

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Party system, its peculiarities and development of political practices in Nigeria**

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**This paper attempts a reasoned critique of the applicability of the concept of traditional ‘party system’ vis-à-vis the emergence and peculiar nature of political parties in Nigeria. Focusing on the various theoretical expositions of party systems and its heuristic adaptations across the globe, the paper investigated the historical antecedents of party formation, administration, composition and party loyalty and its metastasis in Nigeria. The paper observed that while multi-partism appears to have been the dominant practice from the colonial period till date, the spirit behind the formation and administration of the parties bears much of regional overtone than the entrenchment of democratic values and enhanced freedom of association, which the presence of many parties customarily entails. Beyond the various reforms in the Nigerian party system, therefore, this study hazards an observation that putting good framework on ground is not enough, there is also the palpable threat that can be self-inflicted by various factions within the political parties while each strives to find ways to secure relevance and control in usually fierce and sly manners.**

**Key words:** Democratic governance, Nigeria, party system, political practices, good governance.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Party system refers to a political order in which the formation, mobilization and contestations of political parties is a means of constituting political orders in a democratic country. In comparative political science literature, scholars have defined party system as consisting of effective groupings of a society’s politically dynamic agent for the sole purpose of controlling the apparatuses of government (Nwankwo, 1982). Thus, a key organization in a party system is political party, which Johari (1989:4) quoted Edmund Burke, a renowned English scholar, to have defined as ‘a body of men united for promoting the national interest on some particular principles in which they are all agreed’. The foregoing

liberal view has however been countered by the realist views, mainly from American extractions who opined that it is deceptive to attach pointless significance to ‘principles’ of national or public interest the important thing is that a party, among others, is primarily an assemblage or machinery for partaking in the struggle for power; a medium for suing for and securing public offices through legitimate and popular means; and an agency for fulfilling political ambitions and securing supports and votes from the electorates at the time of elections. A notable figure in this realist view is Sigmund Neumann, defined a political party as ‘an articulate organisation’ of politically active citizens who have in mind ‘the control of

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governmental powers' and competition for election into governmental institutions to transmit their ideology into public policy (Johari, 1989:424). Section 229 of 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) has also defined "political party" to include organisation that preoccupies itself with soliciting for votes during elections into various executive and legislative offices as designated in the constitution.

Thus, a basic dichotomy discernible between the two views is that while the former implicates that the differentiations of political parties may be sought on the basis of principles anchored on national interest; the latter emphasized the mobilization of popular participation for converting specific personal interest into national interest. The Marxist view also differs essentially from the British and American views expressed hitherto. According to the Marxist view, a political party exists as a 'vanguard' of the people and its 'main task is to create class consciousness' of the rulers bourgeoisie, and the ruled proletariat (Johari, 1989:424). Johari (1989:423) further argued that ultimately, because the process is skewed against the latter, a political engineering will inevitably emerge to 'prepare the proletariat for a bloody and violent revolution'. Thus, Marxist view appears to lay more emphasis on parties as social class organizations identifiable in accordance within a defined vested interest. The bourgeois parties have their vested interest in ensuring that status quo is maintained while the aim of the workers (communist) party is to torpedo the existing oligarchic system and then to create a classless, and ultimately stateless, society in the final stage of social development. Lenin, as quoted by Johari (1989:424), argued that: The communist party is created by means of selection of the best, most class-conscious, most self-sacrificing and farsighted workers... The communist party is the lever of political organization, with the help of which the more progressive part of the working class direct on the right path the whole of proletariat and the semi-proletariat along the right road. Furthermore, an absolute essence of political parties as veritable vehicle for democratic development appears to be shrouded in ambiguity. As Chege (2007) rationalized, even though political parties occupy a significant position in the advancement of democracy, it is often difficult to conclude how much they play this role. On the positive side, Chege (2007) reported how the mobilizing force of political parties accelerated transitions from apartheid regimes in South Africa to majority rule and in the authoritarian communist state of the former USSR to democracy, both at the tale end of last century.

In addition, the author mentioned the pivotal role of 'social democrats and socialist parties' ... in building the welfare states across Western Europe (Chege, 2007:17). Contrariwise, Chege (2007) recorded the deleterious tendency of supposed political parties in the rise of and approval for racism in Adolf Hitler's Germany and the cruel abuse of humanity that followed it. According to

him, 'the institutionalization of apartheid in South Africa and racism in the US South following Reconstruction, as well as the most egregious violations of human rights in the USSR, in China under Mao Zedong, and in Cambodia under the Khmers Rouges' were the product of established political parties (Chege, 2007:17). Thus, the story of political parties could be told from two diametrically opposed positions: one of glowing records of immense acceleration of democratic practices and the other of perverse consequences inimical to democracy and individual liberty that such free human association should ordinarily guarantee. Nevertheless, political parties are arguably indispensable institutions for the mobilization of various interests in any political system. As Sklar (2004a) observed, the reality of parties influence in class formation is more pronounced in a non-industrial state like Nigeria. In the words of Allen and Sarmiento-Mirwaldt (2015:2), the idea by Edmund Burke that there can be no 'virtual representation' without a 'communion of interest and sympathy in feelings and desires' is expressive of the inevitability of political parties. As James Madison also argued in *Federalist No. 57* 'communion of interests and sympathy of sentiments' is an essential part of democracy without which every sovereign entity could disintegrate into tyranny (Allen and Sarmiento-Mirwaldt, 2015:2). Basically, therefore, a careful articulation of these views would reveal that a political party presupposes the following essential ingredients:

- a. An organization: An entity with legal personality (that is, can sue and be sued) established for the purpose of achieving a combination of set goals. It is meant to conduct the business of winning elections and control of government. It may also be construed under the system theory, in which political party an organization will be seen as a compendium of hierarchical unit(s) of structure with horizontal (co-ordinate) and vertical (super-ordinate) jurisdictions.
- b. Agreeable people: A political party is an organization of persons who are more or less agreed on certain principles of governance especially on some important matters of public policy.
- c. Aim: A party's chief aim, notwithstanding how it is clothed or the strategy utilised, is to control the reins of government. This is done by passing through a disciplined procedure of scrupulous internal democratic practices, organized party primaries or selection process, thorough education of electorates on party manifestoes, and eventually campaigning vigorously for election.
- d. Public Policy: Political party is a body whose members make concerted efforts to implement their policies and programmes by constitutional means.
- e. Effective governance machinery: The idea is that political parties have basic similarities in that they parade arrays of qualified and eligible personalities capable of controlling and running the machinery of government,

have strategies in place to secure a stable base of mass popular support, and create internal mechanisms for controlling funding, information and nominations for public acceptance.

f. Function: Every party have functional means with which they mobilize ordinary citizens, either to vote or to achieve some other political goal, recruit fresh leaders and socialize older ones in the art of political relevancy and expediency, even in one-party states and provide a long-lasting sense of party identification.

g. Public Interest: Parties' programmes are formulated in such a way as to propagate the aggregative interests of a good number of citizens. It is objectionable for a party to articulate her rule with a view to serving parochial interest(s) or of a section of a state no matter how big. Suffices to add that this is a feature observed more in breach that practice in developing countries where there are sectional parties or religious parties.

h. Democratic principles: A party must inculcate the observance of the tenets of rule of law and strive to propagate only constitutional means of securing victory in elections and work within the framework of the constitution and electoral statutes. To function as acceptable political party in a democratic state, a party must eschew sharp practices or election manhandling, the use of force or revolutionary means, and undue advantages over other political parties.

## METHODOLOGY

A major research design for this work is literature survey. As such a good number of works on party system, electoral principles and democratic representation were sampled and critiqued. As such, the subject of party system from global and African context were critically discussed and later brought to focus specifically on Nigeria as it affects her local practices. A general survey of empirical and theoretical literature was also carried out for the purpose of harnessing the current state of scholarly submissions on the Nigeria's political party formation and practices. In essence, the study is hinged on a systematic examination of the outcomes of different scholarly works coupled with essential provisions of official documents of parties and electoral regulations and bodies. Important personalities that occupy crucial position, either at the party level and election bodies were also consulted for opinion. In addition, the study also benefitted from excerpt from newspapers and magazines on evaluation of political party attitude and practice in Nigeria. The method also includes content analysis of constitutional and statutory prescriptions most especially the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended). Nevertheless, a major limitation of this study is dearth of adequate record keeping on the part of succeeding agencies for election regulation, creating a gap in how much the practices of the past can be compared with that of the present.

## Theoretical exposition on major party systems

### One-party system

One-party system or single-party system is a political

arrangement whereby only one political party is allowed to control the reins of government in a given state. As such, only the political party is permitted by the country's constitution to field candidates for elections. In practice, the existence of a lone party forming government perpetually is usually a direct consequence of autocracy whereby the ruling is so powerful that it can ban all other political parties or associations. Historically, there are cases like that of China, Russia and Singapore, where the Communist Party, United Russia, and People's Action Party respectively wield the aforementioned tremendous power to outlaw other parties. A common by-product of one-party state is the inevitable emergence of dictatorship and autocracy. In the current global order, the surviving states where one-party arrangement still persists are the communist nations, most prominently China and North Korea, and possibly Cuba. The erstwhile arrangement in Iraq is also worthy of inclusion, where the Ba'ath Party continues to dominate and form government. A general feature applicable to all states practicing one-party system is the inclusion of a particular party in the constitution of the state. In other words, any kind of inter-party struggle or opposition based on formation of separate political associations other than of the ruling party is legally disallowed. The constitution literally grants the ruling, usually incumbent, party the unlimited prerogatives to regulate the entire phases of life within the geographical and sovereign boundaries of the state. Advantages of single-party system are:

1. One of the advantages of a one party system is that laws get proposed and passed a lot quicker. No time wasted on politics and campaigns.
2. Unity in the government hierarchy is more guaranteed because, more often than not, there are no competing interests, at least none that are recognized.
3. Leadership is more stable and this can enhance continuity in public policy.
4. Decision-making is more streamlined and less about politics and more about effectiveness.

The disadvantages are:

1. Lack of proper representation as the electorate has no choice other than to validate the choices of the ruling party. This further means that they tend to curtail electoral choices exclusive and may not adequately provide for all groups within a country.
2. One-party system can easily lead to dictatorship and eventually bloody revolution.
3. One party system also tends to lead to all power being concentrated into a small group that have all the power to extinguish all forms of dissent.
4. Lack of voice for opposition, not only political parties but also other political associations like pressure groups, public opinion, NGOs, etc.
5. Emergence of Draconian laws due to lack of political balance and dissents in law-making process, especially those governing civil rights.

## Two-party system

As the name implies, two-party system describes a political arrangement in which two main political parties overshadow others in the contest for political offices in approximately huge proportion in comparison to all other parties. In other words, the two dominant parties control the phenomenon of winning and of losing elections in virtually all governmental levels. It does not mean that there are only two political parties recognized by the constitution as is the case with one-party system, but the important thing is that the two dominant parties control elections into nearly all political offices in the state. In most cases, the two parties interchange the control of the reins of government between themselves. While one secures the majority votes and seats in the parliament and consequently forms the government, the other secures the next major votes and is regarded as the minority of opposition party. Theoretically, a two-party state would only subsist in countries where the majority party must have the capacity to form government without the assistance of the other 'minority' party. For the most part, there is a guarantee of a rotation of power between the two parties in the system. Usually, a dichotomy exists between the two main parties in which one is regarded as 'right wing' and the other left wing'. Such is the situation in countries like the US, UK, Malta, Australia and other states practicing two-party system. The strongholds of a two-party system appear to be the United State of America where, the Republican Party and Democratic Party have historically won elections into nearly all executive and legislative offices to the proximate exclusion of other parties. The situation in countries such as Britain and Spain is however less rigid because even though there are clear emergence of two major parties bestriding the political landscape like a colossus by securing elections of much of executive and legislative officials, there are other minor parties in the state pooling lesser but necessary and sustained political weights in some sections of the state. These other parties with lesser or no influence in the polity of a two-party state are collectively referred to as "third parties". In a state where two-part system is practiced, third parties usually emerge because of the existence of a particular overarching ideology or influential interest group or the emergence of a focused or charismatic individual who can pool influence in a part of the country. In Table 1, the so-called 'third' parties collectively polled about 33% of the total votes cast and 86 seats in the 2015 elections into the UK House of Commons. A two-party system is relatively branded with the following advantages:

1. Two-party system is noted for its operational simplicity in comparison to multi-partism as the electorates can easily determine which of two manifestoes to vote. The electorate is presented with two main choices out of which to decide where to go. A problem emerges when the two candidates appear to be 'devil's alternatives'

meaning that none of the two choices is good enough for a truly democratic decision.

2. The system is usually ideology-based. Meaning that candidates are expected to pass through necessary educative synthesis as organized by the parties to secure nomination. The whole essence appears to ensure discipline towards party manifestoes that could enhance efficiency in administration if the party is elected.
3. Two-party system is perhaps less prone to unhealthy rivalry and political alliances, and rancorous politics involving many parties in different parts of the country.
4. A two-party system promotes centrism, less extremism; and inspires the main parties to design mutual programmes that are capable of appealing to a critical mass of the electorates. It can enhance political stability which leads, in turn, to economic growth.
5. The system is generally more stable and easier to govern than multi-party systems, which can become a hung parliament. A hung parliament refers to a situation where no party is able to poll enough votes that could ensure a convincing majority in the legislative house to establish the government of the day.
6. The ever-demanding presence of the so-called third parties could act as necessary watchdog for the main parties to keep updating their mandates and manifestoes in line with the dynamic needs of the people.

The disadvantages inherent in a two-party state are:

1. Democracy is not fully operationalized as the choices before the electorates are often restricted to two main alternatives. Moreover, the third parties are often considered as fallback choices and not of merit.
2. More often than not, the ruling party often disregards the views of the opposition party mainly for politics and not for merit and thereby causing frustration within the fold of the opposition camp and increasing the desperation to win next election.
3. Similarly, the opposition party often finds faults in the policies of the ruling party mainly for the political advantage it confers and not particularly in the interest of good governance. In other words, the ruling party is often in rigid defence of her policies while the opposition can always find fault in the same and consequently leaving the electorate confused as to which of two parties is right.
4. Meaningful ideas in debate are unduly stifled by technicalities of arguments and counter-arguments, and may not promote inter-party compromise but simply partisan appeals to the population.
5. For countries like Nigeria and India, two parties are not enough to represent the highly diversified interests of their population.
6. Two-party system has the tendency to stifle the views of minorities.

## Multi-party system

A multi-party system operates in state where three or

**Table 1.** Showing results of 2015 general election into the UK House of Commons.

Name of Political Party	Percentage Vote	Percentage Vote Change	No. of Seats won	No. of Seat Change	Percentage Seat won
<b>Major parties</b>					
Conservative party	36.90	0.79	331	24	50.90
Labour party	30.40	1.41	232	(26)	35.70
Sub-total	67.30	-	563	-	86.6
<b>Third parties</b>					
UK independence party	12.60	9.5	1	1	0.20
Liberal democratic party	7.90	(15.20)	8	(49)	1.20
Scottish national party	4.70	3.1	56	50	8.60
Green party	3.80	2.8	1	nil	0.20
Democratic union party	0.60	nil	8	nil	1.20
Plaid cymru party	0.60	nil	3	nil	0.50
Sinn Fein party	0.60	nil	4	(1)	0.60
Ulster unionists party	0.40	nil	2	2	0.30
Social democratic labour party	0.31	nil	3	nil	0.40
Independent	1.19	nil	1	nil	0.20
Sub-total	32.7	-	87	-	13.4
Total	100	-	650	-	100

Source: Adapted from Garland, J. and Terry, C. (2015) and Hawkins, Keen, Nakatudde (2015).

more parties have equal chances of winning substantial votes and enjoy electoral coverage for forming government. In other words, the parties stand almost equal chances of winning prior to election as there is the absence of a two-way pendulum, as often the case with two-party system, where the majority votes will swing. In most colonized African independent states multi-party system is the common practice due to the existence of multiple ethnic groupings, with oft-disparate interests, that were only banded together for administrative conveniences of the then colonies. A multiparty system usually emerges where existence of multiple social cleavages and proportional representation is indispensable within the system. Proponents of multi-partism have argued that a multi-party system is essential to represent the multiplicity of ethno-regional and professional concerns in the contemporary states of the world.

The advantages often found in multi-party system are:

1. There is perceived safety and security of having to choose from a good numbers of parties: broadening not only the choices but also the representation of political interests. While other party systems restrict choices, the existences of many parties give the electorates a wider cleavage to determine how their ideological beliefs can be abundantly represented.
2. Multi-partism is best suited for countries with high diversity like Nigeria to evolve representative democracy.

3. The responsiveness and flexibility of a political system to acclimatise to changing situation and public mood could be better guaranteed where the number of parties is not just one and also more than two.

4. Multi-party system is much more likely to prevent autocracy or dictatorial proclivity of leaders, either for intra- and inter-party democratic practices or in the entire polity.

Multi-party system often operates within the following demerits:

1. Multiparty systems lead to incoherent policy atmosphere due to frequent change in ruling party. Every party that gets to power anew would probably start afresh.
2. The presence of many parties could result in the formation of coalition governments and its accompanied and lack of trust and silent but often critical acrimony within the government in power.
3. Proliferation of political parties, some of which may never win any election but which exist for ego boosting sake.
4. Wasteful spending on too many political parties. In Nigeria and many other multi-party states, countless parties are formed with constitutional compliance for the sole purpose of receiving the statutory annual subvention from the government. Much of these funds are utilised for the maintenance of party offices rather than boosting the electoral values of the parties.

### Party politics in Nigeria: History and formations

Even though elective representation was first introduced into Nigeria in 1919 by virtue of the Township Ordinance of May 29, 1919, which granted elective representation for the Lagos Town Council and into other councils with little or no experiences of challenges within the colony. (Jinadu, 2011), the man generally acclaimed to usher electoral principles into the country remained Sir Hugh Clifford. Consequent upon the 1919 Ordinance, three persons were elected on the basis of zero-party into Lagos Town Council in 1920. This led to the first election ever held in Nigeria in which three Nigerians emerged as the first elected Africans (Voters Education Handbook, undated). Sir Hugh Clifford, who succeeded Lord F. Lugard as the Governor-General introduced electoral principles that culminated in the formation of the first set of political parties into Nigeria. The Clifford Constitution of 1922 however, provided room for extension of elected (unofficial) Nigerian representatives into the legislative assembly that made law for the newly amalgamated Nigeria. Thus, four elected representatives, three lawyers and one medical doctor, representing the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) emerged from the legislative council election held in 1923 (Voters Education Handbook, undated). However, the four elected representatives (three for Lagos and one for Calabar) were grossly outnumbered as official members (who were mainly British) and the unofficial members (who were appointed traditional rulers and other civilians) constituted 42 members of the 46-man legislative council. The very essence of Clifford Constitution in this discourse is that it provided maiden need and template for party formation in Nigeria.

As Richard Sklar explained in his epic book titled "The Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation", published in 2004, the formative bases of parties in Nigeria continue to bear the very rough edges of nationalistic, cultural, and parochial class intents of the independent periods till date. Nevertheless, the formation of political parties is an important element of democratic arrangements. Sklar (2004b: xix) demonstrated how 'political parties...appears to be the dominant institution of [any] society'. According to him, the 'social structures' of a nation is greatly influenced by the structures of the parties (Sklar, 2004b:442). Sklar 2004b:xix) argued that the history and formation of parties, or better still the history of parties formation, cannot be overemphasized as they determine other social structures like 'traditional authority, government, the economy, and various, particularly ethnic and religious, interest[s]'. As Jinadu (2011) pointed out, scores of parties emerged in the aftermath of the introduction of electoral principle into Nigeria within the period of time spanning Clifford's 1922 and independent in 1960. As Jinadu (2011) pointed out, a number of prominent parties emerged in the aftermath of introduction of multi-partism electoral framework between

early 1920's and the independent year. According to him, such parties include, but not limited to:

"Nigerian National Democratic Party (1923), the People's Union (1923), Union of Young Nigerians (1923), the Nigerian Youth Movement (1937), the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (1944), the Northern Elements Progressive Association (1945), the Northern Elements Progressive Union (1950), the Action Group (1951), the Northern Peoples' Congress (1951), the United National Independence Party (1953), the United Middle Belt Congress (1955), formed through the merger between the Middle Belt League (1950) and the Middle Belt People's Party (1953), Bornu Youth Movement (1956), the Dynamic Party (1955), and the National Democratic Party of Nigeria and the Cameroons (1958)" (Jinadu, 2011: www.vanguardngr.com). At present, The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) listed 40 registered political parties. These parties include:

Accord (A), Action Alliance (AA), Advanced Congress Of Democrats (ACD), African Democratic Congress (ADC), African Peoples Alliance (APA), All Progressive Congress (APC), All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), Alliance For Democracy (AD), Allied Congress Party of Nigeria (ACPN), Better Nigeria Progressive Party (BNPP), Citizens Popular Party (CPP), Democratic Alternative (DA), Democratic Peoples Alliance (DPA), Democratic People's Party (DPP), Fresh Democratic Party (FRESH), Hope Democratic Party (HDP), Independent Democrats (ID), Kowa Party (KP), Labour Party (LP), Masses Movement of Nigeria (MMN), Mega Progressive Peoples Party (MPPP), National Action Council (NAC), National Conscience Party (NCP), National Democratic Liberty Party (NDLP), Nigeria Elements Progressive Party (NEPP), New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP), Nigeria People's Congress (NPC), National Unity Party (NUP), People For Democratic Change (PDC), Peoples Democratic Movement (PDM), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Progressive Peoples Alliance (PPA), Peoples Party of Nigeria (PPN), Peoples Progressive Party (PPP), Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), Social Democratic Party (SDP), United Democratic Party (UDP), Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), and United Progressive Party (UPP), and Young Democratic Party (YDP) (INEC, www.inecnigeria.org).

A good reason for these rather long excerpts is to point attention to the various attempts by Nigerians to utilize the window of opportunities afforded by multi-partism over the time. Even though a good number of these parties were ethno-regional in shape and character, their very numerous formations increased political awareness and competition in the country. Sklar (2004b) emphasized that even though there are always the rainbow of big

parties in every political dispensation that appears to form a representative coalition of all interests, there are always many section-based parties that whittle down the influences of the 'big' ones. The share influence of the formations of the so-called sectional parties, even as Sklar (2004b:xviii) describe them as 'subordinate classes', increased the tempo of competitiveness that was to make Nigerian political scene highly contested. In the early days of party politics in Nigeria, the dynamism of increased party formations reflected itself very prominently, when the NCNC trounced the NYM, even though the latter had also successfully wrestled the same power from NNDP in the Lagos Town Council election. The same situation appears to also played out in 2015, when the coalition of section-based parties coalesced to form the All Progressives Congress (APC) successfully engaged and defeated the ruling Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) in the 2015 general elections. This is undoubtedly contrary to the submission of Sklar (2004a) who had argued that such coalition would never be able to trounce the so-called national parties in Nigeria.

### **Ethnicity and political practices in Nigeria**

From the colonial time, ethnicity has remained a major threat to Nigeria's social structure. Of particular note is the effect of deep ethnicity on political party practices and processes. Despite the practice of multi-party democracy from colonial period till date, ethnicity continues to rob Nigeria the institutional development embedded in such liberal system. Aminu and Ogbonnaya (2015) argued that multi-party systems are commonly considered as a viable democratic weapon that can institutionalise integrity and healthy competitions among political actors. According to them, such advantages have eluded Nigeria due to excessive ethnicity factors in the Nigerian political space. The fact that ethnicity is a major factor in the country's social structure reflected in the origins and proliferation of political parties in Nigeria. Since the colonial period, and perhaps selectively till date, the peculiarity of the country in terms of party formation is that the parties were regionally biased. Scholars have opined that this proliferation makes Nigerian political parties lack ideology. Jinadu (2011) argued that:

The centrifugal consequences of the ethno-regionalization and the personalization of party politics, particularly between 1951 and 1965, in Nigeria has moved, since the constitutional and political reforms of 1975 to 1979, from a functional definition of a political party to a legal-constitutional one, which primarily defines party more in terms of structure than of functions, with emphasis on structural requirements for political party registration as (i) national outlook and spread; (ii) internal organization or democracy, and (iii) recognition and registration by an electoral body. However, a movement emerged in 1936, Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) as

arguably the maiden attempt to form a truly national party in Nigeria (Sklar, 2004a). Yet, from the narrow aim of the party—to defeat the incumbent NNDP in the 1938 Lagos Town Council elections; and the facts that the initiators and frontrunners were of Yoruba and Ibo origins, the NYM has been roundly criticized as equally a regional party (Sklar, 2004a; Olaiya, 2015a; Olaiya, 2015b; Olaiya, 2016). Thus, the movement soon became embroiled in intra-party ethnicity-laden crisis that swept it off its feet in 1941. The Youth Movement's influence in national politics was short-lived by internal crisis not far removed from ethnicity and a more broad-based political association, the, which incorporated the communal party of Lagos, took over. The same pattern of regional fervor continues to play out in subsequent political formations like that of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) in 1944.

The need to therefore delimit the adverse effect of ethnic political movements, as typified by past experiences, Jinadu (2011) argued, necessitated the making of political parties to become a constitutional matter through the transitions of 1975 to 1979 and 1985 to 1999, both brokered by the military. The underlining end was to censor the formation of ethno-regional parties. The strategy utilized was to insert a number of requirements in the constitutions about the structural or organizational composition that political associations must fulfill to qualify for registration. The idea was to inject the attitude and integrity of free and fair elections into the political process and to reduce electoral violence, which the country experienced between 1962 and 1965. It was also believed that the same ethnicity challenge culminated in the proliferation of parties, most of which bear the name and colorations of ethnic backgrounds. In view of these, the constitution was drafted to specifically require certain criteria for registration—the name, emblem, or motto of the party must neither be ethnic nor religious in nature nor portray the party in anyway as representing regional/ethnic interest. Apart from this, all parties are also to operate open membership programme in which every Nigerian is free to join, irrespective of ethnic or religious affiliation.

In addition, every party is expected to maintain her headquarters at the Nigeria's capital city in Abuja, while those who are to man the party must have the geographical spread across the country. Moreover, democratic principle and practices must reflect themselves in all internal decisions and undertakings of the party so much, so that election into party offices must be held periodically in line with constitutional and statutory provisions. In line with Section 223 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended), which borders on reflection of federal character, election of party officials must be carried out by representatives of at least 24 out of 36 states that make up the federal constituent units. Section 224 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) provided that all parties must align her manifestoes with the

achievement of socio-cultural rights of citizens as contained in the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria. Essentially, the constitution assigned the functions of registration of political parties and of conduct of election to specialised national electoral agency –the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in 1999. The necessity to therefore evolve truly national parties cannot be overemphasized considering the incontrovertible fact that the chaos of the First Republic cannot be divulged from the regional fervors in which most, if not all, of the parties operated. As soon as political activities commenced, no fewer than 53 political associations emerged to participate in the political process. From these, seventeen prospective parties actually presented papers to be registered, but only five were considered by the FEC. These are “the United Party of Nigeria (UPN), the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Nigerian People's Party (NPP), the Great Nigeria People's Party (GNPP), and the People's Redemption Party (PRP)” in 1978 (Nwankwo, 1982) and later the Nigeria Advance Party (NAP) in 1981 to become the sixth party to be registered.

Nevertheless, the expectations of those who drafted the constitution and the military rulers who midwived them appeared dashed, to some extent, as most of the 1978/83 parties again took the toga of ethno-regional appearances reminiscent of the pre-1966 periods. There was hardly a particular exception, including the so-called “new breed” NAP, and the ‘national’ NPN. The membership spread of the parties and coverage in electoral victories reflected regional antecedents that tilted towards the North. The UPN, despite its rigorous campaign tour around the country for electoral patronage only found electoral acceptance in the Southwest making it a rebirth of the old Action Group. In addition, the NPP was an open reincarnation of the National Council of Nigerian Citizens of the eastern part of the country as the political base and whiff of supports from the North Central part of the country. The Peoples Redemption Party was a practical reconstruction of the radicalism renowned of NEPU with stronghold in Kano axis, while the GNPP, which purported to be a rallying point for minorities groups, was much more popular among the Kanuri people of the Borno State in the North. It is therefore discernible the totality of the six parties as a whole represented the ‘federal character’ in which each party stands for different section of the country without proper adherence to the constitutional requirements which clearly stipulated otherwise as to parties should be registered. As Olaiya and Oladoyin (2009) pointed out, the character of the registered parties did not deviate as such from the ethnocentric fiber of the pre-1966 parties but could be taken to represent the need to found representation for the recognized power groups in the country.

### **The 1999 constitution and political parties in Nigeria**

Under the various post-independent constitutional

developments in Nigeria, the need to de-ethnicise political practices appears to have occupied the front burner. From the final provisions of the constitutions, the draftsmen made it impossible for the formation of ethnic-based parties. Thus, even though the 1975 to 1979 parties may not have completely removed the ethnocentric formations in the parties, Jinadu (2011) argued that parties that emerged from the 1987 and 1999 constitutional orders were somewhat devoid of the genetic ethno-regional reincarnation of the old parties. This may not be unconnected with the provisions of Section 222 of the 1999 Constitution, which stipulates that an association would not be recognized as a political party in Nigeria except:

- 1) Its membership is open to all Nigerians regardless of birth, sex, faith or ethnicity.
- 2) The names of and addresses of its national officers are registered with INEC.
- 3) A copy of its Constitution, which must meet certain conditions set by INEC, is deposited at the commission's headquarters.
- 4) It informs INEC of any change in its constitution within 30 days of the change.
- 5) Its name, symbol or logo has no ethnic or religious connotation and that its activities are not confined to only a section of the country.
- 6) Its headquarters is located in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

In clear compliance with this constitutional sanction, the parties of the post-1987 and post-1999 dispensations did found expressions in wider geographical representations that fall within the constitutional provisions. The essence of constitutional provisions for political parties in Nigeria borders more on building the parties as organizations for the enhancement of the unity of the country. In addition, the constitution does not allow personal candidature and, pursuant to Section 221 of the constitution, only a person(s) who hold membership and secured the sponsorship of a political party can vie for position into public office and canvass for votes. The section also makes sponsoring of candidates the sole responsibility of political parties. To ensure transparency and accountability of the registered political parties, Section 225 of the constitution made it required of every political to submit to the INEC a detailed annual statement and analysis of its sources of funds and other assets together with a similar statement of its expenditure in such form as the Commission may require, and publish such statement of its assets and liabilities. By virtue of Section 226 the Independent National Electoral Commission also owes the National Assembly the duty to submit annual report on the accounts and balance sheet of every political party. All political parties are also forbidden to refrain from holding or possessing any funds or other assets outside Nigeria. To ensure control and compliance to statutory and constitutional provisions most especially as



contained in sections 221, 225(3) and 227 of this Constitution, the National Assembly is empowered to make law, pursuant to section 228, which provides for 'the punishment of any person involved in the management or control of any political party' found after due inquiry to have contravened any of the provisions of the constitution. Such person(s) also risk disqualification from holding public office on the ground that he knowingly aids or abets a political party in contravening section 225(3) of the constitution.

### **Political parties and social-economic rights of Nigerians**

The 1999 Constitution placed two major tasks of importance in the governance of the nation on the political parties. Intrinsically, the task of nation building based on equity in social-economic and cultural right, otherwise known as the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy as contained in Chapter II of the constitution, is placed on the political parties, most especially the one(s) in power. The Chapter puts out arrays of rights, which are not particularly legally enforceable by citizens against the government. The essence here appears to mean that parties are mandated to include the rights in their policies so as to make the rights closer to the people. This coincides with the views of Akande (2000) who argued that the provisions of chapter two must find its way to actualization and not just mere rights entrenched in the constitution without any form of methodology to achieve them. However, this important area of constitution is not enforceable in line with Section 6(6) (c) of the same constitution, which oust court jurisdiction (Bejide, 2014). As though the constitution is fashioned to balkanise the jurisdiction of the court within comprehensive judicial powers, section 6(6) (c) preclude the judiciary from adjudicating in matters of social rights. The section provides that the judiciary:

Shall not, except as otherwise provided by this Constitution, extend to any issue or question as to whether any act or omission by any authority or person or as to whether any law or any judicial decision is in conformity with the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy set out in Chapter II of this Constitution.

Thus, it is apposite to state that the constitution, through the Chapter II creates the obligations of the state to the citizens without necessarily granting opportunity to redress the violations of those rights. In *Archbishop Olubunmi Okogie v. Attorney-General of Lagos State* (1981) 2 NCLR 350, the court reinstated the non-enforceability of socio-economic rights in Nigeria as contained in section 6(6)c of the same constitution. Ebobrah (2007) submitted that Okogie's case is a *locus*

*classicus* insofar as lack of jurisdiction of judiciary is concerned on matters relating to socio-economic rights of Nigerians. Furthermore, when the provisions of Section 13, which empowers the court to apply the provisions of Chapter II, among other organs, is juxtaposed with Section 6(6) c it is clear that redressing any of the remedies through the courts of law is futile (Ebobrah, 2007). Various scholar have thus been expressed Opinions that the onus lies on government to ensure that these rights are well protected to make up for the non-justiceability. As Ojo (1984) pointed out, "most, if not all, the matters provided for in the Objectives and Directives section belong to the area of party politics." The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) 2009, argued that a good reason for taking this position could well be a way of preventing unnecessary litigations on issues that are regarded as political promises to the point of rights that can be asserted and enforced in a court of law.' They are regarded as values to be pursued and goals to strive to achieve. Solace is taken in the fact that the factors contained in Chapter II could be used to determine the success or otherwise of a government. Thus, if it is felt that a party in power has performed abysmally below expectation, the party may not be voted for when next the electorates have the opportunity of voting to choose their leaders (NOUN, 2009).

### **Challenges of political parties in Nigeria**

Many challenges have continued to beset the Nigerian political parties. The political parties exist within a democratic space where all fingers are pointed at politicians as not only corrupt but also lacking in integrity of democratic values. Extrinsically, the 1999 Constitution also placed on the government the political obligation to eradicate all forms of corruption in Nigeria. Stated in Section 15(5), the constitution provides *inter alia* that 'the State shall abolish all corrupt practices and abuse of power.' This task is herculean considering the degree of corruption-related crimes and the fact that Nigeria is already so notoriously pigmented as one of the worst countries in the world where corruption goes on unabated. Corruption is thus, a principal element that continues to carve bad image for Nigeria and Nigerians and cause a lot of untold aspersions on the country's ability to attract foreign capital into the country (Olaiya, 2012). Global evaluations usually categorize Nigeria as corrupt. For instance, the Transparency International based in Germany, "rated Nigeria as the most corrupt country in 1980 to 1997 and 2000, second most corrupt country in 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2004, with Nigeria's best record as the 8th most corrupt in 2007, ranking 147 out of 155" (Olaiya, 2011). Olaiya and Oladoyin (2009) argued that the peculiar situation in Nigeria where the provisions of the 2006 Electoral Act, though stringent in character, has not been effective in

tackling the quagmires of electoral fraud in the country has not helped matter. His empirical work identified the flaws in the 2006 Electoral Act and the attendant consequences on good governance. Since good governance is the target of every modern state, the Nigerian case presents a striking scenario of mis-governance occasioned by several flaws in the Electoral Act, which, have led to more than 90% of the 2007 elections being contested in the law court. According to Jinadu (2011), some of the challenges faced by the Nigerian Political parties include, but not limited to:

1. Absence of mechanism for public- and self-assessment of extent of democratic values in handling in-house matters in the party. Issues such as how parties choose their nominees, conduct their primaries, and handle official matters requiring technocratic practices that only career bureaucrats can handle, are a source of continuous challenge to the parties.
2. The recycling nature of Nigerian politicians that not only disallow young upcoming politicians to develop but also gradually take over the control of the parties is a challenge. For the same reason, the continued existence of old orders at the detriments of youngers ones precludes the new focus from the present adverse politicking to positive and nation-building character to politics.
3. Lack of ideology-based politics and excessive emphasis on personalized politics.

Other challenges identified are:

1. Patrimonial politics, which connotes the issues of godfatherism, violence and political insecurity have been manifest in the Nigerian polity from the colonial periods to the present political dispensation.
2. Power of Incumbency of the ruling party to control the appointed electoral bodies to the detriments of other parties reduces the integrity of electoral process, create mutual suspicion, disquiet among the parties and the defection syndrome that ultimately eliminate competitive politics.
3. Military-initiated democratic transitions and constitutionalism which have made observance of the ideals of democracy observable by the rulers and the ruled.
4. Ethnicity-based politics and campaign of calumny for the sole purpose of gaining political advantage.
5. Poor funding of the parties from the INEC, which more often than not reduced the parties to seek financial succor from rich Nigerians or, for the parties in power, from government official, have continued to compromise the virulence of the parties to pursue purely public goods.
6. Constitutional and Statutory lacuna that have rendered the political parties as willful assailants during election periods or victims of attack because there is neither constitutional nor statutory provisions for prosecuting

election offenders.

Yet, challenges to electoral system are not limited to Nigeria. Just that the peculiarities differ. In the United Kingdom, Garland and Terry (2015) argued that the 'First Past the Post', which allows a candidate with a majority vote to win the constituency seat, is progressively disenfranchising voters and unduly overemphasising class gaps in politics and thereby disenfranchising a good number. As Garland and Terry (2015) posited, the volume of votes won or lost by parties hardly reflect the number of seats eventually won in the parliament. According to them, "The Greens and UKIP won nearly five million votes but received just two seats between them. Few can look at those figures and think that the voting system is working for our democracy. This was the most disproportionate result in British election history. Labour saw their vote share increase while their number of seats collapsed. The Conservatives won an overall majority on a minority of the vote, and the Liberal Democrats lost nearly all their seats despite winning 8% of the vote. The SNP won 50% of the Scottish vote share, but 95% of Scottish seats. Millions of voters are angry with a system that marginalises their views. Nearly half a million people signed petitions calling for electoral reform in the fortnight after the election petitions which were handed in to 10 Downing Street by representatives from five political parties (Garland and Terry, 2015:1)".

## Conclusion

### Antidotes to lax political system in Nigeria

Party system and political practices are among the essential elements of democracy. While the latter is malleable and substantially dynamic and refers to the totality of behavioral tendency of all political actors in a given social environment, the former refers essentially to the somewhat immutable feature of a sovereign entity. What influenced the adoption of multi-partism as a political system in Nigeria is not far-fetched. The multi-ethnic nature of the country; the disparate nature of the regional politics; and lack of communion of ideology among the political leaders, among others, are a pulling factor that made the formation of uni-polar, bi-polar, ideology-based parties impossible. Political practice, on the other hand, is woven around two sentiments: ethnicity and religion. Consequent upon the numerous challenges identified above, this work has embarked on the task to providing possible panacea. A good point to start in this quest is to identify with the conclusions of various authors among whom are Jinadu (2011) generally opined that finding solutions to the problems faced by parties must be holistic and anticipates all issues already neglected in the constitution and electoral statutes. According to him, putting good framework on ground is not enough, there is

also the palpable threat that can be self-inflicted by various factions within the political parties while striving to find ways to secure relevance and control in usually fierce and sly manners.

Such, he argued, is capable of subverting 'reform elements in the framework, unless there are external disincentives to discourage them.' He therefore advanced the following panacea, among others:

1. Enhancement of 'constitutionally stipulated powers and functions of INEC to monitor and regulate the administration and operational mechanisms of the political parties, as well as income and revenue profiles. INEC should also be strengthened to ensure that parties are checkmated in areas of internal democracy and inter-party tolerances.

2. Interposing an external regulatory and oversight public interest into party political activities and their governance through a stiff control of the political activities of the parties. This, of course will be contingent on the fact that the "power of incumbent" identified earlier will not come to play here to frustrate the opposition and negate their chances during elections.

3. Effective intra- and inter-party dialogue to foster mutual understanding, interrogation of grey areas and ultimately a level-playing ground.

4. A new political and legal culture, which anchors party politics on the demands and dictates of constitutional government: ethics, accountability and transparency, tolerance of diversity and inclusiveness of all societal class interests, and the rule of law. This must also include faithful application of the principles of separation of powers and checks and balances among the various administrative hierarchies of the party at local government, state and federal levels should structure and govern the constitutions, operations and party political activities of the parties.

5. Applied decentralization of party structure and administration, where party membership is coordinated at the ward level. The party structure and administration at each level must be autonomous within the spheres of competence assigned to it by the party's constitution, with provisions made for checks and balances by the other levels on the exercise of the autonomy.

6. This would forestall big-man politics (politics at the 'top) and patrimonialism and foster advancement of, and commitment to, grassroots development.

7. Internal democracy within the parties should be applied to the conduct of their electoral processes for nominating candidates for public political offices.

Others suggested by him are:

1. Building party discipline and cohesion: Party discipline based on due process is the foundation for party cohesion, both of which are vital for the sustainability of federalism and democracy in the country. Party discipline, as the foundation for party cohesion requires faithful

compliance with the letter and spirit of party constitutions, which in turn must be informed by the broad democratic principles enshrined in Chapters II and IV of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

2. Party Congresses and Conventions: Party congresses and conventions at local government, state and federal levels are mechanisms for managing diversity, accountability and inclusion in the governance of the political parties, including relevant party electoral processes for party and public political offices. Their membership should reflect diversity and be based primarily on the elective principle.

3. Credible party primaries: The decentralized or federalized party structure already outlined implies that, while the national executive committees of the political parties should issue guidelines for the primaries of each party, to ensure uniformity nationwide within the party, the power to organize the primaries should reside in the relevant or appropriate party congresses, e.g. for gubernatorial elections, in the state congresses of the parties.

### Conflict of interest

The author has not declared any conflict of interest.

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