



Research Article

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## Political Parties and National Integration in Emerging Democracies: A Focus on the Nigerian State

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Doi: 10.2478/mjss-2018-0162

### Abstract

*Political Parties are Political institutions which are basically designed for power acquisition for the purpose of utilizing power for public good. In other words, political parties as agents of political development are expected not only to articulate and aggregate political interest but as a secondary group, political parties are expected to bring to their fold members from various ethnic background, class and religion for the purpose of galvanising them for national development. Thus, the concepts of people and integration are so central to the conception of leadership and organisation that defines political parties. This paper through the use of historical political analysis and the use of the structural-functional theory unfolds the activities of political parties in emerging democracies as regard the process cum pattern of mobilization for power acquisition and the utilization of such power for national development and integration. Based on the analysis, the deduction is that even though the leading political parties in Nigeria are national in outlook – both in party structure and membership, the parties are defective based on institutional weakness and the inability to provide functional check on party representative in government after utilizing the party to gain political offices. This is coupled with restrictive access to political offices through the zoning of such offices based on ethnic consideration, thereby fuelling ethnic identity in the Nigerian body – politic. The paper therefore views political parties as integrative mechanisms not only for deepening and widening democratic culture in emerging democracies but also as agents of national integration and development.*

**Keywords:** *Democratic Culture, Ethnic Identity, National Integration, Political Development, Political Parties*

### 1. Introduction

Before the present phase of democratization in most African states in the 1990's, African states including Nigeria were bedevilled with political instability and dictatorial forms of governance (Ola, 2010). The propelling argument for the adoption of democracy as a form of government especially in the Nigerian State is the conception that democracy will not only aid the much needed development but will also foster national integration.

Political parties are democratic institutions that are central to political processes in a democracy. Political parties are so central to democracy because they not only serve as institutions for the acquisition, manifestation and check on power but they represent a belief system in term of ideology and interest and also constitute the mechanism through which interests are heard, represented and aggregated for cohesion and national integration.

Democratic processes in emerging democracies are so ethnicized(Omodia, 2013 and Omodia, 2016) that political parties are challenged by the need to provide nationalism and to raise national interest above ethnic interests. In emerging democracies, political parties are also

challenged by the need to ensure effective integration between the interest of the political leaders and the led. As a matter of fact, in the Nigerian State, when it come to power acquisition, ethnic consideration could be said to override national interest. This no doubt explain the reason for the zoning of political offices based on ethnic interest rather than competence which is more advantageous to national interest. The negative implication of this scenario is the use of ethnic militia for the purpose of drawing attention to power (Omodia and Aliu, 2013). It could also be argued that the persistent ethnic-religious, communal and terrorist attacks in the Nigerian State cannot be divorced from intra or inter political conflicts by politicians based on the need to capture political power.

As regard the challenge of integrating political leaders and the led by political parties, in the Nigerian State, this challenge no doubt accounts for the multiplicity of political parties. In Nigeria, there are presently Sixty-eight(68) registered political parties by the independent electoral body. It could be recalled that at the beginning of the present democratic dispensation in Nigeria, there were only three registered political parties. These are the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the All People's Party (APP) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD). The dissatisfaction of the led by the political leaders coupled with the contradiction within the political elites themselves could be said to be largely responsible for the multiplicity of political parties.

From the above background, the import of this paper is to unfold the capacity of political parties in emerging democracies with specific focus on the Nigerian State to serve the purpose of national integration through socio-political mobilization. In order to achieve this objective, the paper in addition to the introduction is sectionalised into: Framework of Analysis, Political Parties and National Integration before the fourth Republic, Political Parties and National Integration in the Fourth Republic, The Way Forward and Concluding Remarks.

## 2. Framework of Analysis

This paper discusses political parties and national integration in emerging democracies with specific focus on the Nigerian State from the perspective of political parties and political institutions or structures and national integration as a basic function to be performed by political parties of emerging democracies if their democracies are to stand the test of time. Thus, Almond and Powell's Structural-Functional Theory would be utilized as a tool of analysis. Though the theory was propounded in the 20th Century, the utility of the theory in a 21st Century discourse is based on its primary nature and the basic system function expected of emerging democracies.

Political structures are political institutions or arrangements that are designed to perform defined functions within a system. Functions on the other hand could be seen as what the system does or the output of political structures. The conception of Almond and Powell is that political functions could be broadly classified into two (Almond, et. Al, 2000). These are: (i) Input functions (ii) Output functions. The Input functions are such functions as: Elite recruitment/socialisation, Interest articulation, Interest aggregation and Political communication. The output functions on the other hand are: Rule making, Rule application and Rule adjudication. These seven functions constitute what could be referred to as the seven functional variables of Gabriel Almond and Powell.

In Nigeria, Political parties and political structures could be said to be involved in the performance of the above stated functions. Political parties perform the function of elite recruitment/socialization through political education in form of campaigns, rallies, holding of political meetings to mention a few, while elite recruitment takes place through intra-party elections and outright provision of party ticket for political representation to weighty would be members. Interest articulation on the other hand takes place through demands on the system made by parties on behalf of their members. For interest aggregation, political parties synthesize divergent views of party members with the hope of presenting a common party position, while political communication is done through the access provided by parties for communication flow both horizontally and vertically.

From the above input functions on the part of political parties, the question that comes to mind are: To what extent does the political education provided by political parties serve the purpose of

national integration? Are rallies and meetings held by parties designed to serve personal or ethnic interests? Are interests aggregated to serve national interest or are they sectional, ethnicized and personalised thereby leading to multiplicity of political parties based on marginalised viewpoints seeking to be heard and represented?

As regard output functions, political parties no doubt perform the functions of rule-making, rule application and rule adjudication. As a matter of fact, political parties tend to possess built-in mechanism for rule making, application and adjudication among their members. The question then is: do political parties tend to manifest strong capacity for implementation and adjudication of party rules? In other words, are political parties in the Nigerian State strong enough to maintain party discipline and cohesion?

In order to be able to effectively answer the above stated questions through a vivid understanding of the workings, operations and manifestations of political parties in the present democratic dispensation of the Nigerian Fourth Republic, it is quite indispensable to look at the role they played in the formation of the Nigerian State.

### **3. Political Parties and National Integration: Before the Nigerian Fourth Republic**

There are contending arguments over the role political parties and the party system could play in national development. There have been arguments in favour of one party democratic system as a system that is most suitable for national cohesion, integration and economic development especially in the early post – colonial days (Nwoko, 1988; Omodia, 2011). Conversely there have also been arguments in favour of multi-party system as one which supports national cohesion and integration through political compromise and possibly coalition in multi-ethnic states (Bello, 2008).

In African States, the contributions of political parties to national integration could be seen from two perspectives: The first is the contribution of parties to state formation and the manifestation of integrative activities that were geared towards statehood. The second is the character of the post-colonial political activities of political parties as they affect national integration in specific states.

In Nigeria, as regard the first perspective, at the early part of the movement for state formation, political parties were more nationalistic in achieving an independent state anchored on the principle of self-determination, even though their operations were sectional. For instance, although electoral activities were restricted to two cities (Lagos and Calabar) by the Clifford Constitution of 1922, the demands and activities of the major political parties, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) and what was later known as the National Council of Nigeria Citizens were national in outlook (Crowder, 1968).

However, after the 1951 Macpherson Constitution, with the emergence of political parties associated and representing the three Nigerian regions of the North, East and West, state formation was negotiated based on ethnic and identity interest. In other words, the Nigerian multi-party system consisting of sectional parties such as the: Action Group (AG), Northern People Congress (NPC) and National Council of Nigeria Citizens (NCNC) favoured a federal state that was driven by the notion of 'Unity in Diversity'.

The major effect was that although parties were able to fully mobilize their members and the local people towards the common interest of political independence, the competition amongst the political parties were largely unhealthy because of sectional representation of interest which were largely suspicious of one section dominating others, thereby leading to avoidable conflicts and bloodshed during party activities such as campaigns and elections.

As regard the post-colonial political parties and national integration, during the first republic, with political independence out of the way, the ethnic character of the parties became deepened. The ugly scenario did not only lead to conflicts and crises which threatened the democratic process, it eventually led to a situation where the military had to seize political power with the excuse of protecting the unity of the Nigerian State (Ademoyega, 1981).

In the Second Republic, even with the multi-party arrangement, attempts were made at making political parties to be national in outlook and representation. But, unfortunately, the leading political parties such as the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), Nigeria People's Party (NPP) could not be

divorced from the ethnic background of the founders who played active political roles in state formation (Olagunju, Jinadu and Oyovbaire, 1993; Otakpor, 2010). As a matter of fact, the leading political parties were seen as offshoot of previous parties. For instance, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) which was the party that formed government at the centre, was seen as an offshoot of NPC, while the UPN and NPP were seen as offshoot of the AG and NCNC respectively.

The aborted Nigerian Third Republic sought to solve the problem of ethnicized party politics and effective national integrative function of the institution through the establishment of two political parties that were designed to be nationalistic in outlook and operation. Unfortunately, this arrangement did not stand the test of time because of the personal ambition of the key military officers that were actively involved in driving the process.

#### 4. Political Parties and National Integration in the Fourth Republic

Tabularly, the scenario before the Fourth Republic could be presented thus:

**Table 4.1:** Major Political Parties and their Nature of Politics in the First and Second Republics

S/No.	Political parties and their stronghold	Nature of politics	Consequences
1.	NPC & NPN (North)	Identity Politics	Crisis in controlled states where claim to power based on Identity Politics was challenged
2.	NCNC & NPP (East)	Identity Politics	Same above
3.	AG & UPN (West)	Identity Politics	Same above

**Source:** Adapted from Omodia, 2010; Otakpor, 2010

From the above, one could clearly state that political parties before the Fourth Republic were highly sectional. Thus the challenge before political parties in the Fourth Republic, especially if democratic values were to be deepened was on how to institute political parties that will be able to nationally integrate the different sections that make-up the Nigerian State. It also meant that the integration of persistent domination of ethnic groups or political power by one of the ethnic groups needs to be addressed.

However, unlike the past, where political parties were associated with charismatic leaders as it was with the case of Dr. NnamdiAzikiwe's NPP, Chief Obafemi Awolowo's AG and UPN, Ahmadu Bello's NPC, the political parties in the early Fourth Republic- Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), All People's Party (APP) and Alliance for Democracy (AD) were formed by individuals without overriding powers. The assumption was that this would aid in checking against a single individual driving the party towards sectionalism as was the case in the past republics (Omodia, 2010). In addition, it was believed that the structure would also aid the integrative mechanisms of parties by placing more emphasis on enlarged consultation and compromise. Conversely, some policy analysts believe that the absence of charismatic leaders like what was obtainable in the past has actually weakened the integrative mechanism of political parties considering the mobility of politicians from one party to the other (Bello, 2008). However, the fact that the present democratic experiment has endured more than the others, could to a great extent justify the flexible nature of political parties in terms of consensus and compromise building as well as in integrating diverse political interests.

In addition to the structure of the political parties is the zoning arrangement injected into the political operations of the parties. This zoning arrangement was to aid in eschewing the fear of domination by ethnic groups. As a matter of fact, during the political transition leading to democratic governance on the 29th of May 1999, the political parties had to settle for a Southern Western candidates as a way of compensating the South for the long years of Northern domination of the presidency, and the South West to be specific because of the June 12 presidential election annulment which was believed to have been won by the candidate from that section of the Nigerian State.

Tabularly, the mechanism for power acquisition cum integration adopted by the parties could be presented thus:

**Table 4.2:** Major Political Parties and their Nature of Politics up to 2015

S/No.	Political parties and their stronghold	Nature of politics	Consequences
1.	PDP(Strong presence in all part of Nigeria	National Politics	Held political power up to 2015
2.	ANPP (North)	National Politics	Was in opposition up to 2015. But later formed a merger with other political parties that won the 2015 presidential election
3.	AD (West)	Sectional Politics	Very weak political party
4.	ACN (West)	Emerging force in National Politics	Gaining more political grounds naturally

**Source:** Adapted from Egwemi, 2008; Ayanda and Odunayo, 2015

From the above table, it could be seen that the PDP that formed the party at the centre was able to hold on to political power up to 2015 as a result of its national integrative capacity which was anchored on the zoning of political offices. Conversely the All Nigerian People's Party (ANPP) which was formerly APP with its stronghold in the CoreNorth continued to remain as opposition party until the party was able to merge with other political parties in order to gain the status of a truly national political party. The AD on the other hand is so weak that it has even lost its relevance in the South-West especially with the formation of Action Congress (AC) which was later transformed into Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN).

However, it is important to state that the alteration of the zoning arrangement by the PDP based on the demise of President Musa Yar'Adua and the assumption of office by then Vice-President, Goodluck Jonathan negatively impacted on the integrative capacity of the party (Ayanda and Odunayo, 2015). Thus the support base of the party in the North was greatly diminished because the North felt that it was their turn to occupy and retain the presidential seat for two terms of eight years. The Internal Contradiction within the PDP based on the abandonment of the zoning arrangement coupled with the birth of the All Progressive Congress which was a merger of the All Nigerian Peoples Party, (ANPP), the Congress of Progressive Change (CPC), the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), and the defection of breakaway faction of the PDP to join the APC led to a new political calculus in the Nigerian State.

This could be presented thus:

**Table 4.3:** Major Political Parties and the Nature of their Politics after 2015

S/No.	Political parties and their stronghold	Nature of politics	Consequences
1.	PDP (South-East & South-South)	National Politics	Lost power at the centre and most of the states.
2.	APC (North and South-West)	National Politics	Tool over power at the centre and most of the states.

**Source:** Adapted from Ayanda and Odunayo, 2015

From the above table, one could say that the party system in the Nigerian state is such that although there are presently Sixty-Eight registered political parties, but the system has transformed into two major political parties with the rest parties possessing poor support base and organisation to take over power at any level. The implication therefore is that a lot of interests are not being represented by political parties and such interests are being injected into the political system through violent crimes and other dysfunctional means.

## 5. The Way Forward

Although the thesis of this paper especially in the present democratic dispensation is that the more a political party enhances its capacity for national integration the greater the party stand the chance of acquiring political power. However in moving forward and deepening the present democratic experiment, there is need for national integration to go beyond accommodating the diverse ethnic nationalities through zoning of political offices to the accommodation of diverse socio-economic interests and also instilling confidence in the political process on the part of the led by enhancing the capacity of political parties to check political flag bearers in office. This no doubt will serve as a means of integrating the political leaders with the led through avenue provided by political parties.

## 6. Conclusion

One could also convincingly say that the more political parties are nationally integrated, the greater the chance they have to form a government especially at the centre. Conversely, the lesser the integrative capacity of political parties, the more they tend to lose relevance and poorly organised to compete for political offices. As a result, the more you have poorly integrative political parties, the greater the challenge of democratic survival especially in emerging democracies. This shows that in order for the present democratic experiment to continue to survive, the integrative capacity of political parties must be enhanced. The weakness of integrative capacity as earlier demonstrated caused the demise of past republics in the Nigerian state. Thus, the continuous challenge in the present dispensation is anchored on the need for political parties to optimally enhance its aggregative function to the benefit of the Nigerian state.

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