly in 1979, it won a simple majority of votes and seats in the National Assembly to give it an edge over each of the other parties (Falola & Ihonvebere, 1985, p. 71; Daily Times, 1979, pp. 1–3; Africa elections, 2015). Thus, it quickly went into an alliance with the NPP to stabilize its government. However, in the 1983 elections, the NPN won an absolute majority of seats and, as such, did not need any alliance with the NPP anymore.

Still, before the 1983 elections, the UPN, NPN and the GNPP formed an alliance called the Progressive People Alliance (PPA). The Alliance produced a tentative political group called the Progressive Peoples' Party (PPP). But the failure of its sponsors especially Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe to reach an agreement on who should lead the alliance in a presidential election made the group die out without achieving its advertised objective of uniting the opposition against the NPN-controlled Federal Government. Therefore, the Alliance failed to stop the NPN from winning an absolute majority of seats in the National Assembly and two-thirds of the governments of the then 19 States of Nigeria. The States controlled by the NPN after the 1983 General Elections increased from the previous 7 to 12. They were: Anambra, Bauchi, Bendel, Benue, Borno, Cross River, Gongola, Kaduna, Niger, Oyo Rivers and Sokoto. However, the UPN which lost Bendel and Oyo States got Kwara and thus had four States in its control – Ondo Ogun, Lagos and Kwara. The NPP lost Anambra but was able to retain Plateau and Imo States still. GNPP lost its two former States of Borno and Gongola while PRP retained only Kano, having lost its former State of Kaduna to the NPN (Daily Times, 1983, p. 17). Although the 1983 Presidential election results were disputed and challenged, the courts nonetheless, upheld the victory of the NPN.

### **Party Politics in Nigeria's Third Republic, 1990–1993**

It is debatable whether the period 1991–1993 can, in all historical truth, be referred to as the period of “Nigeria's Third Republic”. It is because, the 1989 constitution which was drafted for it and intended to proclaim the ‘Republic’ and grant it the force of law to come into existence was, in the strictest sense of it, not proclaimed as Nigeria's *grand norm* by the Military Government of General Ibrahim Babangida which drafted it. At best, what actually happened in Nigeria from 1991–1993 politically, can be described as a diarchic arrangement in which the military government of General Babangida permitted within its rule, the simultaneous existence of civilian rule at the local and state levels while still retaining a military government at the center which operated not based on the 1989 Draft Constitution but upon Decrees made by the highest legislative body of the government – The Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC). The same military government went as far as permitting the summoning of a civilian national legislature – the National Assembly – but with the proviso that Decrees and not the constitution should guide its activities. It was, indeed, a queer arrangement.

However, political parties were permitted to operate freely at both the local and national levels. At the time, the military government registered only two political parties, making it a very novel case in African politics. Nigeria had only two parties: the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC) (Nwosu, 2008). It was an experiment that was novel in Africa because the practice of permitting only two registered parties while outlawing any other had not been seen in any part of the continent before that time. It was an unprecedented political development in Nigeria. The normal process of a two-party system is when two parties evolve through their domination of political space. This process is perfectly exemplified in the US where the dominance of the Republican and Democratic parties is not a matter of a legal enactment but a reality that has evolved from a very long and tortuous process of political participation and differentiation which has made most political alliances and interests in the US to be distinguishable and classifiable into Republican and Democratic persuasions.

The U.S. is, therefore, not a two-party state but a multi-party state by law and convention. It only has Two Dominant parties because there are several other parties in the US such as the Communist Party! The electoral law and the constitution of the country also permit “Independents” who have not subscribed to any political party’s platform to contest elections. But in Nigeria of the so-called ‘Third Republic’, the military decreed into existence, two parties only. The same government also provided funds for the parties’ operations, built their offices, wrote their constitutions and called upon Nigerians to join either of them. Therefore, in strict political cum-legal parlance, the parties were not the “people’s party”, but mere government parastatals to which those interested in political power after military rule did either join or accepted to be excluded. Yet, Nigerians joined the parties in their millions.

The National Republican Convention had the core of its supporters in the States of the North-west and the North-east as well as in the South-east while the Social Democratic Party enjoyed wide-spread support in the North-central, South-west and South-south group of States (Nwosu, 2008, p. 44). However, during the presidential elections of June 12, 1993, the presidential candidate of the SDP, according to available records, won most of the valid votes cast and was about to be declared the winner of the presidential election when the military President, General Babangida, annulled the election results (Nwosu, 2008). Nigerians protested the annulment most profusely but to no avail.

The massive protests against the annulment of the presidential election of June 12, 1993 created so much political tension and impasse in the country that General Babangida was forced to leave power on August 26 of that year. Another diarchical and interim government was constituted under the leadership of Chief Ernest Shonekan. That government did not last long for, it was overthrown, barely three months after General Babangida hurriedly constituted it. General Sani Abacha’s military *coup d’état* of November 17, 1993 which overthrew the interim government dissolved via a decree, the moribund National Assembly and all the governments at the local and state levels, bringing to an abrupt close, all the political and constitutional processes that were directed at installing a civilian regime in

Nigeria during the ‘Third Republic’ from 1989–1993. Those processes were inchoate because the civilian government at the center never came into force *de jure* and *de facto*, making it debatable whether a ‘Third Republic’ ever existed in Nigeria.

### **Political Parties in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic, 1999–2019**

Nigeria’s Fourth Republic was proclaimed and its constitution promulgated on May 29, 1999. The proclamation and promulgation were made by the Military Government of General Abdulsalami Alhaji Abubakar. Prior to 1999 and specifically in September 1998, General Abubakar’s government had allowed party politics to, after 16 years of military rule, be operated in the polity. But the military government was short. It lasted from June 8, 1998 to May 29, 1999, barely one year. Hence, there was little time to permit long experimentation as was possible under General Babangida, in the renewed attempt at returning Nigeria to civil-democratic rule. General Abubakar’s government permitted a multi-party system of political contest. But only three were registered in 1998 – the PDP, APP and AD. However, as of February 2019, there were 92 political parties (INEC, 2019) (see Table 1 below). But the most visible and electorally relevant today are just six, namely, the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), All Progressives Congress (APC), All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), Social Democratic Party (SDP), Labour Party (LP), and Accord Party.

From 1998 to 2003, all the major parties listed above including AD, APP (later ANPP) and the CPC won seats both in the National assembly and in states’ Houses of Assembly. APGA was very popular in Anambra and Imo States and thus won most of the seats in the states’ Houses of Assembly. The AD did not just win the majority of elective seats in all the six South-western states of Lagos, Ondo, Oyo, Ogun, Osun and Ekiti in 1999, it secured 19 out of Nigeria’s total 109 senatorial seats in the National Assembly. In addition, its gubernatorial candidates won Governorship elections in all the mentioned states. The APP won elective seats in the National Assembly while its core of supporters formed the government in the north-Eastern states of Borno, Yobe, Gombe, Bauchi, etc. Its candidate in Kogi state, Alhaji Abubakar Audu, won the governorship seat in that north-central state of Nigeria and the majority of the seats in the state’s House of Assembly in 1999. However, the most popular party throughout Nigeria during the first sixteen years of its Fourth Republic (May 1999–May 2015) was the PDP. The party was not only in control of most of the governments of the States of the Federation but controlled the seat of government at the center for sixteen unbroken years. At the Federal level for instance, the PDP from 1999 up to the early part of 2015 won more than half of the seats in the National Assembly (242 in the 360-member House of Representatives and 72 Senators out of the total 109 in the House of Senate). It also won all the first four presidential elections conducted during the period.

The PDP was thus able to maintain its leadership of Nigeria’s political space up till late 2014 when many of its key officials and political officers began to defect to the brutally

efficient APC as a result of their disenchantment with the party's decision to support the re-election bid for the presidency of erstwhile President Goodluck Jonathan. Before then, the party controlled more than half of the seats in the legislative houses of 22 states of Nigeria and an equal number of Gubernatorial seats in Nigeria up to July 2014. In addition, out of Nigeria's 774 local government areas, the PDP controlled 402. It was indeed a huge political machine in Nigeria that was far greater than any national-based parties before it. The party ensured that no other political party displaced it at the national stage of political power for sixteen unbroken years (May 29, 1999 – May 29, 2015). It was, indeed, a great feat! It is important to note that no single political party has ever succeeded in achieving this feat in Nigeria's history. The unprecedented number of years in which, despite serious mistakes and challenges that confronted the country's democratic practices since 1999, a civil rule was maintained under PDP's leadership should make any charitable historian agree that regardless of the imperfections, Nigerians seemed to agree that they preferred democracy to military rule. Therefore, this fact is evidential in the country's gradual but sure evolution into a matured democracy.

The APC which has displaced the PDP as the ruling party following March 28, 2015 presidential elections and April 11, 2015 gubernatorial and States' Houses of Assembly elections now has the onerous responsibility of maintaining the democratic system including ensuring that the country remains stable politically and free from the dangers of a return to dictatorial practices under military rule. The APC's electoral feat was remarkable. Out of the total valid votes of 29,432,083 recorded by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) during the Presidential Election, the APC's candidate, General Muhammadu Buhari got 15,424,921 representing 52.40% of total votes and the PDP's candidate, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan got 12,853,162 or 43.67% of total votes. That meant that for the first time in Nigeria's history, an opposition party defeated the ruling party and won 22 of the 36 states' governments across the country. It controls 55 out of the 109 seats in the Senate and more than 200 seats in the House of Representatives, making it the largest single political grouping in Nigeria's history to have successfully challenged and displaced a ruling party. But the challenge it has now just as PDP had before it is in ensuring that such a democratic license and the achievements of party-politicking bequeathed to it do not slip out of the hands of Nigerian people into the hands of military dictators and undemocratic elements. How it does this in subsequent years will be judged by history.

Still, party registration has continued and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has continued to open the political space to accommodate more political parties even when it is clear that most of them are mere associations with very negligible political support-base. The rationale for this, INEC has shown, is not in whether a political party can win a parliamentary seat but in ensuring that the political space is not closed against any group of people who desires to associate legitimately and to seek to gain political power. It has helped expand the level of participation and socialization of the Nigerian people. It is a virtue that was absent under General Babangida's diarchical arrangement between 1991

and 1993. Hence, up to February 2019 there were 92 registered political parties whose names and acronyms are shown in table 1 below:

Table 1: Registered Political Parties in Nigeria as of February 2019

S/N	Party	Acronym	S/N	Party	Acronym
1	Abundant Nigeria Renewal Party	<b>ANRP</b>	51	National Action Council	<b>NAC</b>
2	Accord	<b>A</b>	52	National Conscience Party	<b>NCP</b>
3	Action Alliance	<b>AA</b>	53	National Democratic Liberty Party	<b>NDLP</b>
4	Action Democratic Party	<b>ADP</b>	54	National Interest Party	<b>NIP</b>
5	Action Peoples Party	<b>APP</b>	55	National Rescue Movement	<b>NRM</b>
6	Advanced Allied Party	<b>AAP</b>	56	National Unity Party	<b>NUP</b>
7	Advanced Congress of Democrats	<b>ACD</b>	57	New Generation Party of Nigeria	<b>NGP</b>
8	Advanced Nigeria Democratic Party	<b>ANDP</b>	58	New Nigeria Peoples Party	<b>NNPP</b>
9	Advanced Peoples Democratic Alliance	<b>APDA</b>	59	New Progressive Movement	<b>NPM</b>
10	African Action Congress	<b>AAC</b>	60	Nigeria Community Movement Party	<b>NCMP</b>
11	African Democratic Congress	<b>ADC</b>	61	Nigeria Democratic Congress Party	<b>NDCP</b>
12	African Peoples Alliance	<b>APA</b>	62	Nigeria Elements Progressive Party	<b>NEPP</b>
13	All Blending Party	<b>ABP</b>	63	Nigeria for Democracy	<b>NFD</b>
14	All Grand Alliance Party	<b>AGAP</b>	64	Nigeria Peoples Congress	<b>NPC</b>
15	All Grassroots Alliance	<b>AGA</b>	65	People for Democratic Change	<b>PDC</b>
16	All Progressives Congress	<b>APC</b>	66	Peoples Coalition Party	<b>PCP</b>
17	All Progressives Grand Alliance	<b>APGA</b>	67	Peoples Democratic Movement	<b>PDM</b>
18	Alliance for a Unit4d Nigeria	<b>AUN</b>	68	Peoples Democratic Party	<b>PDP</b>
19	Alliance for Democracy	<b>AD</b>	69	Peoples Party of Nigeria	<b>PPN</b>
20	Alliance for New Nigeria	<b>ANN</b>	70	Peoples Progressive Party	<b>PPP</b>
21	Alliance National Party	<b>ANP</b>	71	Peoples Redemption Party	<b>PRP</b>
22	Alliance of Social Democrats	<b>ASD</b>	72	Peoples Trust	<b>PT</b>
23	Allied Congress Party of Nigeria	<b>ACPN</b>	73	Progressive Peoples Alliance	<b>PPA</b>
24	Allied Peoples Movement	<b>APM</b>	74	Providence Peoples Congress	<b>PPC</b>
25	Alternative Party of Nigeria	<b>APN</b>	75	Rebuild Nigeria Party	<b>RNP</b>
26	Better Nigeria Progressive Party	<b>BNPP</b>	76	Reform and Advancement Party	<b>RAP</b>
27	Boot Party	<b>BP</b>	77	Restoration Party of Nigeria	<b>RPN</b>
28	Change Advocacy Party	<b>CAP</b>	78	Save Nigeria Congress	<b>SNC</b>
29	Change Nigeria Party	<b>CNP</b>	79	Social Democratic Party	<b>SDP</b>
30	Coalition for Change	<b>C4C</b>	80	Socialist Party of Nigeria	<b>SPN</b>
31	Congress of Patriots	<b>CP</b>	81	Sustainable National Party	<b>SNP</b>

S/N	Party	Acronym	S/N	Party	Acronym
32	Democratic Alternative	<b>DA</b>	82	United Democratic Party	<b>UDP</b>
33	Democratic Peoples Congress	<b>DPC</b>	83	United Patriots	<b>UP</b>
34	Democratic Peoples Party	<b>DPP</b>	84	United Peoples Congress	<b>UPC</b>
35	Freedom and Justice Party	<b>FJP</b>	85	United Progressive Party	<b>UPP</b>
36	Fresh Democratic Party	<b>FRESH</b>	86	Unity Party of Nigeria	<b>UPN</b>
37	Grassroots Development Party of Nigeria	<b>GDPN</b>	87	We the People Nigeria	<b>WTPN</b>
38	Green Party of Nigeria	<b>GPN</b>	88	Yes Electorates Solidarity	<b>YES</b>
39	Hope Democratic Party	<b>HDP</b>	89	Young Democratic Party	<b>YDP</b>
40	Independent Democrats	<b>ID</b>	90	Young Progressive Party	<b>YPP</b>
41	Justice Must Prevail Party	<b>JMPP</b>	91	Youth Party	<b>YP</b>
42	Kowa Party	<b>KP</b>	92	Zenith Labour Party	<b>ZLP</b>
43	Labour Party	<b>LP</b>			
44	Legacy Party of Nigeria	<b>LPN</b>			
45	Liberation Movement	<b>LM</b>			
46	Mass Action Joint Alliance	<b>MAJA</b>			
47	Masses Movement of Nigeria	<b>MMN</b>			
48	Mega Party of Nigeria	<b>MPN</b>			
49	Modern Democratic Party	<b>MDP</b>			
50	Movement for the Restoration and Defence of Democracy	<b>MRDD</b>			

Source: INEC. (2019). *Political Parties*. Retrieved from: <http://.inecnigeria.org/political-parties/>.

## Problems of Political Parties in Nigeria

To speak of the problems of political parties in Nigeria is to show the reasons for the political and social instability of the country since independence in 1960. Party politics caused Nigeria in about the last fifty years, an appreciable level of damages in democratic advancement and national cohesion. Existing social and ethnic fault lines were not only played-up for political profit but widened by some parties. Hence, the problems of party politics can theoretically be described as both systemic and historical in Nigeria. They are systemic because they flow from the very faulty nature and character of Nigeria's political structure since 1914 and historical because the same problem that bedeviled party politicking in the colonial period (1923–1960) are, today, the problems that Nigerian politicians still have continued to grapple with but with little promise of overcoming them (Achebe, 1983).

Party politics and the problems they have brought upon Nigeria since the first political party in Nigeria (NNDP) was formed in 1923 have continued to remain (i) ethnicity and parochialism (ii) persistent internal schism within parties and the lack of party discipline (iii) failure to intellectualize politics by developing a strong and consistent ideology founded

on 'group-think' and principles. (iv) military leadership's impatience leading to the overthrow of democratic government and to political instability and, (v) corruption and leadership failures. Of all these problems caused by political parties in Nigeria, the ethnicization of politics which encouraged parochialism and sectionalism rather than national outlook has been the most debilitating.

The ethnicization of politics in Nigeria sowed seeds of discord in the colonial period and broke down the pan-Nigerian spirit that nationalists such as Herbert Macaulay, J. C. Vaughan, H. O. Davies and Adeyemo Alakija had cultivated in the Nigerian indigenous elite before 1944. Since then, party formation, membership and fellowship and voting patterns have followed the pro-ethnic or pro-regional loyalty lines even up to the present. For example, in the colonial period, the formation of the two major political parties – NPC, Igala Union, and Igbira Tribal Union – was founded on solid sectional and ethnic if not parochial foundations. In fact, the NPC did not hide its parochialism at all in its adopted name. It made a public show of it by announcing that the party was not for Nigerian peoples but only a Northern People's Congress! Its membership recruitment was limited to Northern Nigeria while it severally called on Islamic and Hausa- Fulani sentiments to win votes in that part of the country. The AG used the same call on ethnic sentiments to win support in the Western Region. Just like the NPC which sprang up from primordial sentiments of *Jama'a mutanen Arewa* (Assembly of northern peoples), the AG emerged from a pan-Yoruba ethnic association called the "*Egbe Omo Oduduwa*" (Oduduwa Descendants' Association). Oduduwa being the acclaimed eponymous ancestor of the Yoruba ethnic nationality in West Africa.

Ethnic sentiments were also played up in the NYM'S leadership and succession crisis of 1941. Nnamdi Azikiwe and all his Igbo supporters in the NYM had resigned from the party *en masse*, when their efforts at choosing a leader to replace Dr. Kofo Abayomi as the leader of the NYM failed (Olusanya, 1980, p. 599). This resignation and the formation of another party NCNC in 1944 which the Igbo dominated was one of the reasons why Chief Awolowo thought a recourse to the formation of the AG which should be dominated by the Yoruba was imperative, in 1950. Besides, although most of the NYM members had been southerners, the party called on northerners to join too. But the northern emirs and religious leaders who were the NPC leaders forbade any of their northern people from joining the party. One Mallam Jumare who refused to heed the ethnic ban and joined the NYM was dismissed from his post as a teacher in the north and had to be offered employment at the NYM's secretariat in Lagos (Awolowo, 1960, p. 116) – clear evidence of NPC's ethnic intolerance.

The overall effect of all these ethnic politics played up even in Nigerian political parties' colonial period was that the foundation of Nigeria's nationhood was placed upon parochial and separatist tendencies in which allegiance to indigeneity and parochial sentiments were placed above national service and ethos. The consequence has remained a country constantly under the threat of disintegration and which many of its citizens merely tolerate rather than appreciate one another. The same ethnicity played upon by parties led to the 1951 Kano riots, the national census crises in 1963 and very visibly, the Nigerian civil war of 1967–1970.

The second problem of Nigerian political parties is their tendency to gravitate towards an utterly rancorous internal crisis and impasse. There was no single political party in Nigeria before and immediately after independence that did not cave-in under the weight of internal squabbles caused most of the time by the refusal of their leadership to uphold the principles of natural justice, equity and fair play. Most of them were run by the almost dictatorial self-interested elite who had scant respect for democratic values. Hence, different factions and sub-factions sprang up to whittle down their capacity to mobilize the electorate for political education and national development. For example, the dominance and lack of internal democracy in the NPC were so pervasive that the middle-belt elements, the majority of whom were non-Hausa and were, in most cases, northern Christians, felt uncomfortable. Even those who were Muslims as were all the NPC leaders but who could not cope under the weight of its leadership and class domination broke away from the very conservative NPC to form either the UMBC or the NEPU.

The NPC even fared better than both the AG and the NCNC in terms of internal schism. The Chief S.L. Akintola faction of the AG broke away to form the NNDP (a party that bore the same name as the earlier NNDP formed by Herbert Macaulay in 1923) into an alliance in 1963/64 with the AG's arch-rival, the NPC. The alliance, called the NNA, won the 1964 federal elections. The same lack of internal cohesion applied to the NCNC whose non-Igbo members broke away to form the Nigerian Independence Party (NIP) and the COR alliance of the ethnic Ijo, Anang, Ogoni, Ibibio and Efik to counter what they claimed was Igbo's dominance in the NCNC. The same lack of internal democracy and rancorous internal politics has plagued today's Fourth Republic parties like the PDP, ANPP, AD, APGA, CPC, etc., but most woefully, the AD. In fact, in Rivers State, in 2007, the PDP presented for election a candidate who neither contested nor won the primary election as the party's gubernatorial flag-bearer. The Supreme Court had to intervene to restore sanity by declaring the current Governor, Rotimi Amechi as the duly elected Governor of that State. The culture of parties imposing candidates who have not been qualified by the due process of election has continued until writing.

There is also a lack of political ideology and strong political principles upon which a good and viable system of party politics can be built in Nigeria. Except for the PRP, NAP and, to a minimal extent, the UPN in Nigeria's Second Republic, which tended towards a welfarist cum-socialist ideology, no political party in Nigeria can be strictly defined in terms of a clear ideology. The failure to construct ideological bases for parties meant that politicians were only interested in political power for its own sake and never had any solid idea about developing Nigeria socially and economically. The failure to construct an ideological base for any of the parties in today's Fourth Republic also means that the parties lack any intellectual foundation upon which to situate their struggles for power. Hence, charlatans, pretenders and cheats parade themselves as party leaders and followers, empty of any identifiable intellectual capacity for social engineering. The most visible effect of this has been that politicians quite unashamedly cross-carpet, changing political affiliations at will without bothering what effect can have on the trajectory of party formation and political stability.

Military overthrow of civilian governments can also be held responsible for ensuring a stable regime of party politics in Nigeria. There have been in Nigeria within the 54 years of its post-independence history, a whopping 8 different military administrations that ruled the country for 29 years or some 55.7% of the total time-frame of post-independence Nigeria. These were the military administrations of Generals Aguiyi-Ironsi (January – July 1966), Gowon (July 1966 – July 1975), Muhammed (July 1975 – February 1976), Obasanjo (February 1976 – September 1979), Buhari (December 1983 – August 1985), Babangida (August 1985 – August 1993), Abacha (November 1993 – June 1998), and Abubakar (June 1998 – May 1999).

Nigeria, therefore, has been governed more by dictators than by democratically elected leaders. Before now, this fact had the effect of truncating the trajectory of democratic evolution and the consequential ruination of the development of the culture of party politics. Hence, military *diktat* and the dictatorship culture have continued to rub-off on Nigerian politicians more than democratic ethos. It explains why party leaders behave as military administrators and soldiers on the battlefield by forcefully snatching ballot boxes and imposing unpopular and unelected candidates on their members and the country. Nigerian politics has simply not shed the draconian rulership style of the military which it had imbibed for most of its history.

Finally, corruption and leadership failures have plagued Nigerian political parties. The issue of corruption and the ills it has levied on Nigeria need not be re-invented here, for, it has been exhaustively discussed in various enlightened fora (Lawal, 2006, Brownsberger, 1983, pp. 215–233; Odekunle, 1983). But it is sufficient to show that it is one of the most debilitating factors for leadership failures among Nigerian political parties. Politicians simply turn governance into a big contract. They sponsor parties into political posts to corner government contracts (Odekunle, 1983, p. 217). In the last 15 years in Nigeria, political parties platform have been used to steal an unimaginable amount of money from the government purse with very few sanctions imposed. The cases of the former Governors of Bayelsa State (Diprieye Alamieyesiegha) and of Delta State (James Onanefe Ibori) which have been judicially determined are clear cases of graft by party leaders in Nigeria (The Nation, 2012, p. 1).

## Conclusions

### *The Prospects of Political Parties in Nigeria*

Regardless of their failures and the problems which such failures have brought upon the country, Nigerian political parties have remained an indispensable pillar of democratic governance. True to Edmund Burke's allusion to the usefulness of political parties in democracies, Nigerian political parties have successfully mobilized support for democratic governance. They have also been instrumental in aggregating diverse public interests and opinions and articulating them into a simplified body of manifestoes from which the electorate may choose. The AG, for instance, was so successful in mobilizing public support for

social and educational development in the Western Region during the First Republic that the Yoruba in South-western Nigeria has come to imbibe the idea of Western education as a key to development. Today, any political party will only ignore the Yoruba's love for western education at its peril. The government's giving in the six states in the area of a free primary and secondary education to the people has become the minimum irreducible offering and democracy dividend any government must make to that part of Nigeria.

Political parties have also not failed despite the challenges of ethnicity and religious division in Nigeria to provide some platform for national discourse and solidarity. The NPC in the Second Republic was able to do this. The party created a unified platform for national friendship between the core northern states and the minority states of Rivers and Cross-River. It is not unlikely that the current President of Nigeria, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, benefited from this foundation of friendship laid by the NPC when the core north voted for him at the last March-April General elections. The same foundations of pan-Nigerian solidarity were instrumental to the victory of Chief Moshood Abiola (a south westerner) of the SDP over his core-north rival, Alhaji Bashir Tofa, in the aborted 'Third Republic'. The SDP was able to weld disparate political preferences together. Despite its Muslim-Muslim ticket in Abiola and Alhaji Babagana Kingibe, it secured most votes across ethnic and religious divides in Nigeria in June 1993.

Finally, party politics holds the key to warding-off from Nigeria's national political space the danger of hero-worship or personality cult which a zero-party situation can impose on the country. A zero-party system tends to promote individualism and the rich to hijack the political space by using their wealth and influence to exclude the poor and the middle class. For now, Nigeria's party system is making that danger virtually unlikely. In other words, the Nigerian party system holds the prospects of advancing the frontiers of popular participation, popular sovereignty and majority rule now and soon.

It can be safely concluded that Nigeria has come of age in party politics. Today, the country can no longer be regarded as a starter in party politics to gain power. But ongoing intra-party disputes have combined with the problems of ethnicity, corruption and leadership failures to deny Nigeria of the very lofty possibilities and merits of orderly political development. As virulent as they are, this danger has failed to detract Nigerians from the path of stable political development and maturity. By the middle of 2014 the country had close to sixty parties although only five of them (PDP, APC, LP, APGA and ACCORD) could win seats in the State and Federal legislatures. It has continued to show the need to establish more reliable, ideology-driven parties with greater national appeals founded on principled approaches to civil rule.

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