

## **REASSESSING ETHNIC-BASED PARTY FORMATION, PROLIFERATION AND POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN NIGERIA: A PERISCOPE INTO THE FUTURE**

### **Abstract**

This paper examined the manifestations of ethnic cleavage and identity on party formation and proliferation in Nigeria's political landscape. Nigeria is unarguably a country with multi-ethnic nationalities with each group intermingling with one another in the tussle for political power. Observably, since independence until the Fourth Republic, the nation's social structure in terms of heterogeneity has significantly influenced electoral politics and formation of political parties in the country. This therefore raises germane concerns as to why political parties in Nigeria tilt more towards ethnic attachment and are bereft of ideological leanings, unlike their counterparts in advanced democracies, with far-reaching negative consequences on political integration and cohesion in the country. From a historical-descriptive perspective, the paper unfolded the bases for the rise of ethnic-based political parties as well as justified the contention that ethnic-based considerations in political process have contributed to political instability in Nigeria. Moreover, although ethnic-based parties featured prominently in the early years of independence and afterwards, which resulted to regimes displacements, the paper's analysis authenticated that ethnicity is still a foremost determinant of party formation and political contests in contemporary Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Consequently, the paper recommended prominently that political party leaders should avoid actions that could heat up the Nigerian polity and plunge the country into crisis with attendant political instability; rather they should focus attention on issues that will promote peaceful co-existence and unity among the citizens.

**Keywords:** Ethnicity, ideology, party formation, political integration, political instability.

### **Introduction**

Globally, political parties have been recognized as necessary institution for political stability. This may have informed Huntington's (1968) postulation that the stability of a modernizing political system depends on the strength of its political parties. A party, in turn, is strong to the extent that it has institutionalized mass support. However in the Nigerian context, due to many factors political parties are weak and far from being institutionalized. They lack coherent organization, not cohesive, incapacitated by lack of independent sources of funding, and afraid of competition. Consequently citizens confer low legitimacy on parties and party systems.

Nigeria is undoubtedly one of the most heterogeneous countries in the world. With a population of over 200 million, Nigeria is also the most populous black nation with over 250 ethnic groups and several sub-groups. Despite these characteristics, the country's political scene is dominated by three major ethnic groups, namely, Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo. Other sub-groups exist but are regarded as minorities (Isiaq, Adebisi and Bakare, 2018). The existence of sub-groups among the large and dominant ones raises the fear of domination of the minority groups by the major ethnic groups. Consequently, politics is played by these ethnic groups and sub-

groups in such a manner as to maintain the domination by the majority groups or to prevent and resist domination by the minority groups.

What is clear from the above is that Nigerian politicians selectively manipulate party structures, systems and arrangements to suit vested interest. The single party system which usually finds it difficult to incorporate all elements within a state without coercion used to be a popular brand in Africa. Similarly, the values inherent in multiparty option, which was meant to take into account the diversities of a typical African State, are always eroded by the sweeping influence of the dominant party as Nigeria presently experienced with the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). But the two party systems, which proven to be the most effective means of moderating polarization, given the experiences of Euro-American democracies, is not always a popular model in African States, Nigeria inclusive. Again, taking cognizance that China and Russia have made a success of one party system, Britain and USA of two-party, and Germany and France of multi-parties, it then becomes obvious that what is important for Africa and Nigeria particularly is the legitimization and institutionalization of political parties towards attainment political stability in the country.

### **Conceptual Illumination**

#### **Ethnicity**

The concept of ethnicity has been variously defined by scholars of all climes, though, there is no consensus reached on its meaning. This is because term invokes mixed feelings and subjective interpretations across different contexts or cultures, in the developing and developed countries. This is because many villages, groups and isolated communities, due to one reason or the other, came together to form a nation and then maintained their cultural practices even within the newly formed entity. These entities later metamorphosed into ethnic groupings within a state with different degrees of cultural uniqueness and distinctiveness (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996).

Azeez (2009) saw ethnicity as a sense of fellow feeling that has its foundation in the combined remembrance of past experience and a common hope and desire for the future. Ethnicity has to do with origin of a people. Thus, it is the existence of the group that makes ethnicity possible as ethnicity does not exist outside the unit or group that embodies it. Ethnicity could also be seen as the employment or mobilisation of ethnic identity and difference to gain advantage in situations of competition, conflict or cooperation (Osaghae, 1995). Thus, for the author, ethnicity is a readymade weapon for actualizing group desires within a Nation-State and a careful and deliberate attempt by social actors to outsmart other competing groups in the struggle to control the scarce economic resources of the State. Therefore, ethnicity is not

necessarily due to ‘biological attachment’ but the result of the interaction within the external environment.

Relatedly, Anugwom (2000, p. 64) posited that ethnicity should be seen as arising in any situation where a group of people, no matter how small, with different cultural and linguistic attributes from those of its neighbours uses this as the basis of solidarity and interaction with others. In so doing the group sees itself not only as distinct but as a group in itself and for itself.

Put differently:

Ethnicity implies the fact that the group feels ethnocentric towards others. That is, it sees other groups as relatively inferior and more or less as rivals. This feeling brings about certain attitudes which distort reality or breed subjectivity in the evaluation and perception of events. Ethnicity is also characterized by common consciousness. And this factor more than any other defines the boundary of the group that is relevant for understanding ethnicity in any point in time. Ethnicity in addition often contains an obscured class component. In this sense, it becomes a tool for the elite members of society to hold on to their privileges.

IIDEA (2000, pp. 226-227) captured the objectives as well as aspects of the subjective dimensions of ethnicity in its broad description that:

The concept of ethnicity refers to a social identity formation that rests upon culturally specific practices and a unique set of symbols and cosmology. A belief in common origin and a broadly agreed common history provide an inheritance of symbols, heroes events values and hierarchies, and confirm social identities of both insiders and outsiders .... Ethnicity is a social construct. It has to be understood within its historical context .... Ethnicity constitutes a way in which people think of themselves and others .... At the same time it also refers to sets of social relations within which social groupings such as men, women, poor, rich, young or old all relate to each other. It thus also refers to specific power relations at the same time as it refers to cultural relations.

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that ethnicity results from conditions of multiplicity of ethnic groups within a territory in which ethnic difference mobilized for political and economic interests in relation to other groups. This condition of politicized ethnicity has led to ethnic nationalism, whereby an ethnic group demands for a separate nation, state and local government possibly adopting propaganda, persuasion, violent or terrorist methods to advance its realization.

### **Political Party**

Conceptualizing political party accurately is particularly difficult because the classical and political philosophers as well as Liberal and Marxist scholars differ sharply on this issue. In a classical sense, Burke (1975) defined a political party as a body of men united for promoting

by their joint endeavours the national interest upon some political principle in which they are agreed. Similarly, Schumpeter (1943, p. 279) stressed that “the first and foremost aim of each political party is to prevail over the others in order to get into power or to stay in it”.

LaPalombara and Weiner (1966) conceptualized a political party as a political organization, which actively and effectively engage in a competition for elective offices. In effect, a political party is a formal organization whose self-conscious, primary purpose is to place and maintain in public office persons who will control alone or in coalition, the machinery of government. Thus, a political party, like interest group is an organization seeking influence over government; it can be distinguished from an interest group on the basis of its primary political orientation.

Agbaje (1999, p. 195) asserted that “a political party is a group of persons bonded in policy and opinion in support of a general political cause which essentially is the pursuit, capture and retention for as long as democratically feasible, of government and its offices”. In the author’s view, a political party should have three clear variables (i) a label in the minds of its members and the electorates (ii) an organisation that campaign for candidates seeking elective offices (iii) leaders that controls the legislative and executive arms of the government. In effect, a political party is a group that seeks to elect candidates to public offices by supplying them with a label - a party identification by which they are known to the electorate”.

In a contribution, Lipson (1964, p. 120) asserted that a political party emerges:

Whenever sufficient diversity of interests occurs among those who compose a society and the political system gives these interests an opportunity to combine, men will cluster into groupings, which may be more or less formal, and closely or loosely organized. They do this in order to better protect what they may possess and extend their influence to wider spheres.

In certainty, a political party is composed of a group of people like any other groups or organizations, except that it is distinguished by its unique objective, which, in a democratic setting, is seeking control of state power or government through nominating its candidates and presenting programmes for endorsement via the electoral process in competition with other parties.

Obviously, a political party denotes (i) an organisation of individuals who have common interest that they all agreed upon (ii) an organisation that struggles for state power and (iii) an organisation whose members make efforts to implement its policies and programmes through constitutional means.

### **Political Instability**

Political instability, according to Okolie (1998), is a social phenomenon which assumes various dimensions and equally reflects changing character and patterns of socio-economic competition and antagonism. In effect, political instability occurs when a change in government within a society does not follow the regulative rules of the society. It involves the idea of disorderliness in the conduct of political affairs which may include rivalry, contention, conflicts, insurrection, uproar and every other state of affairs which depicts the breakdown of law and order. In essence, political instability implies every act and activities in political process which defile the political virtues of tranquillity, serenity, orderliness, peace, unity and stability.

Raji and Wahab (2016) postulated that political instability entails among others, communal violence, rural or religious insurgency, urban riots, coup d'état and civil war as well as elites' disagreement over the distribution of power resources. All these forms of political instability can lead to mass forms of violence. Thus, as conflicts are common and unavoidable in all human society, so conflicts that can lead to political instability will occur where there is inequality in access to the control of natural resources and political powers as being experienced in Nigeria.

For Dudley (1973) political instability could be viewed as a change in political processes or activities which is in contravention and repugnant to the prescribed rules of politics. It connotes a condition where there is no congruence between the constitutive and regulative rules of the game or system, such that changes within the system can be made to follow as well as conform with its regulative rules. In a given political system or situation, if changes are made in such a way that do not follow or conform to the regulative rules of politics, and where there is absence of congruence between the constitution and regulative rules of politics, then it could be concluded that there is political instability. The author stressed that political instability is a characteristic of developing countries and should be seen as a necessary and inescapable condition in the creation of political order anywhere. That is to say that disorder must be perceived as a definitive state in any established, time-honoured progression towards an assumed model of political institution.

In the same line of thought, Adeyeri (2013) asserted that political instability is an unconstitutional change of government, either regular or irregular. It is a situation whereby a country is going through political turmoil. Political instability arises as a result of the inability of government of the day and the society as a whole to adequately address the grievances of the population or a particular section of the population. The source of grievances can be internal, external or political, depending on the circumstances.

As rightly noted by Kew (2006), one of the major factors responsible for political instability is the failures of the political class to sufficiently adhere to the basic tenets of democracy and constitutionalism. This situation according to Harriman (2006) has given rise to abuse of power, brazen corruption, disregard for due process and the rule of law, intolerance of political opposition, abuse of the electoral process and the weakening of institutions. This contradicts the tenets of governance, which presupposes the process of social engagement between the rulers and the ruled in a political community.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper is cast into the framework of incentive theory of party formation and party building as popularized by Lipset and Rokkan (1967). The theorists postulated that party formation and political participation is a kind of exchange: the organisation offers certain benefits in order to capture resources which enable it to function. These loosely defined benefits are what drive party formation and participation by its members. Striking the same chord of argument, Panebianco, (1988) and Strom (1990) asserted that a political party is an organisation that seeks benefits derived from public offices by gaining representation in duly constituted election. Hence, participants get involved in the party formation in order to obtain benefits, rather than shared identity or a feeling that joining the party is the 'right thing to do'. This strongly indicates the fact that the formation, maintenance and participation in a political party are due, largely to incentives or payoffs.

Lipset and Rokkan (1967) have argued that formation of political party has throughout the history stood for division, conflict, opposition within a body politics. As a result, political parties are formed based on ethnic, class or group interests. According to Hopkin (1999) and Nwangwu and Ononogbu (2014), group and individual interests based upon incentives as strong and stable as economic ones are constantly struggling for political advantage. Consequently, in the modern democratic states, political parties have developed largely as instruments of various class interests. Over the years, political parties have emerged in a number of ways and by different groups. They have been created by members of religious or ethnic communities, by individuals seeking to advance the interests of their social class, by the leaders of already existing political organisations such as trades unions, or members of cultural and religious associations, by governments and parliamentary factions, and even by ambitious or charismatic individuals. In the view of Elischer (2013), while party formation and competition is characterized by multiple cleavages in the industrialized world and in which communal boundaries constitute one cleavage line out of many; in the non-industrialized world, communal

boundaries constitute the dominant, if not the only cleavage line that structures party politics. The inevitable result is the introduction of ethnically based parties into the political system.

In the Nigerian context, the dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria - Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo - had, since independence, been engaged in the activities of controlling the political power of the nation, with the primary aim of controlling the resources of the state. The sole ambition of controlling the economic activities of the nation has led to 'keen hunt' for political power especially at the centre by the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. The political calculation and permutation of who gets what, when, and how of the political cum economic potentialities of the nation are the main sources of hostility and conflicts. This has continued to threaten the political stability and advancement of Nigeria as a nation. The incessant struggle for political power has always heated-up the nation's polity. Apart from the fact that this action has continued to polarize the nation along ethnic groups divides, the degree of human losses in political violence associated with power struggle has been unquantifiable.

### **Trajectories of Ethnic-based Party Formations in Nigeria**

Ethnic politics had been in existence since the colonial days in Nigeria and as rightly noted by Nnoli (1986), ethnicity more than other factors has been at the root of the development of political parties before independence. Ako-Nai (2008) opined that ethnic politics and rivalry in Nigeria could be linked to colonial imperialists who adopted the method of divide and rule to govern. Then ethnic groups were played against one another for economic gain from the British imperialists. The development of party democracies and subsequent formation of political parties in Nigeria began in 1923 after the adoption of the Clifford Constitution of 1922. Specifically, the constitution, which established the elective principle for the first time in Nigeria, paved the way for elective representation of Nigerians into Legislative Council also permitted the formation of political parties so as to ensure greater participation of Nigerians in their government.

**Table 1: Party formation during pre-independence Nigeria, 1923-1959**

<b>S/N</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Name of political party</b>	<b>Foundation members</b>	<b>Ethnic attachment</b>
1.	1923	Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP)	Sir Herbert Macaulay	Hausa
2.	1936	Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM)	Professor. Eyo Ita Samuel Akisanya Ernest Ikoli H. O. Davies Adeyemo Alakija Samuel Akintola	Yoruba
3.	1941	National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC)	Harold Dappa-Biriye Anthony Enahoro	

			Omo Eboh Macaulay O. Zireghe	Ijaw/Yoruba
4.	1943	Action Group (AG)	Obafemi Awolowo Samuel Akintola Anthony Enahoro	Yoruba
5.	1948	Northern People's Congress (NPC)	Ahmadu Bello Abubakar Balewa Waziri Ibrahim	Hausa
6.	1950	Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU)	Aminu Kano Abdulah Aliyu Sumalia	Hausa
7.	1958	United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC)	Joseph S. Tarka Patrick Dokotri	Tiv
8.	1959	Niger Delta Congress (NDC)	Harold Dappa-Biriye Horace Ozeke	Ijaw

Source: Etekpe and Edevie, 2021 updated by the authors, 2022

From table 1 above, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) was Nigeria's first political party formed in 1923 by Herbert Macaulay to take advantage of the new Clifford's Constitution, which succeeded the 1914 Nigerian Council. More importantly, the table shows the major political parties formed during the pre-independence era and their ethnic groups of attachments determined due largely to the origin of the founding members or organizations. For instance, the Northern People's Congress (NPC) was formed by Northern educated elements and top Hausa politicians from a pan-Northern Nigerian socio-cultural organisation, the Jamiyaar Mutanen Arewa (JMA) (the Association of People of the North) on October 3, 1948. The party held considerable influence in the Northern Region from the 1950s until the military coup of 1966. Similarly, the Action Group (AG) dominated by the Yorubas metamorphosed from a socio-cultural group, Egbe Omo Oduduwa (Association of the Children of Oduduwa, the mythical ancestor of the Yorubas) which was formed by a group of Yoruba students in London (Dudley, 1982; Dode, 2000).

In the view of Danjibo and Ashindorbe (2018), political party formation from the pre-independence era took a regional pattern starting with the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) which at formation attempted to be national in outlook, but later came to be perceived as a party principally for the eastern region, the Action Group Party (AG) for the Western region and the Northern People's Congress (NPC) for the Northern region respectively. Each of these parties therefore, regarded their respective geographic regions and ethnic bases as bastion and fortress from which 'alien' intruders must be kept at bay.

The unresolved issue of minority states was an important element in electoral struggles among the three major regional parties, namely the Hausa-Fulani-dominated Northern Peoples Congress (NPC), the Yoruba-based Action Group (AG), and the Igbo-led National Council of

Nigerian Citizens (NCNC). The elections held during this period often became a ‘crucial test of strength on the minorities’ issue’, with the AG, in particular, relying on the vigorous manipulation of ethnic minority grievances in a bid to penetrate the regional bases of its rivals and/or assume control of the Federal Government (Sklar, 1963). Indeed, the AG and its rivals established instrumental alliances with political associations which had emerged in opposing regions to advance ethnic minority demands. The AG, for instance, aligned at various times with the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), the Bornu Youth Movement (BYM), and the Ilorin Talaka Parapo in the North, and the United National Independence Party (UNIP) in the East. Although it flirted with various ethnic and political minority associations in the North, the NCNC was involved primarily with associations agitating for the separation of the Mid-West (which included a significant Igbo population) from the Western Region. These associations included the Benin-Delta Peoples Party (BDPP), the Mid-West State Movement (MSM) and the Otu-Edo.

Following the granting of independence by the colonial imperialists in 1960, the Nigerian political landscape experienced dramatic change with the emergence of the First Republic. During the period, Nigeria was ruled by different leaders representing their regions as premiers in a federation.

**Table 2: Major political parties during Nigeria’s First Republic, 1960-1966**

S/N	Year	Name of political party	Party leadership/positions	Ethnic attachment
1.	1960	Northern People’s Congress (NPC)	Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (Prime Minister)	Hausa
2.	1960	National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC)	Dr. Nnamdi B. Azikiwe (President)	Igbo
3.	1960	Action Group (AG)	Chief Obafemi Awolowo (Premier - Western Region)	Yoruba
4.	1960	Action Group (AG)	Chief Samuel Akintola (Premie r - Western Region)	Yoruba
5.	1965	Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP)	Chief Samuel Akintola (Re-elected Premier Western Region)	Hausa
6.	1960	National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC)	Michael Okpara (Premier - Eastern Nigeria)	Igbo
7.	1964	National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC)	Dennis Osadebey (Mid-Western Region)	Igbo

Source: Authors’ compilation, 2022

From table 2, it is crystal clear that Alhaji Tafawa Balewa who emerged as the Prime Minister was the political leader in the NPC. He was both a defender of Northern special interests and an advocate of reform and Nigeria’s unity. As a result, Balewa became Prime

Minister in a coalition government of the Northern People's Congress (NPC) and National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) while Nnamdi Azikiwe became the President. Though the NNDP was formed under the leadership of Sir Herbert Macaulay, the party had influence across the country. Of note, it was the platform used by Chief Samuel Akintola of the Yoruba's to win re-election as the premier of Western region. Before independence, NNDP had won all the three seats in Lagos into the Legislative Council in the election of 1923, 1928, and 1933. It also won the election into the Lagos Town Council when the elective principle was introduced.

Incidentally, the Nigerian Civil War from 1967 to 1970 followed by years of military rule truncated democratic processes and party activities up to 1978 when the constitutional and political reforms ushered in a new political epoch that led to the inauguration of the Second Republic in 1979. Table 3 shows party formation in the Second Republic.

**Table 3: Major political parties during Nigeria's Second Republic, 1979-1983**

S/N	Year	Name of political Party	Foundation members	Ethnic attachment
1.	1978	Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN)	Obafemi Awolowo, Adekunle Ajasin, Bola Ige, Prof. Ambrose Alli, Alhaji Lateef Jakande, Philip Umeadi, M. C. K. Ajuluchukwu, S. M. Afolabi	Yoruba
2.	1978	National Party of Nigeria (NPN)	Shehu Shagari, Maitama Sule, Makama Bida, Alex Ekwueme, Shettima Ali Monguno, Joseph Tarka, K. O. Mbadiwe, Adamu Ciroma, Joseph Wayas, Adisa Akinloye	Hausa
3.	1978	Nigeria People's Party (NPP)	Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim Nnamdi Azikiwe, Adeniran Ogunsanya	Igbo
4.	1978	Great Nigeria People's Party (GNPP)	Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim	Hausa
5.	1978	People's Redemption Party (PRP)	Abubakar Rimi, Balarabe Musa, Sabo Bakin Zuwo, Bola Usman, Michael Imoudu, Lekan Balagun	Hausa
6.	1982	National Advance Party (NAP)	Tunji Braithwaite, Eweka Onyemelukwe, Usman Girei, Dare Omobayo, Musa Salami, Uba Mohammed, Reuben Kutok	Yoruba

Source: Etekepe and Edevie, 2021 updated by the authors, 2022

From table 3, it is clear that the Second Republic political parties were reincarnations of the First Republic political parties with the dominant parties exhibiting similar patterns of

formation, orientation and leadership. For instance, National Party of Nigeria (NPN) developed out of a body known as the Northern Movement with some prominent politicians recruited from the Southern parts of the country. Correspondingly, the Nigeria People's Party (NPP) had its origin in the Northern part of Nigeria. The party was an offshoot of the Council for Understanding and Solidarity (CUS) created by young politicians from the Middle Belt who were opposed to the continued domination of the Northern minority areas by the Hausa-Fulani establishment. As the group could not muster enough support to single-handedly challenge the Hausa-Fulani political establishment in the North, it entered into a tactical alliance with the Waziri Ibrahim's group and some other groups in the South including the Igbo-dominated National Union Council to form the Nigerian People's Party in September 1978. Conflicts over power sharing and the nomination of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe as the presidential candidate of the party forced a faction of the party led by Ibrahim Waziri to pull out to form the Great Nigeria People's Party (GNPP).

It is pertinent to note that while historical evidence from the First and Second Republics revealed that political parties were either formed based on ethno-regional affiliations or invariably evolved into regional-based parties, evidence from that era also showed on-going attempts to forge party alliances and build coalition of like minds across regional lines which if not truncated by military intervention would have culminated in the formation of two broad based and dominant political parties (Akinola, 2014; Danjibo and Ashindorbe, 2018).

By the end of 1983, the Second Republic was aborted following a coup d'état led by Major General Muhammadu Buhari which ousted President Shehu Shagari's administration. In turn the Buhari administration was overthrown by General Ibrahim Babangida in August 1985. After about four years, in December 1989, Babangida's regime promulgated decrees No. 83 to set up and regulate the operations of two political parties. Table 4 shows party formation in the Third Republic.

**Table 4: Major political parties during Nigeria's aborted Third Republic, 1985-1997**

S/N	Year	Name of political party	Foundation members	Ethnic attachment
1.	1989	Social Democratic Party (SDP)	Prof. Tunde Adeniran, Shehu Musa Gabam, Clarkson Nnaji	Nil
2.	1989	National Republican Convention (NRC)	Tom Ikimi, Adamu Ciroma, Umaru Shinkafi.	Nil

Source: Etekpe and Edevie, 2021 updated by the authors, 2022

From table 4 above, the two political parties, the National Republican Convention (NRC) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) were formed devoid of political or ethnic consideration.

However, while SDP was being known for ‘a little to the left’, the NRC was known for ‘a little to the right’ in ideological spectrum (Odinkalu, 2001).

The annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential elections contested by Moshood Abiola of the SDP and Bashir Tofa of the NRC culminated in the continuation of military rule in the country. Afterwards, Major General Sani Abacha ascended power as the military Head of State via a bloodless coup and served between 1993 and 1998. Five political parties were registered during the General Sani Abacha’s military supervised transition programme as shown in the table below:

**Table 5: Major political parties in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic, 1997-1998**

S/N	Year	Name of political party	Foundation members	Ethnic attachment
1.	1997	United Nigeria Congress Party (UNCP)	Isa Mohammed, Atiku Abubakar, Attahiru Bafarawa, Ali Modu Sheriff	Hausa
2.	1997	National Centre Party of Nigeria (NCPN)	Don Etiebet, Alhaji Isa Mohammed, Gen. Joe Garba, Kenny Martins, Chukwuemeka Odemegwu Ojukwu, Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu	Hausa/Igbo
3.	1997	Congress for National Consensus (CNC)	N/A	N/A
4.	1997	Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN)	N/A	N/A
5.	1997	Grassroots Democratic Movement (GDM)	Gambo Lawan, Muhammadu Yusufu, Isiaka Ibrahim	Hausa

Source: Authors’ compilation, 2022

The parties, like those under the Babangida’s supervised transition programme, were not too distant from the government of the day. The parties rightly suited Ige’s (1994) description as the ‘five fingers of a leprous hand’. The climax of their unorthodox character was demonstrated when the five parties jointly nominated and adopted General Sani Abacha, then a sitting Head of State, who was not a registered member of any of these parties, as their consensus presidential candidate. However, this contrived and staged-managed transition programme collapsed like a pack of cards when Gen. Abacha dropped dead on 8th June 1998 (Ita and Basse, 2017). Following his death, Major General Abdulsalami Abubakar assumed office as the Head of State and lifted ban on political activities and announced that democratic elections would be held in 1999 thus ushering-in the Fourth Republic.

**Table 6: Major political parties in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic, 1999-2019**

S/N	Year	Name of political Party	Foundation members	Ethnic
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				<b>attachment</b>
1.	1998	People's Democratic Party (PDP)	Olusegun Obasanjo, Atiku Abubakar, Alex Ekwueme, Jerry Gana	Yoruba
2.	1998	All People's Party (APP)	Arthur Nzeribe, Olusola Saraki, Olu Falae, Umaru Shinkafi, Yusuf Garbah Ali	Igbo Hausa-Fulani
3.	1998	Alliance for Democracy (AD)	Ayo Okpadekun, Abraham Adesanya, Yusuf Mamman, Bassey Ekpo Bassey, Bola Ige	Yoruba
4.	2002	All Nigerian People's Party (ANPP)	Mahmud Waziri, Dr. Olusola Saraki, Alhaji Sani El-Katuzu, Gen. Jeremiah Useni, Hamidu Ajibade, Don Etiebet	Hausa
5.	2003	All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA)	Chukwuemeka Odemegwu Ojukwu	Igbo
6.	2006	Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN)	Bisi Akande Bashir Dahaltu	Yoruba
7.	2009	Congress for Progressive Change (CPC)	Muhammadu Buhari, Tony Momoh, Buba Galadima	Hausa
8.	2013	All Progressives Congress (APC)	Muhammadu Buhari Bola Tinubu Ogbonnaya Onu Annie Okonkwo, Ibrahim Shekarau	Yoruba/Hausa

Source: Authors' compilation, 2022

What is obvious from table 6 above is that though most major political parties had/have national look, they were/are believed to have strong ethnic attachment. For instance, the Alliance for Democracy (AD) was a tribal party formed to appease and promote the cause of the Yoruba people in the Nigerian federation following the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election widely believed to have been won by Chief M. K. O. Abiola, a Yoruba. Similarly, the All Nigeria Peoples' Party (ANPP) was originally founded as All People's Party (APP) by 14 Igbo and Hausa-Fulani political associations but announced the change to its name at a press conference in June 2002 when it merged with a faction of the United Nigeria Peoples Party (UNPP). The new name and changes to its logo and party colours was formally ratified at a special national convention of the ANPP in November 2002 (Okocha and Umar, 2002; Omunu, 2002).

In the same vein, the All Progressives Congress (APC) was formed in February 2013 as a result of the merger of Nigeria's three biggest opposition parties - Action Congress of Nigeria (CAN), Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), All Nigeria Peoples' Party (ANPP), a faction of All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) and the new PDP - a faction of the then ruling People's Democratic Party. Though the party has national outlook, it is dominated by the Hausa/Yoruba Muslims. Moreover, APGA is clearly a party for the Igbos having won the majority of seats in the House of Representatives and governorship in Anambra during the 2011, 2015 and 2019 elections. Currently, while APC is stigmatized as party of Northerners, predominantly Hausas, the PDP is counted as party for the Southerners.

### **Ethnic-based Party Formation and Proliferation in Nigeria: Implications for Political Stability**

Party formation and management is central to democratic governance in Nigeria even as the country is faced with the challenges of building strong and enduring democratic institutions. It is obvious that the formation of political parties based on ethnic or primordial sentiment weakens democracy and undermines its prospects for consolidation. Ethnic parties usually exhibit tendencies such as absence of internal democracy, lopsided appointment, etc., that are antithetical to democratic governance. Observably, the proliferation of ethnic-based parties has led to increase in the number of parties contesting for executive and legislative representation in the political system with attendant high degree of party fragmentation thus making the formation of governments a cumbersome process. The emergence of ethnic-based parties or an increase in the number of ethnic-based parties further minimizes the number of voters with the potential to switch parties (Elischer, 2013).

Democratic contest in ethnically segmented societies is often viewed as a hotbed of instability and conflict. Studies by scholars like Horowitz (2000), Bremmer (2006) and Lewis (2011) have shown that ethnic loyalties often inevitably become the basis for intense partisanship, thereby fuelling ethnic divisions and making ethnic conflict more likely. Upholding this position, Horowitz (2000) remarked that ethnically segmented societies and their respective political parties are in a reciprocal relationship. Once in place, ethnic parties aggravate ethnic divisions. They depend exclusively on the support of a particular ethnic group. Due to a lack of other cleavage lines, ethnically based parties are unable to diversify their electoral base. There is no transferability across communal boundaries. The total dependency on communal support puts ethnic parties under great pressure to satisfy group demands. They constantly face the possibility of competition within the group the party claims to represent. The potential of 'ethnic outbidding' by an intra-group competitor makes parties adopt radical positions. Party leaders

espouse ethnic demands, thereby bolstering chauvinistic elements. These positions are irreconcilable with the positions of other ethnic parties. Multi-ethnic parties or non-ethnic parties may emerge, yet they are not sustainable over time. Due to severe competition from ethnic parties and the lack of alternative cleavage lines, multi-ethnic parties disintegrate into ethnic wings. The lack or the dissolution of multi-ethnic parties leads to a “bankruptcy of moderation” within the party system thus making the formation of ethnic-based parties inevitable and ubiquitous (Reilly, 2001, p. 3).

The above scenario makes multiparty elections tense and conflict-ridden. The exclusionary political environment transforms democratic election outcomes into an ethnic census. Among the losers, elections produce a feeling of constant political marginalization, thus making political environment conducive for ethnic violence. Eventually, the prevalence of ethnic-based parties and the political dynamics they produce can lead either to the imposition of an autocratic one-party state - often imposed by a governing multi-ethnic party to avoid further deterioration of state cohesion - or by a military coup conducted by the army to restore stability and peace (Chandra, 2005).

By and large, political parties are indispensable for democratic rule as they bridge the gap between the state and civil society, aggregate the interest of their respective populations and, in doing so, structure the popular vote; integrate and mobilize the citizenry; and are in charge of recruiting the national political leadership. In short, parties are the primary vehicle for political participation. The nature of parties determines the nature of political competition. In societies in which particularistic parties prevail, participation is likely to be characterized by exclusion, which holds potentially detrimental consequences for state stability and peace. It is in this context, that political participation in Nigeria is viewed as being structured around ethnic loyalties.

### **Conclusion: Prognosis for Future Direction**

In contemporary democracies, parties are usually regarded as vital political institutions. On this view, they are a *sine qua non* for the organization of the modern democratic polity as well as for the expression and manifestation of political pluralism. This has generated a lot concerned about the questions of democratization and the impacts of ethnic-based parties in Nigeria. Although the effect on stability and peace is not clear-cut, ethnic parties negatively affect democratic competition and choice in the Nigerian polity. They minimize elite responsiveness, increase political polarization, and make political change, at least, partly contingent on turnout rates of individual communities.

There is no gin-saying the obvious that Nigeria's political parties are products of the country's tumultuous political history, becoming the complex system dominated by the APC and PDP today. The tripartition of Nigeria into Northern, Western and Eastern regions under the 1945 constitution gave rise to ethno-regional-based party politics, deepening ethnic politics and exacerbating tension and conflict along tribal and regional lines. Periods of military rule that interrupted democratic governance in 1966, 1983 and 1993 further restricted the development of political parties to represent and engage citizens. While the major parties that dominate Nigeria's politics have changed overtime, the foundations of the ethno-regional party system have remained in place. Rather than acting as the platforms for specific ideologies or issues, today's political parties are primarily used by Nigeria's elite to gain political power and influence. Party defections are commonplace, particularly ahead of elections as politicians scramble for the best platform to secure victory. This phenomenon has been particularly evident as parties' leaders with presidential aspirations have struggled to exert control over national leadership of the parties, playing out through internal skirmishes and schisms (International Republican Institute, 2020).

Furthermore, in Nigeria, political parties tend to be organized along ethnic, religious or geographic lines rather than around ideological issues. In colonial Nigeria, political parties provided an avenue through which to mobilize and educate citizens and grow the independence movement. After Nigeria attained independence in 1960, political parties were important channels for recruiting new leaders for the country's developing political sphere, and for allowing citizens choice and input into the selection of leaders. Political parties can also promote public accountability, collective action, popular participation, inclusiveness and legitimacy by ensuring the inclusion and consideration of citizens' principles, ideologies and goals in governance processes in Nigeria. However, parties' internal weaknesses and challenges in the political system have limited their effectiveness on these points.

The 2002 Supreme Court ruling that facilitated the creation of new political parties was intended to allow for a greater diversity of perspectives and voices in the political sphere, but, it has instead opened the system to abuse and manipulation. Today, politics and political parties are seen primarily as business ventures due to the influence of money. While the presence of a greater number of political parties may appear to give citizens more choice at the ballot, too many political parties can overwhelm citizens and discourage voter participation. In the 2019 elections in Nigeria, 73 candidates contested for the position of president, yet the top two contenders hailed from the main parties, the APC and PDP, and received nearly 97 per cent of the vote. Ninety-one political parties presented candidates in lower level races held during the

general elections. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has made efforts to address this in 2020 by deregistering 74 out of the 91 registered parties in the country, selecting those that had failed to win at least 25 per cent of votes in a least one state in the presidential vote or in one local government area in a governorship election. With 18 political parties left, INEC would be better able to oversee party activities and enforce the amended 2010 Electoral Act. Citizens can also better decipher differences between parties and feel more confident casting their vote in the polling booth.

As contended by Raji and Wahab (2016), to ensure political stability in the country, Nigerians should not see politics as a business but as a call to serve and to help distribute fairly the resources available in the country. Political leaders should not see politics as a call to acquire and divert government money to one's account, while the generality of the citizens will be languishing in abject poverty and unemployment. The political leaders, at all levels of government, have to be models to the citizens by avoiding inciting statements that could disunite the country and plunge the country into crisis, rather they should focus their attention on those issues that will promote peaceful co-existence and unity among the citizens. The past leaders have either intentionally or not, been carrying out actions that would constantly promote tension in the system and thereby consistently over-heat the polity. Also, the institutions of government in the country must work out an enduring strategy for crises management and resolutions. There should be a committee in the National Assembly and a unit in the presidency that will be in charge of crises management and resolution. Also, the focus of the government in Nigeria should be in ensuring good governance, since good governance will promote social justice, equality and even distribution of resources to the citizens. This will promote peace and stability in the country, and with peaceful atmosphere prevailing in the country, there will not be any need for any citizen to be deceived or enticed into thuggery or any situation that would lead to political instability.

### **Recommendations**

In view of the preceding analysis and the findings in this paper, the following recommendations are proffered with a view to guiding Nigeria's political parties and its leaders on conducts and activities that would ensure the attainment of political stability in the country:

- ✓ The founding of political parties as well as political contestation should be based on definite ideological orientation. Political ideology is an indispensable element of politics. It serves as a major instrument of power, especially in the determination of the mode of acquisition, use and consolidation of state power. It is indeed the political life-line for the

- animation of politics. It acts as a map for the practice and interpretation of politics because of its capacity to guide, support, restrain and rationalize political action.
- ✓ Political parties must be held accountable for their abuses of the system and failure to represent the interests of the Nigerian people. INEC and security forces must fulfil their mandate to punish perpetrators through increased arrests, investigations, prosecutions and suspensions. Additionally, political parties must use their internal accountability mechanisms to hold members accountable for violating party constitutions, which contain prohibitions against contravening the electoral laws and guidelines, which may in-turn heat up the polity resulting to political violence and instability. This entails establishing an Electoral Offences Commission, whose Bill is currently pending in the National Assembly, to investigate and prosecute electoral violations.
  - ✓ The recent amendment to the 2010 Electoral Act, which addresses some of the loopholes in the party politics, should be broadly supported by political parties. This is apt as political parties take advantage of weaknesses in Nigeria's legal framework for elections. For example, the old 2010 Electoral Act enabled the substitution of primary election winners with a party's preferred candidates, and failed to impose sufficient penalties for party defectors.
  - ✓ Intra and inter-party conflicts dominate Nigerian politics, creating an environment persistently vulnerable to political violence and instability. Hence, political parties should create standing disciplinary committees to resolve internal conflicts and enforce regulations against unlawful behaviour. The Inter-Party Advisory Council should also be strengthened and empowered to mediate inter-party conflicts and facilitate dialogue. The National Peace Committee (NPC), should partner with INEC to sign, monitor and enforce accords between parties. The partnership should also incorporate security agencies through the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security to prosecute and sanction accord violators.
  - ✓ Low voter turnout and disillusionment with politics and elections will continue to hamper Nigeria's democratization and quest for political stability unless citizens see concrete responses to their votes. Parties should increase direct communication with citizens about efforts to respond to their concerns and priorities. Political parties must run issue-based campaigns devoid of hate speech or disinformation to restore their integrity in the eyes of citizens. Once elected and/or appointed to political office, party members must follow through on the promises made during the campaign period. When citizens trust their

government to represent and respond to their interests, Nigeria will become less susceptible to political violence and instability.

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