Reassessing Ethnic-based Party Formation, Proliferation and Political Instability in Nigeria: A Periscope into the Future

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Authors' contributions

Review Article

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 another in the tussle for political power. From independence until the Fourth Republic, the nation's social structure in terms of heterogeneity has significantly influenced electoral politics. This raises germane concerns as to why the formation of political parties in the country tilts more towards ethnic attachment and is bereft of ideological leanings, unlike what is obtainable in advanced democracies. 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 the political process have contributed to political instability in Nigeria. Moreover, the paper authenticated the fact that ethnic-based parties featured prominently in the early years of independence and afterwards, resulting in regime displacements and 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 the Nigerian polity up and eventually plunge the country into crisis with attendant political instability; rather they should focus on issues that will promote political integration and cohesion among ethnic nationalities within the country.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, political parties have been recognized as a necessary institution for enthroning democratic governance and ensuring political stability in the polity. In its classical sense, a political party is a body of men united for the promotion, by their joint endeavours, the national interest upon some agreed political principles [1]. As an organization, which actively engage in a competition for elective offices, "the foremost aim of each of the party is to prevail over the others in order to get into power or to stay in it" [2]. In effect, therefore, a political party is a formal organization whose primary purpose is to place and maintain in public office persons who will control 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.

In the modern era, a stable political system depends largely on the type of system adopted and the strength of its political parties. For instance, China and Russia have enjoyed a strong, stable and successful one party system while Britain, the United States of America, Germany and France operates two or multi-party systems as the case may be [3]. However, in Nigeria, parties are weak and lacking in institutionalized mass support owing to the heterogeneous nature of the country. Accordingly, the nation's political scene has been dominated by the three major ethnic groups, namely, Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo and in rare cases other sub-groups classified as minorities [4]. Over the years, leaders of the major ethnic groups have been at the forefront of party formation and organization, thereby manipulating party structures, systems and arrangements to suit their interests. This has led to multiplicity of political parties formed majorly along ethnic lines.

Thus, the paper examines the manifestations and implications of the above trends, particularly proliferation of ethnic-based parties, on political integration, political stability and good governance in the country. Given the qualitative nature of the paper, the historical and descriptive research methods were utilized which permitted the collation of relevant and insightful information from the documentary sources on party formation in Nigeria from pre-independence era to date.

Significantly, the paper unfolds the bases for the rise of ethnic-based political parties, thus, broadening the theoretical base and body of existing knowledge in the area of party formation and proliferation in Nigeria. Practically, information in this paper is meant to be of enormous benefit to political groups, party leaders, national and international agencies concerned with party and electoral matters in by providing them the political lens with which to view and pursue future party formations in the country.

2. CONCEPTUAL ILLUMINATION

This revolves around three major concepts, viz: ethnicity, political party, political instability. There is the need to explain them for purposes of clarity.

Ethnicity: The term 'ethnicity' has to do with origin of a people. It is a group of people living within a state with different degrees of cultural uniqueness and distinctiveness [5]. It is a situation where a group of people with different cultural and linguistic attributes 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 [6]. These characteristics often promote the employment or mobilisation of ethnic identity to gain advantage in situations of competition, conflict or cooperation [7]. Thus, ethnicity is a 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.

The objectives as well as aspects of the subjective dimensions of ethnicity have been explained as "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, on the one hand, and a social construct or a way in which people think of themselves and others, on the other hand [8]. 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: Political party has been conceived "as 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" [9]. From the above explanation, three clear variables are manifest: First, a label in the minds of its members and the electorates; second, an organisation that campaign for candidates seeking elective offices; and third, 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.

As noted by Lipson [10], a party emerges whenever sufficient diversity of interests occur among members of the society that may possess and extend their influence to wider spheres. Overall, political party denotes an organisation of individuals who have common interest, particularly the struggles for state power for the purpose of formulating and implementing policies and programmes of government through constitutional means [11].

Political instability: Political instability, according to Okolie [12], 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.

In the view of Raji and Wahab [13], political instability entails, among others, mass forms or communal violence, rural or religious insurgency, coup d'état and civil war as well as disagreement over the distribution of power resources. For Dudley [14] it 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 congruent 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 congruent between the constitution and regulative rules of politics, then it could be concluded that there is political instability. The author stresses 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.

Political instability sometimes results to unconstitutional change of government [15], particularly when the members of the political class fails to adhere to the basic tenets of democracy and constitutionalism [16]. This situation has, in some cases, given rise to abuse of power, corruption, disregard for due process and the rule of law, intolerance of political opposition, abuse of electoral process and the weakening of institutions of government [17].

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is cast into the framework of incentive theory of party formation and party building as popularized by Lipset and Rokkan [18]. The theorists postulated that party formation and participation in politics is a kind of trade-off. Differently put, the system must sacrifice certain benefits in order to capture resources which enable it to function. These benefits are the motivations for party formation and participation by members and the benefits are derived from public offices through representation in duly contested elections [19,20]. Hence, citizens participate in the formation and management of party in order to obtain benefits, rather than shared identity or a feeling that joining the party is the fulfilment of civic responsibilities. 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 [18], thus, 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.

Scholars such as Hopkin [21], Nwangwu and Ononogbu [22] had suggested that group and individual interests are better protected under party system. In the modern democratic states, political parties have developed largely as instruments of various class interests and emerged in a number of ways and by different groups. For instance, they have been created by members of religious or ethnic communities, individuals seeking to advance the interests of their social class, the leaders of already existing political organisations such as trades unions, or members of cultural and religious associations, governments and parliamentary factions, and even by ambitious or charismatic individuals. Interestingly, while party formation and competition have been characterized by multiple cleavages in the industrialized world, communal boundaries constitute the dominant, if not the only cleavage line that structures party politics in the non-industrialized world, resulting to the introduction of ethnically based parties into the political system.

In Nigerian, the dominant ethnic groups had, over the years, tailored party formation along ethnic lines and engaged in the activities of controlling the political power of the nation, with the primary aim of controlling the resources of the state [23]. 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 the country. This has continued to threaten the political stability and advancement of Nigeria as a nation. The inordinate 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 Nwangwu and Ononogbu [22].

4. TRAJECTORIES OF ETHNIC-BASED PARTY FORMATIONS IN NIGERIA

Before independence, ethnicity more than other factors has been at the root of the development of political parties in Nigeria [24]. Thus, ethnic politics and rivalry have been linked to the policy of 'divide and rule to govern' adopted by the colonial imperialists [25]. Consequently, the major ethnic groups played against one another for economic gains from the imperialists. Of note, the development of party democracies and subsequent formation of political parties began after the adoption of the Clifford Constitution of 1922 [26,27]. Specifically, the constitution, which established the elective principle for the first time in Nigeria, encouraged the indigenous people to participate in the colonial democratization process [28]; paved the way for elective representation of Nigerians into Legislative Council and permitted the formation of political parties so as to ensure greater participation of the people in their government [29].

From Table 1, NNDP was the 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 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 NPC was formed by Northern elites and top Hausa politicians from a pan-Northern Nigerian socio-cultural organisation, the Jamiyaar Mutanen Arewa (JMA) on October 3, 1948. The party held considerable influence in the region from the 1950s until the military coup of 1966. Similarly, AG dominated by the Yorubas metamorphosed from a socio-cultural group, Egbe Omo Oduduwa, which was formed by Yoruba students in London [31,32].

In the view of Danjibo and Ashindorbe [33], political party formation from the pre-independence era took a regional pattern starting with the NCNC. At formation, the party exhibited a national outlook, but later became a party principally for the Eastern region, the AG for the Western region and the NPC for the Northern region respectively. The unresolved issue of minority ethnic groups was an important element in electoral struggles among the three major regional parties, namely the Hausa-Fulani-dominated NPC, the Yoruba-based AG, and the Igbo-led NCNC. The elections held during the pre-independence 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 [34].

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

S/N	Year	Name of political party	Foundation members	Ethnic attachment
1.	1923	Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP)	Sir Herbert Macaulay,	Hausa
2.	1936	Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM)	Prof. Eyo Ita, Samuel Akisanya, Ernest Ikoli, Hezekiah 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, Abdulahi 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, [30]. Updated by the authors, 2022

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 [35,36].

Following the granting of independence in 1960, the Nigerian political landscape experienced dramatic change with the emergence of the First Republic. During the period, the nation 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 (Premier - 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 Abubakar 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 [37].

Incidentally, the 1967 to 1970 pogrom, followed by years of military rule truncated the democratic processes and party activities in the First Republic. However, following the constitutional and political reforms of the era, a new political epoch ushered in the Second Republic in 1979 [38]. Table 3 shows party formation in the Second Republic.

From Table 3, it is clear that parties in the Second Republic were off-shoot of the First Republic political parties with 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, Nigeria People's Party (NPP) had its origin in 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 [39,40]. 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 Nigeria People's Party in September 1978. Conflicts over power sharing and the nomination of Nnamdi Azikiwe as its presidential candidate forced a faction of the party led by Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim to pull out to form the GNPP [26].

It is pertinent to note that parties in the First and Second Republics were formed based on ethno-regional affiliations or invariably evolved into regional-based parties. Evidence from that era had shown that attempts to forged 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 [41,33].

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, Adeknle Ajasin, Bola Ige, Prof. Ambrose Alli, Alhaji Lateef Jakande, Philip Umeadi, Michael Chikelu Ajuluchukwu, Sunday Afolabi	Yoruba
2.	1978	National Party of Nigeria (NPN)	Shehu Shagari, Maitama Sule, Makama Bida, Alex Ekwueme, Shettima Ali Monguno, Joseph Tarka, Kingsley 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: Etekpe and Edevie, [30]. Updated by the authors, 2022

By the end of 1983, the Second Republic was aborted following a coup d'état by Major General Muhammadu Buhari, which ousted Shehu Shagari's administration. In turn, the Buhari regime was overthrown by General Ibrahim Babangida in August 1985. After about four years, in December 1989, Babangida's regime introduced the transition to civil rule programme through Decree Nos. 14, 26 and 27, which birthed two-party system [42,43]. Table 4 shows party formation in the Third Republic.

From Table 4, two parties, the SDP and NRC were formed devoid of political or ethnic consideration by the then Military government. In spite of this, ethnic affiliation and traits were still noticeable in the membership composition of the parties, such that SDP drew majority of its members from the Southern part of the country, while NRC had majority of its members among the Hausa/Fulani of the Northern part of the country. However, while SDP was known for 'a little to the left', the NRC was known for 'a little to the right' in ideological spectrum [44]. The annulment of June 12, 1993 presidential election 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. In a bid to further politics in the Third Republic, five political parties were registered during the General Sani Abacha's military supervised transition programme as shown in Table 5.

Table 4. Major political parties during Babangida's regime, 1985-1997

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

Source: Etekpe and Edevie, 2021. Updated by the authors, 2022

Table 5. Major of political parties in Nigeria's during Abacha's regime, 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, General 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

Table 6. Major political parties in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, 1999-2019

S/N	Year	Name of political Party	Foundation members	Ethnic attachment
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	Ayo Okpadekun, Abraham Adesanya,	

S/N	Year	Name of political Party	Foundation members	Ethnic attachment
		(AD)	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, General 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

It is vital to state from the outset that parties from Table 5 were not too distant from the government that midwifed the transition programme and were rightly described as "five fingers of a leprous hand" [45]. Their unorthodox character was demonstrated when they jointly nominated and adopted General Sani Abacha as their consensus presidential candidate. However, the transition programme collapsed following the death of Sani Abacha and subsequent assumption of office as the Head of State by Major General Abdulsalami Abubakar [43]. The new military leader promptly lifted ban on political activities and conducted democratic elections held in 1999, thus ushering-in the Fourth Republic. The parties formed during the period are as shown in Table 6.

What is obvious from Table 6 is that though most major political parties had/have national outlook, they were/are believed to have strong ethnic attachment. For instance, the Alliance for Democracy (AD) was a tribal party dominated by Yoruba people. Similarly, ANPP originally founded as All People's Party (APP) was promoted by a coalition of Igbo and Hausa-Fulani political associations [46,47]. In the same vein, the APC formed in February 2013 as a result of the merger between ACN, CPC, ANPP, a faction of APGA and the new PDP though had national outlook, it was dominated by the Hausa/Yoruba Muslims. Likewise, APGA was clearly a party for the Igbos having won the majority of seats in the House of Representatives and governorship in Anambra during 2011, 2015 and 2019 elections. Of note, APC is stigmatized as party of

Northerners, predominantly Hausas while PDP is counted as party for the Southerners.

5. ETHNIC-BASED PARTY FORMATION AND PROLIFERATION IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLITICAL STABILITY

Party formation and management are central to democratic governance in Nigeria even as the country faces myriad of political challenges. Thus, formation of political parties based on ethnic or primordial sentiment weakens democracy and undermines its prospects for consolidation. Evidently, ethnic parties have exhibited anti-democratic tendencies such as absence of internal democracy, lopsided appointment, etc. Observably, the proliferation of ethnic-based parties has led to increase in the number of those contesting for executive and legislative positions thus making election management a cumbersome process and further minimizes the number of voters with the potential to switch party loyalty [48].

Democratic contest in ethnically segmented societies is often viewed as a hotbed of instability and conflict. Studies by scholars like Horowitz [49], Bremmer [50] and Lewis [51] have shown that ethnic loyalties have become the basis for intense partisanship, thereby fuelling ethnic divisions and making ethnic conflict more likely. Due to a lack of other cleavage, ethnically based parties have been 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.

Furthermore, 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 [52].

The above scenario makes 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 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 [53].

Certainly, 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 where particularistic parties prevail, participation is likely to be characterized by exclusion, potentially detrimental consequences for state stability and peace. In this context, political participation in Nigeria is viewed as being structured around ethnic loyalties.

6. PROGNOSIS FOR FUTURE DIRECTION

As pointed out earlier, parties are usually regarded as vital political institutions. 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 [54]. This has generated a lot of concern 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 political parties are products of the country's tumultuous political history, becoming the complex system dominated by the APC and PDP today. The foundation for the rise of ethno-regional-based party politics was laid during the colonial era, thus 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 [55]. The major parties that dominate Nigeria's politics have changed overtime while the foundations of the ethno-regional party system have remained in place. Rather than acting as the platforms for specific ideologies, 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 [56].

Besides, 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 [57].

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 [58]. In 2019, there were 91 political parties in Nigeria out of which 73 presented candidates that 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) addressed this issue in 2020 by deregistering 74 parties 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 [59]. With 18 political parties left, INEC would be better able to oversee party activities and enforce the 2022 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 [13], 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. 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 expediting legislative action on establishment of Electoral Offences Commission, whose Bill is currently pending in the National Assembly to investigate and prosecute electoral violations.

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. Moreover, 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 [60]. 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.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper set out to examine the manifestations of ethnic identity on party formation and proliferation and its implications for political stability in Nigeria. Within the purview of analysis, it has been established that since pre-independence (colonial) era, party politics in Nigeria was based on ethnic factor. Thus, the paper safely conclude that it was during this period that the seed of ethnic politics was sown which germinated and spread through the First, Second, Third (stillborn) and the ongoing Fourth Republics. A cursory examination of party politics in Nigeria has revealed that the colonial and post-colonial political parties were formed along ethnic cleavages. Simply put, the Nigerian situation has encouraged ethnic politics with the formation and proliferation of parties based on the three major ethnic groups - Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo.

Although the formation of political parties and their management are central to democratic governance in Nigeria, undertaking such with a preponderance of ethnic sentiment or allegiance has had insalubrious consequences for political stability in the country. Evidently, ethnic-based party formation has weakened democracy and undermined its prospects for consolidation, eroded internal democracy, heightened lopsided appointments and pauperized democratic dividends of the citizens, resulting in the negation of democratic governance in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the propagation of ethnic-based parties has led to multiplicity of parties contesting for elective positions in Nigeria's political terrain with attendant high degree of party fragmentation, hostility and voter apathy with the potential to switch parties. In point of fact,

democratic contests in Nigeria, as an ethnically segmented country, have become a hotbed of instability and conflict.

8. 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 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 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.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ 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 the 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.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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