

E VOLUTION OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts a reasoned emergence and peculiar nature of political parties in Nigeria. Focusing on the various theoretical expositions of party systems and its heuristic adaptations across the country, 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-party system 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 ought to customarily entail. Beyond the various reforms in the Nigerian party system, this study hazards an observation that apart from putting a good framework on ground, there is a 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, via fiercely desperate and sly methods.

Introduction:

I hate all politics. I don't like either political party. One should not belong to them one should be an individual, standing in the middle. Anyone that belongs to

a party stops thinking. Ray (1962).

One thing is certain about the above quotation: the burning desire or quest to know why people indulge in politics. The evolution of political parties in Nigeria dates back to 1923 when the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) was launched. This followed the establishment of the Nigerian Legislative Council to provide some political space for the participation of indigenes. Franchise was however limited to two cities: Lagos and Calabar. A

Keywords: Democratic governance, evolution, Nigeria, party system, political practices, good governance.

More vigorous process of party formation was initiated with the formation of the Nigerian Youth Movement in 1938 and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) in 1944, under the leadership of Herbert Macaulay. The Action Group (AG) emerged in 1948, while the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) was established in 1951. These parties constituted themselves as political expressions of ethno-regional associations with the Action Group in the West evolving from a Yoruba cultural association –Egbe Omo Oduduwa; the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) evolving from the northern cultural association, Jamiyar Mutanen Arewa and; the National Congress of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) which started as a national party but later narrowed its social base to a cultural association, the Igbo State Union of the south east. These ethno-regional elite blocs struggled against each other in configuring the politics of the First Republic as a contest for hegemony by the elites of the major ethnic formations: Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo and the marginalisation of the minority groups. Massive electoral fraud in the 1964 and 1965 elections precipitated a political crisis that led to the collapse of the First Republic, civil war and the entry of the military into Nigerian politics. The aim of this paper is to discuss the evolution of political parties, reason(s) behind the formation of political parties in Nigeria with special focus on NCNC, NYM, NPC, UPN, and PRP.

Conceptual Framework

There is no single definition of “political parties” that satisfies everyone. In fact, two scholars or students of politics might define “parties” in different ways. The principal difference seems to be what we might expect from parties—the goals of party activity. One definition, often called the pragmatic party model, suggests that parties are organizations that sponsor candidates for political office under the organization's name with the hopes of controlling the apparatus of government. The ends are control of government, which has often meant the perquisites of control (e.g., patronage jobs, government contracts). On the other side of the spectrum is the responsible party model. Here “parties” implies

organizations that run candidates to shape the outcome of government, to redirect public policy. Rational parties work to win elections to control government, while responsible parties work hard during elections in order to shape public policy. The former is instrumental; the latter, ideological. Which of the two better fits Nigerian political parties? This is a hotly debated question and there is no clear answer. What is clear, however, is that there are three characteristics that distinguish political parties from other organizations such as interest groups, unions, trade associations, and political action committees.

Those differences are as follows:

In many democracies, political parties promote candidates under their own labels. Many groups work hard to win elections. The National Rifle Association (NRA) and the American Federation of Labor—Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), for example, help particular candidates in every election. But such organizations do not nominate candidates to run under their labels. Only political parties do this.

- Political parties have a broad range of concerns, dubbed a platform. They are umbrella organizations that develop positions on an array of policy questions. Most interest groups limit their efforts to a narrow range of topics. The NRA, for instance, is concerned with regulations on guns, and the Environmental Defense League is primarily concerned with issues related to pollution and the protection of ecosystems.

- Ever since the Progressive Period—roughly the turn of the 20th century—political parties have been subject to numerous state and local laws. They are “quasi-public” institutions. Interest groups, on the other hand, are purely private and free of government regulations. Indeed, the extent to which parties are also private organizations has been recently debated in the federal courts.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts the Social conflict theory as its theoretical framework. It is a macro-oriented paradigm in sociology that views society as an arena of inequality that generates conflict and social change. Key elements in this perspective are that society is structured in ways to benefit a few at the expense of the majority, and factors such as race, sex, class, and age are linked to social inequality. To a social conflict theorist, it is all about dominant group versus minority group relations. Karl Marx is considered the 'father' of social conflict theory.

The Evolution of Political Parties The history of political party in Nigeria can be situated within the context of the two-party and multi-party political system (Adejumobi, 2007), which can be traced to the development of nationalist consciousness, awareness and political movements (Agarah, 2004), that began in Nigeria in the 1930s. This activity specifically, is what Coleman (1986:22) described as the “second wave of nationalist movement which was ‘less militant and resistant’ but mainly concerned with sentiments, activities and organizational developments aimed at the selfgovernment and independence of Nigeria”.

A key distinguishing feature of the second wave of Nigerian nationalism was the development of permanent political associations to pursue national objectives (Coleman, 1986), with the various associations formed, by nationalists such as Ernest Ikoli, Herbert Macaulay, Samuel Akinsanya, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo and others constituting the precursors of political parties in Nigeria. Political parties in Nigeria display certain key features, which include:

- Their emergence and evolution has been closely tied to Nigerian constitutional development or evolution of Nigerian constitution. For example, it was the Clifford constitution of 1922 provision of four elective seats for Nigerians in the legislative council that stimulated the formation of the Nigerian National Democratic Party of Herbert Marcaulay. Similarly, political party formation enjoyed a boost from the Richard’s constitution of 1944 provision of regional assemblies while retaining the four elective seats to legislative council. Most parties have ethnic and regional bases or display identity orientations. For example, the Action Group (AG), the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), the Alliance for Democracy (AD) and the Action Congress (AC) had/have their basis in the Yoruba - dominated South-West of Nigeria. Similarly, the National Council of Nigeria Citizens (NCNC), the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) and the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) had/have their political strong-hold in Igbo land while the Northern People’s Congress (NPC), the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) and All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) had theirs in the Hausa-Fulani heartland of northern Nigeria.
- Only a few of the political parties in Nigeria can boast of having a national spread.
- Political parties in Nigeria have been prone to serious inter-party conflicts, divisions, splitting and decamping (Agarah, 2004; Adejumobi, 2007). These

features arise from what has been described by Rosiji (1992) as “caucus or elitist nature” of political parties in Nigeria, the direct outcome of thinking that the educated minority in each ethnic group are the people who are qualified by natural right to lead their fellow nationals into higher political development (Olarinmoye, 2008). In other words, political elites first create political structures then invite the mass to join. Political parties are created and directed by the elites in society who believe that control of government and of political power should be their preserve. They are, thus, not parties with membership drawn from across board and they have interests that are parochial, centred on elite objectives and actualization.

Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC)

The NPC was the largest political party in Nigeria. It was the governing party in the Northern Region from the early fifties until the January 1966 coup d'etat, and has participated in the Federal Government since 1952—as the senior partner from 1959 onwards. The NPC has almost exclusively restricted to the Northern Region and to the peoples of northern origin. The ethnic groups making up the hard core of the NPC were the Hausa and Fulani.

The NPC had strong support also from the Nupe and the Kanuri nationalities, and managed to obtain support from some sectors of most other northern ethnic communities. The party used all the means at its disposal, including "punishments" and "rewards", to make support worthwhile for most minorities and displayed an extensive willingness to integrate cultural groups which did not belong to the predominant cultural system of the north. On the basis of the composition of the NPC leadership, the party was an alliance between the traditional elites of the north, the growing bureaucracy and the moderate section of the new elites, mostly recruited from the northern aristocracy, and the larger businessmen belonging to the talakawa, the commoners in the traditional northern society, in which ascribed social status ranked much higher than achieved social status. These were also the social groups within the minority communities that were most attracted by co-operation with or within the NPC.

The NPC made extensive use of the widespread fear in the north of being dominated by the educationally more advanced peoples from the south. Its "northernization" policy, preferring applicants from the north to southerners for posts in the government services, was an important weapon in this regard and yielded dividends everywhere in the north, even in the minority areas.

It was an effective weapon against those opposition parties in the north that were allied with the two large southern parties, the NCNC or the AG, like the NEPU, the UMBC and the BYM.

National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC)

The oldest of the Nigerian political parties at the date of independence was the NCNC (founded in 1943). Until 1961 the name was the Nigerian Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons. It was the government party of the Eastern Region during the fifties and until the military take-over of January 1966, and became the governing party also in the new Mid-Western Region from the start in 1964. In the Western Region the NCNC constituted a strong parliamentary opposition until 1963, when it combined with the UPP to form the regional government. In the middle of 1964 the parliamentary party of the NCNC in the Western Region was split, a large section broke away to form the new NNDP, together with the UPP, and the NCNC loyalists returned to regional opposition, now together with the reduced former government party, the AG.

The NCNC was mainly a southern-based party, having its core area in Ibo land, and its strongest support outside Ibo land among the minorities of the old Western Region—which later became the Mid-Western Region—and among the Yoruba's. In the Northern Region, the local NCNC organizations were mainly composed of southerners, mainly Ibos, living in the north. The NCNC also had substantial support in the minority areas of the Eastern Region. The NCNC had substantial communal support in the Ibo areas of the Eastern Region and the Mid-West. The party leadership in these areas consisted of the new elites—people in business, professional men, intellectuals, administrators, a few trade-union leaders, etc. Though the party sought to attract communal support also in the minority areas of the East, its penetration was only partially successful.

In the north the NCNC had been allied with the NEPU since 1954. The NEPU was a radical party, with its basis among the Habe and Fulani peoples, especially among the urban dwellers in Hausa-land--craftsmen, shop-keepers, small traders and reform-oriented Koranic teachers.

Until 1957, the NCNC was also allied with the BYM—also a radical political party Ngou (1989). In 1957 this party switched to an alliance with the AG. Smaller, locally based, political parties or state unions in the Middle Belt and Ilorin were also occasionally allied to the NCNC. In the Western Region the NCNC had strong

support from most ethnic communities in the minority areas—later the Mid-Eastern Region—where prominent NCNC politicians took the lead in the separatist movement. In Yoruba land, one side in the various conflicts oriented itself towards the NCNC and the other towards the AG. Such conflicts included the old conflicts between communities, stemming from wars between the old city states of Yoruba land, and conflicts in urban areas, stemming from migration, between the indigenous city dwellers and the newcomers.

Nigerian Youth Movement

J.C. Vaughn, Ernest Ikoli, H.O. Davies, and Samuel Akinsanya founded the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) in 1934. Although based in Lagos, the NYM was the first Nigerian nationalist organization to promote politics outside of the capital. Furthermore, the NYM was also the first organization to stress national unity over racial divisions, notably between the Igbo and Yoruba ethnic groups.

In 1934 the British colonial government created Yaba Higher College in order to train more Nigerian technicians. The college suffered for being a native Nigerian institution, having no affiliation with any British university. According to the educated elite at the time, any college based in Africa was inherently inferior. Additionally, Yaba offered no courses on either public administration or economics, which were prerequisites for colonial administrative positions. The Lagos Youth Movement, renamed the NYM in 1936, was created in protest of these inherently inferior educational opportunities.

The NYM would outline its now broader fundamental mission in its 1938 Nigerian Youth Charter. According to its charter, the primary aim of the NYM was the development of a united nation out of the conglomeration of peoples who inhabited Nigeria, and the promotion of complete understanding along with a sense of common nationalism among different elements in the country. Politically, the NYM sought to increase the native Nigerian participation in civil service and government with the ultimate goal of self-government. Furthermore, the NYM established branches in urban areas throughout Nigeria in an attempt to promote inter-tribal cooperation.

The two most influential leaders of the early years of the NYM were H.O. Davies, one of the founders, and Nnamdi Azikiwe. Davies, had lived abroad for several years and studied economics at the London School of Economics. Azikiwe had studied at Lincoln University (B.A. and M.A. in Political Science), the University of Pennsylvania (M.A. and M.Sc. in Anthropology), and Columbia University

(certificate in Journalism) all in the United States. In addition to English, Azikiwe spoke Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, the three major languages of Nigeria.

Although founded on the basis of equal racial participation, the demise of the NYM eventually came from a combination of ethnic tension and political infighting, Leon (1967). Personal conflicts between Azikiwe, an Igbo nationalist, and the other members of the NYM, which as a whole was an increasingly Yoruba organization, were perceived by many to be signs of growing ethnic tensions. Eventually, Azikiwe would leave the organization in protest to what he believed were discriminatory policies against him and the Igbos. From then on, the NYM was mainly a Yoruba organization that had evolved into the type of ethnically-based party it was founded to prevent. In April 1951, the NYU was absorbed by two other Yoruba political parties and ceased to be a force in Nigerian politics. While the NYM's time on the Nigerian political scene was brief, its goal of unifying the stark regional, ethnic and religious divides in the Nigerian colony was an ambitious solution to a dilemma that remained unsolved even after independence in 1960.

Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN)

The Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) was a Nigerian political party that was dominant in western Nigeria during the second republic (1978-1983). The party revolved around the political leadership of Obafemi Awolowo, a sometimes polemical politician but effective administrator. However, the party's main difference with its competitors was not the leader but the ideals of a social democracy it was founded on. The UPN inherited its ideology from the old Action Group and saw itself as a party for everyone, Agbaje (1998). It was the only party to promote free education and called itself a welfarist party.

The desired goal of the military government of Olusegun Obasanjo to build national political parties led to a gradual weakening of ethnic politics in the second republic. The UPN as well as the People's Redemption Party (PRP) presented the most coherent plan of action during the electioneering campaign of 1979. The party jettisoned building a coalition of comfort in a polarized political environment but based partnerships on the cooperation of like-minded advocates of democratic socialism. The Action Congress of Nigeria was regarded as a natural successor to the Action Group and UPN.

People's Redemption Party (PRP)

The People's Redemption Party was a political party in Nigeria. The Second Republic incarnation of the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) and

the Fourth Republican incarnation of a similar namesake, the party was created by the supporters of Mallam Aminu Kano after his withdrawal from the National Party of Nigeria, Bello (2008). The PRP was highly regarded as a progressive left of center political party. Some well-known members of the party included Governors Abubakar Rimi, Balarabe Musa, Sabo Bakin Zuwo, Dr. Edward Ikem Okeke, BalaUsman, Abdullahi Aliyu Sumaila, Sule Lamido and Chinua Achebe, who served briefly as Deputy National President in the early 1980s.

The original party was banned following the Military Coup of 1984 led by General Buhari. In the Fourth Republic, the party with the same name resurfaced under the leadership of Abdulkadir Balarabe Musa. It could however not gather the same level of support as its Second Republican namesake.

Conclusion

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. The multi-ethnic nature of the country; the disparate nature of the regional politics; and lack of common 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 ethnicity, religion and personal sentiments. Consequent upon the numerous challenges identified above, finding solutions to the problems faced by parties must be holistic and should anticipate all issues already neglected in the constitution and legal frame work that guide the election.

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