

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF MULTIPLICITY OF POLITICAL PARTIES' CONTESTATION AND DISJOINTED IDEOLOGY IN NIGERIA, BETWEEN 1999-2015

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Abstract

It is generally accepted among political pundits that political parties are very vital in any democratization process. In fact, political parties are given a privileged place in the practice of democracy and this is because democracy is unimaginable without parties. The enthronement of civilian rule in May 1999 heralded the multiplicity of political parties which are either ideologically sterile or indistinguishable in Nigeria. Multi-party system offers citizens a wide range of choices during elections. Findings indicate that political parties in Nigeria since 1999 have been non ideological in practice but merchantable in operation, cosmetic in outlook, and rent-seeking inclined. The paper argued that, over-bloated number of political parties in Nigeria poses daunting challenges for effective and successful election management; beyond this, the phenomenon constitutes a huge drain in the country's finances as the cost of elections continues to skyrocket proportionately to the number of political parties. The Historical-descriptive design was adopted in this paper. Primary and secondary sources were used. The work was approached thematically and presented chronologically using orthodox historical method of narrative and analysis. Amongst other things, this paper expose the futile nature of multiple parties in Nigeria political context and recommended that, the formation of parties and political contestations should be defined purely by political ideology owing to the continuous abysmal performances of the parties during elections as well as the challenges to effective election management, pruning the number to a management size.

Keywords: Multiplicity, Political, Contestation, Ideology

Introduction

Political parties are the sine quo non for democracy. This is because, political parties created democracy, in the sense that, political parties enable people to participate in elections and other processes of governance, educate them, have them to make quality choices, as well as provide the basis at which democracies function successfully in countries which have competitive party systems. Similarly, political parties are the platform whereby candidates compete for popular support by presenting convinced and reasoned arguments about why they are qualified to contest and win election in order to become elected as public office holders either as president, state governors, local government chairmen and members of both federal, states and local government assemblies. Hence political parties are necessary to make the working of the representatives' government possible.

The third wave of democratization of political reform that spread across Africa and other less developed economies of the world between the late 1980s and mid-1990s culminated in the restoration of electoral pluralism in most countries of the continent. Nigeria in 1999 became proliferated with political parties which are largely characterized by ideological sterility or homogeneity. In Nigeria, it is only under the platform of a political party candidates contest, canvass for votes and win election as the provision of constitution did not give room for independent candidate. This is corroborated in part III D sections 221-229 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. In section 221, it is stated that: "No association, other than a political party, shall canvass for votes for any candidate at any election or contribute to funds of any political party to the election expenses of any candidate at an election". In other words, this section prohibits political activities by certain associations other than political parties. The notion behind multi-party system as adopted in most political system globally is to bring about credible party competitions. Therefore, credibility of party competition can lead to improved government accountability in several ways as suggested by Gottlieb. Firstly, if parties are more fractionalized and power is more evenly distributed between them, they will be less able to collude. Secondly, parties in more competitive elections will seek to mobilize more voters to improve their chances of winning. That a larger voter base, can in turn make the government and its public policy more representatives. Thirdly, competitive parties will invest more in election campaign.

Today, Nigeria has well over fifty political parties dully registered. This tendency presupposes the opening up of the political space for democratic opportunities and development. Contrary to this well established conclusion, the work argues that the proliferation of ideologically vacuous political parties is motivated essentially by unbridled pursuit of private material interest (Gottlieb, 2017).

Consequently, ideology as an essential ingredient of viable political parties and the fundamental basis for socio-political mobilization has been de-emphasized. For instance, Usman posits that an ideologically-driven movement is not relevant to Nigerians because globally the ideological parties that pundits long for, are no longer tenable in our present uni-polar...world. Arguing further, she notes that:

When those class-based political parties existed decades ago, the bipolar world had two super powers representing rival systems of political and economic organization – the American-led socialist east. Countries and their constituent political parties, academics and civil society organizations strongly defined themselves on the basis of either of such doctrines... Presently, the exigencies of the global environment and Nigeria's present realities have rendered such ideological movements... untenable. First, the global dominance of capitalism as the preferred system of economic organization, means most of the world's countries have adopted some variant of capitalism whether the America's free market capitalism, China's state-led capitalism or Nigeria's crony capitalism. Secondly, any movement that employs the rhetoric of a "proletariat revolution", promising the usurpation of the "bourgeois hegemony" to appeal to the Nigerian masses... will find itself left in the cold, dry winds of the harmatan (Usman, 2013,48).

However, it is pertinent to note that ideology is not exclusively limited to super nations of the world. Even political parties on the same locus in the ideological spectrum may have different programmes and policies of achieving basically the same socio-economic objective as it is the case with the conservative and liberal parties in the United Kingdom. By the same token, the strategic goals of the Republicans and Democrats in the United States (US) are fundamentally the same on several issues of national interest as both are right-wing political parties. But, their policy approaches are often different. Thus, under the capitalist (market economy) system, political parties have clearly defined ideological dispositions as in most countries of the world. If the Democrats or Republicans in the US come to power for instance, one can almost predict their general orientation towards the role of government on taxation, public investment, social spending, welfare, individual versus collective responsibility, etc. Thus, when a country has determined a prior, the course of its development, parties can share similar ideological orientations; it is the strategies for fulfilling these that is the different among various parties from each other.

Political parties do not grow in an ideological vacuum. A party that is bereft of consistent ideological predisposition is analogous to an individual who does not believe in anything. Political parties in Nigeria since 1999 have functioned purely as platforms to grab power, and not as agents of national and socio-economic transformation. They are a patchwork of unholy alliances, hurriedly put together to grab power and easy the military junta out. According to Dr. Bamanga Tukur, the then national chairman of the ruling People's Democratic Party, the PDP is an amalgam

of diverse groups united only by one purpose- to grab power-but has not yet fused into a functional political party for development. This is the same story for other parties. Thus, Soludo opines rather jocularly that:

If you take five governors of either PDP or CAN and lock them in a room, bring them out one by one to address a live TV programme on what their respective party's manifesto and cardinal programmes are, as well how their party intends to fund/implement such programmes, you would have the comic relief of the decade. (Soludo, 2017,64).

Essentially, it is because the ideology of development counts for nothing in Nigerian politics since 1999 that the vacuum so created is now filled with ethno-religious identities. Instead of mobilizing the people around issues of development on horizontal basis, the elite are busy manipulating the people vertically using regional, ethnic and religious prejudices. Thus, the parties are characterized by programmatic barrenness which invariably inhibits their development. However, it is pertinent to note that the prominence of ethno-religious considerations rather than clear and well-articulated ideologies as forces of identity and socio-political mobilization are not exclusive to Nigeria's politics. Mainstream Western European political parties are also drifting closer to these social categories. For instance, the social Democrats and Christian Democrats in Germany are increasingly based on ethnicity and religion (Basque, Catalan, Vovsican, Protestant, Catholic). While this tendency in advanced democracies, particularly the example highlighted above, may be unhealthy, the real identities of the parties are well-known. They are never concealed to deceive anybody. This is not the case with Nigeria's political parties. The problem here is that parties pretend to be what they are not, thereby creating some form of electoral and democratic confusion in society (Omotola, 2010). This problem is most acute in terms of structuring the voter's choice, but could not have been different in the face of political uncertainty.

In Nigeria, for instance, an ideologically inclined political party is one that is concerned with how to address the issues that pertain to the security and welfare of the people. The strategic approaches of such parties are different from another on how to address critical national questions such as fiscal federalism, revenue generation and allocation, state creation, citizenship question (indigene/settler dichotomy), national security (mitigation of kidnapping, militancy and terrorism, state police, environmental protection, economic diversification, creation of a sustainable new Nigerian economy without oil over a specified period of time), industrialization, electricity generation, distribution and transmission, fiscal policy, poverty eradication, job or creation, access

to quality education and efficient healthcare services, affordable housing policy, foreign policy, etc. These are veritable ideological issues which constitute the basis of political mobilization in sane societies rather than primordial identities like ethnicity and religion. Unfortunately in Nigeria, manifestoes are still limited to “what” will be done, and not “how” the party intends to implement its programmes (Okoosi-Simbine, 2005).

Although political parties in Nigeria have their manifestoes from which their ideological learning could be gleaned, such manifestoes have often proved to be insufficient in reality on several grounds. There are usually few differences in the manifestoes of most political parties, thereby making it difficult to differentiate amongst them, ideologically. This is particularly the case with parties since the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999. Similarly, the form and character of political contestations in Nigeria, usually informed by the nature and character of the state, gives little or no consideration to ideological dispositions. Instead, forces of primordial identities assume prominence. Consequently, it is not surprising that when one party captures power, it tends to govern on the basis of the whims of the power holder, not so much by party manifestoes. Invariably, this would lead to the enthronement of personality cult as was the case in the PDP, especially between 2003 and 2007 when President Olusegun Obasanjo elevated himself to the status of a semi-god by demanding for an unconstitutional third term as president.

As noted earlier, the proliferation of political parties in Nigeria since the return to civil rule in 1999 presupposes the opening up of the political space for democratic opportunities and development. However, the opportunities associated with such openings are yet to be positively exploited for the political development of the country. This tendency is not unconnected to the prevailing poverty of ideology which has become an unfortunate but inseparable characterization of Nigeria's political system. This is in turn implicated in the vexatious and ignominious pattern of political vagrancy in Nigeria's party politics. While political vagrancy is not inherently bad, it becomes a liability when the shift is not based on sound ethical and philosophical considerations. In such situation, it confuses political followership, constricts development and completely destabilizes the political process. In the same vein, it has led to the proliferation of weak and unviable parties, party indiscipline, lack of internal democracy, absence of party cohesion, high mortality and turnover of party leadership and deficiency of political development in the country.

This work, therefore, argues that, the main problem for the proliferation of ideologically empty political parties in Nigeria can be hinged on the insatiable quest for private material interest by the politicians who has decided to use the avenue either to enrich themselves or for personal aggrandizement. Thus, the fundamental objective of the work is to establish the role of this interest in the multiplicity of non-ideology-based political parties in Nigeria with the intention to proffer solution. As earlier stated in the abstract, the work relied more on secondary and qualitative data for analysis.

The Evolution, Political Development and Multi-Party System in Nigeria

The Nigerian democratic history is one that has been frequently dotted with military incursions since her “paper” independence in 1960. Safe for the first republic political parties that (some) predated Nigeria independence, which were in the real sense of it, very civil, indigenous and devoid of non-political influences in terms of their formations, operations and management formation of political parties in the post-independence Nigeria (except those in the first republic) have always be superintended by the military, which in all cases bequeathed on the Nigeria political space parties system they deem fit for the country.

Over the years, Nigeria has operated a multi-party system of government. This was so during the First Republic (1960-1966), the second Republic (1979-1983), the aborted Third Republic (1987-1993) and the Fourth Republic (1999 to date). It was this same system that was recommended during the Abdulsalami Abubakar’s transition to democracy between 1998 and 1999. General Abdulsalami Abubakar became Nigeria’s tenth Head of state when General Sani Abacha suddenly died in office in June 1998. Surrounded by immense goodwill and encouragement locally and internationally, he initiated a new transition to democracy that ended on 29th May, 1999. The point to note is that irrespective of the type of government in place, whether parliamentary or presidential, the party system in Nigeria has remained the same, that is multi-party except for the brief period of experimentation with the two-party system which resulted in the 12th June 1993 debacle, when Moshood Abiola, the presumed winner of the largely free and fair election, was prevented from assuming office by a conservative military. Multi-party system in Nigeria is no doubt recognition of the plural or multi-ethnic nature of the Nigerian society.

Pre-Colonial Party Formation

Nigeria political party system started with the formation of people union in 1908 which was founded by John K. Randle and Orisadipe Obasa and the Nigerian national Democratic Party (NNDP) founded by Herbert Macaulay in 1923. These two parties, (domiciled only in Lagos as of that time) contested the September 20th 1923 parliamentary elections into the newly created Legislative Council (Lagos and Calabar). Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) won 3 (Lagos) out of the 4 seats while the Peoples Union won no seat as the remaining 1 (Calabar) seat was won by an independent candidate. Nigeria Youth Movement came into the political scene in 1938 and dwarfed the electoral fortune of UNDP who had won elections in 1922 and 1933 (Nwosu, Olaniyi & Oyedele, 1998).

National Council of Nigeria and Cameroun which later transmitted into National Council of Nigerian citizens (NCNC) was formed in 1944, Northern People Congress came to being in 1949 and Action Congress was formed in 1951, a splinter group from Action Group later in 1964 adopted Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) as a party. There were four main political parties in the Nigerian first republic as out lined above which were formed into two main alliances in conjunction with smaller political parties (especially during the run ups to the 1964 parliamentary elections) NPC and NNDP formed the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) (Onobonije, 2005).

Post-Colonial Party Formation (1960-1983)

Though the history of the evolution of political parties in Nigeria dates back to the Clifford constitution of 1922, the parties that were formed prior to independence in 1960 were all regionally and ethnically based, and were largely the result of the provisions of the parliamentary constitution of 1951. Three major parties and a few minor ones featured predominantly in the politics of the early 1960s. These were the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), Northern People's Congress (NPC) and the Action Group (AG); others included the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) and the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU). The oldest of the three major parties was the NCNC which was formed in 1944 (Dudly, 1982). The NCNC was in fact, the dominant force in Nigerian nationalism until 1951 when the Action Group rose to challenge it. The NCNC later had the problem of how to transform a structure that was principally organized

to oppose colonial rule into a vote-winning political party. At this period it was broad-based, with its influence significantly felt as far as the Cameroons.

The Action Group (AG) on the other hand was formed in 1951, as an offshoot of a Yoruba cultural organization known as *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* formed by Chief Obafemi Awolowo and his friends. This party made it clear that it intended to operate principally from the regional level. In a press release issued in 1951, the party announcement was that it was a “Western Regional Political Organization, pure and simple”. Its aim and objectives were for the advancement of the Yoruba race (Nnabuihe, Aghemale, & Okebugwu, 2004). This revelation was later to set the tone for other parties to lay claim to hegemony of their regions during subsequent elections. This may be regarded as the prelude to the emergence of some regional and ethnically-based political parties in Nigeria.

On the other hand, the Northern People's Congress (NPC) with its base in the North was formed in 1949 on the initiative of some young men, including Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Yahaya Gysau and Dr. R.A.B. Dikko. It was an offshoot of the cultural association known as *Jam'iyyar Mutanen Arewa*. By and large, the North had remained untouched by the Nationalist Movement that had significant followership in the South of the country. Deliberate British policy, more especially the principle of absolute non-interference with Islamic beliefs, the discouragement of missionary activities for this same reason, and the relative insulation of the North from the effects of modern economic development, had ensured that no significant radical group emerged to challenge the colonial administration. Though, initially perceived with suspicion by the traditional rulers, the party later gained support from them by stating that it intended to work strictly within the limits of the traditional political systems. The NPC subsequently controlled the politics of the North due to its link with the Native Authority.

As earlier mentioned, apart from these three dominant parties, there were many other smaller ones such as the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), which emerged to challenge the hegemony of the NPC, the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) which claimed to represent the Northern minority groups of the Middle Belt, the United Nigeria Independent Party (UNIP) and others (Dudly, 1982). These were highly localized parties anchored basically on sectional interests

and personalities. Apart from the NCNC, which was initially broad-based in its membership, the NPC and the AG were basically regional parties representing the interests of the ruling class in their respective regions. Of course, these interests were masked as ethnic interests, which contributed gravely to the events which occurred in the 1959 and 1964 Federal Elections. Political unrest and loss of lives and property consequently led to the declaration of a state of emergency in the Western Region and subsequent military intervention of 1966.

The acrimonious politics of the Federal Elections of 1964, the manipulation of ethnicity and lack of political consciousness on the part of the people combined to remotely set the stage for the events of 1966. Pogroms were carried out against easterners in the north of the country resulting in the declaration of the breakaway of Republic of Biafra by Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu on May 30 1966, when it became clear that the Federal Government was not ready to protect the lives, and property of easterners. At this juncture, it is important to pause and ask ourselves-what has changed? Are the present parties, in terms of origin, membership, cohesion and ideology any different from the parties of the 1960s? The scenario in the second Republic (1979-1983) tended to support the view that nothing had changed. On the other hand, the trend of activities in party-formation in the 1998-1999 transition, appears to indicate a fundamental shift.

On the Second Republic, by September 1978, the ban prohibiting the formation of political parties was lifted by the military government of General Olusegun Obasanjo, giving rise to a plethora of political associations numbering about one hundred and fifty. By the end of the year, only five of these associations were registered as political parties, namely the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Nigerian People's Party (NPP), the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), the Great Nigeria People's Party (GNPP), and the People's Redemption Party (PRP). The Nigerian Advance party (NAP) led by Tunji Brothwaite later joined the fray to contest the aborted 1983 elections.

Of these, the UPN had been in the making long before it emerged in October 1978. In fact, most of the leadership of the UPN was the same set of people that had led the Action Group (AG) in the First Republic (Dudly, 1982). The UPN claimed to be "democratic socialist" in orientation, but in practice pragmatic considerations diluted its ideological commitment to democratic socialism. The NPN, on the other hand, initially was nothing more than a collection of rich individuals with

enlightened self-interests and a commitment to the maintenance of a free market economy. Though broad-based, it represented the interests of the rich business-managerial class and had a firm based in the North. If the UPN was a reincarnation of the AG, the NPN was a descendant of the NPC and was firmly positioned to the right of the ideological spectrum. The original NPP, led by Ibrahim Waziri was an amalgam of young moderate well-to-do businessmen and representatives of the minority groups who felt marginalized in the power equation. Disagreement over leadership led to a split which saw the emergence of the GNPP which professed “consensual” (politics of general agreement without bitterness”), and the NPP, which espoused a liberal ethic based on “individualistic”/“collectivist” paradigm. A placing of these parties on an ideological spectrum had the PRD at the extreme left, followed by the UPN, with the NPP at the centre, followed by the GNPP and then, the NPN at the extreme right of the centre. At least, there was some semblance of ideological predisposition by these parties which had completely vanished, by the beginning of the fourth republic.

This positioning notwithstanding indicates that, ideological consideration has never been a strong element of Nigeria’s party politics. More common has been the politics of personalities based on the ability of local politicians to cajole, buy and ride on the ethnic card as a way of getting to political offices. Indeed, it is clear from the foregoing that the parties of the Second Republic differed little from the major parties of the First Republic. Does this mean that circumstances have remained the same? Does this mean that ethnic considerations based on the lack of political consciousness still influence the political behavior of Nigerians? The answer to the above questions is simply the comprehension of the in-depth submission of findings in this work as analyzed above and stated below.

The Multiplicity of Political Parties and the Pursuit Of Material Interest: Implications to Nigeria Democracy, 1999-2015

Multi-political party system is one of the most critical ingredients for engendering democratic consolidation especially in fledgling democracies like Nigeria, in view of the multiple choices it offers the citizens in leadership recruitment and change. Deepening democratic practices in all political climes requires a functional, virile and active party system (Aleyomi, 2013). There cannot be democracy without politics just as there can never be politics without parties (Rossiter, 1960).

Elections in the word of Eldman are important to democracy; political parties are the means through which voters' choices are simplified (Eldman, 1964).

Notwithstanding the enormous benefits of variety of choices made available to citizens by the existence of multi-party democracy, the fourth republic in Nigeria is more of a curse rather than a blessing. The over bloated number of non-performing political parties that got themselves registered and subsequently found their names on the ballots at every election do so not for their interest in offering themselves as credible alternatives to the ruling party by capturing power through winning elections, but solely for the qualification for elections subventions from INEC (Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 as amended, 2010). At best, they exist only to make up the number of political parties to enable the sponsors of such mushrooms parties further their political mercantilism by accessing various subventions to political parties by INEC. The pursuit of private material interest by many Nigerian politicians is largely implicated in the wanton multiplication of ideologically vacuous political parties in Nigeria, especially since 1999. The prevalence of this tendency in the body-politick was accentuated by the extant legal provisions. For instance, the conditions stipulated in the 1999 constitution for the registration of political parties make it easier for more parties to spring up. For instance, section 222(6) of the constitution states that the headquarters of all political parties must be situated in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. However, not many of the parties can boast of a functional secretariat in the FCT (after registration) as most of them have gradually fizzled out, while others merely exist in the register of the electoral commission.

This topic studied the implications associated with multi-party system and how it affects Nigerian political development. Categorically speaking, multi-party system has both political and economical implications associated to it, which has been discussed above. The existence of multi-party system is simply a "sine qua non" for democratic consolidation in any polity of any country. In Nigeria, these political parties were regionally based and their activities led to the collapse of these experiments.

Summary and Conclusion

In summary, this research work which was based on Historical analysis of political party contestation, disjointed ideology and multiplicity of political parties in Nigeria 1999-2015 is a total overhaul of the gravity of political engagement in Nigeria polity. In the first place, the general introductory frame of the study was made by examining the evolution, political development and multi-party system in Nigeria. Here, the researcher was forced to assess various party system that have ever existed in Nigeria from pre-independent period, down to first republic, second republic, third republic within the scope of the study. In the process of assessment, it was then discovered that Nigeria practiced multi-party system in the first and second republic. But in the third republic, the party system changed from multi-party system to two-party system under military rule led by Gen. Ibrahim Babangida. During this military political system, it was only two parties that were recognized legally, which were National Republican Convention (NRC) and Social Democratic Party (SDP).

But then, it was later in 1999 that Gen. Abdusalami Abubakar decided to hand over the power to a civilian government. And after 1999 election, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo assumed power as a civilian government. This event marked the return of democratic government in Nigeria and the beginning of fourth republic. Therefore, in the assessment of the entire republic from first republic down to the fourth republic, it found out that, all of them shared similar cases of electoral violence, political crises, rigging of elections, under aged voting, bribing of electoral bodies, assassination of political aspirants and other related cases. So in other words, to delve into the relationship between multi-party system and political development in Nigeria, the researcher after assessment, discovered that, there is no relationship between political development and multi-party system in Nigeria context considering its colossal failure from inception. Thus, Nigeria should reverse back to two party system which will nip regional politics and create room for sound political ideology that is capable of embracing multiple potentials.

Consequently, the researcher carried out the historical analysis of the multiplicity of political parties and the pursuit of material interest; implications to Nigerian democracy, 1999-2015. It was observed that political parties are the sine quo non for democracy. This is because, political parties created democracy, in the sense that, it enables people to participate in elections and other processes of governance. It is also the platform whereby candidates compete for popular support

by presenting convinced and reasoned arguments about why they are qualified to contest and win election. The topic concluded by highlighting some of the implications of the multiplicity of political parties which included ethnic politics, lack of party ideology, god-fatherism, party defections, poverty and over ambitious politicking.

Finally, it was also discovered that the elites in Nigeria, have failed to play by the rules of competitive electoral politics which prioritize politics of tolerance, consensus, bargaining and compromise. Rather, these elites in Nigeria as warlords, characterized by gangsterism and political disorder dominated pattern of elections and electioneering in Nigeria that threatens to tear the country apart and put its tenuous peace at great risks. In line with that, it was equally discovered that apart from political implications, there were also economic implications attached to the politics of multi-party elections that failed to maintain political stability and development. This is true because, enormous money given to political parties from government purse is greatly affecting the economic arrangement of the nation considering its inordinate use. Worse still, as these political parties will share the money among them for selfish purposes neglecting its proper intention.

It is worthy to note that, electoral processes in Nigeria have historically been marred by a lot of difficulties, instabilities and irregularities as a result of the nature of multi-party politics, starting from first republic, down to our present dispensation. In fact political parties in Nigeria have not yet, come to their objectives and roles in democratic consolidation and political development. There is no need only to accuse the party system itself, but rather the people that operate the parties.

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