

CIDOB International Yearbook 2008 Keys to facilitate the monitoring of the Spanish Foreign Policy and the International Relations in 2007

Country profile: Nigeria and its regional context
Annex Political system and State structure*

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Political system and state structure

I. Land and people

Nigeria lies between latitude 4° and 14° north of the equator and 3° east of the Greenwich meridian. The country occupies a land area of 923,768 square kilometers (i.e. 356,669 square miles) and shares land boundaries with the Benin, Niger, Chad and Cameroon, while its maritime boundaries are with Benin, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana and Sao Tome and Principe. With total boundaries summing 4,047 km in length, Nigeria shares its southern limits with the Gulf of Guinea (a part of the Atlantic Ocean also refers to as Bights of Benin and Biafra) by 853 km; inland frontiers with Cameroon in the east by 1,690 km; Chad in the northeast by 87 km; Niger by 1,497 km in the north; and Benin in the west by 773 km.

Nigeria became a creation of British colonialism through gradual expansionist efforts which started with the Colony of Lagos in 1861, but culminated in the amalgamation of Southern and Northern Protectorates with the Lagos Colony by Sir Frederick Lugard in 1914. This was sixteen years after Flora Shaw – a lady who became married to Sir Lugard – “first suggested in an article to *The Times* that the several British Protectorates on the Niger be known collectively as Nigeria.”¹

In its very natural characteristics, Nigeria is separated into three by rivers Niger and Benue. The Niger River, which is the largest in West Africa, flows from 4,000 kilometers away from Guinea through Mali, Niger, Benin, and Nigeria in the north-west and converged at Lokoja with the Benue River which flows 1,400 kilometers from Cameroun as the largest tributary of Niger in the north-east. Both rivers then flow southward as one to the sea in the Niger Delta region – one of the three largest wetlands in the world, where they empty into the Gulf of Guinea.

The topography of the country falls into four natural geographical divisions, namely:

- A dense belt of about sixty miles wide mangrove forests and swamps stretching along the coast and the greater parts of southern Nigeria with lots of agricultural potentials for the production of numerous subsistence crops and such exports ones as palm produce, cocoa, rubber and timber;
- The northern Savannah and the Sahel stretching from Sokoto to Lake Chad and as far south as Oyo, which, though punctuated by occasional outcrops of granite rock or inselbergs, is suited for groundnut, bulrush millet, peas, beans, guinea corn, wheat and cotton production and such specialized crops as tomatoes, onions, maize, sweet potatoes, sugar-cane, rice and tobacco, while the

¹ Michael Crowder, *The Story of Nigeria*, Faber & Faber, London & Boston, 1980, p.11.

rearing of goats, cows, donkeys and camel reared in the region provide superb leather for export;

- The northward hills and broad stepped plateau stretching to northern border, including sparsely populated Borno, with highest elevations exceeding 1,200 meters (This region, otherwise refers to as the great Jos Plateau, is rich in tin and columbite);
- The Niger-Benue river valley region commonly refers to as the Confluence;
- The mountainous zone along eastern borders.²

Climatically, Nigeria belongs to the tropic with variations which are governed by the interaction of moist southwest monsoon and the dry northeast winds. It has average temperatures of 30-32°C in the south, 33-35°C in the north, with an apparently high humidity from November to March which represents dry season and low humidity from June to September representing rainy season. With three vegetations – *forest*, *savannah* and *montane land* - annual rainfall in Nigeria stands at 60 – 80 inches in the south; 20 inches in the far north (Savannah) and 20 – 60 inches in *montane land* standing between the rainforest of the south and savannah far in north. According to a 1993 estimate, 33% of Nigeria land is arable land with crops spreading across 3% of the entire country, while pastures account for 44% of the land area. Portion of forests and woodland in Nigeria are put at 12%, with approximately 9,570 km² of irrigated land.

Archaeological evidence dates human habitation in Nigeria to 9000 BC.³ The country is today the most populous country in Africa and the eight most populous in the world, with a 2006 census figure of 140 million; out of which over 70% lives in rural areas.

The making of contemporary Nigeria owes its history to the 1885 scramble and partition of Africa which, though was started via the British Royal Niger Company's efforts to expand her sphere of trade, ultimately culminated in the declaration of colonial rule in 1900. This was further consolidated in 1914 when the northern and southern protectorates and the Colony of Lagos were formally unified as the "Colony and Protectorates of Nigeria", though the country had remained administratively divided into northern and southern protectorates and Lagos Colony⁴ until after World War II when the rise of Nigerian nationalism precipitated successive constitutional reforms that forced the British Government to concede to the need to prepare Nigeria for self-rule on October 1, 1960.

II. Political system

Nigeria is a complex plurality of cultures, peoples, religion, and by implication, ideas. This complexity of the plural character of Nigeria is

² See Michael Crowder, *The Story of Nigeria*, Faber & Faber, London, 1962; Library of Congress, "Country Profile: Nigeria", Research Division, Library of Congress, 2006, p.7.

³ Reuben K. Udo, "Environment and Peoples of Nigeria: A Geographical Introduction to the History of Nigeria", Obaro Ikime (ed), *Groundwork of Nigeria History*, Heinemann Educational Books, 1980, p.7.

⁴ <http://www.state.gov>

manifested in the country's adoption of a federal political structure in which the central government shares powers with composite state/regional governments. The country's experiment with federalism spanned a troubled political succession that manifested in the Westminster model of parliamentary system of government in the first republic (1960 – 1966), military rule (1966 – 1979 and 1983 – 1999) and the presidential system of government that lasted from 1979 – 1983 and 1999 – date.

Nigeria's experience with Westminster system of parliamentary government accorded considerable latitude to the component regions within the Nigerian federal system to organize their lives without interference by the federal government. The constitutional provisions that defined the exclusive and collaborative powers – Exclusive and Concurrent Schedules – of the federal regional governments were such that allowed for regional governments to establish and maintain diplomatic relations with Britain as well as secure foreign loans and open foreign missions in their domains without recourse to the federal government. The system functioned under a Cabinet headed by The Prime Minister who, as the Chief Executive arm of government, was also part of the Legislature from where he got elected by colleagues on the sheer majority strength of his party. The Prime Minister, who, in this case, was Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa of the Northern Peoples Congress, appointed his Ministers from the Parliament, while Dr. Azikiwe was the Governor-General. His position changed to that of a ceremonial President when the country became a republic in 1963. At the level of the three (and later, four with the creation of Mid-West) regional governments were Premiers who also rule through a Cabinet whose members were drawn from the Regional Houses of Assembly. The Premiers were also jointly overseen by Governors who were traditional rulers from the various regions.

One significant feature of Nigeria's experience with the Westminster model of parliamentary system of government was the apparently extensive functional powers wielded by regional governments, such that made the federal executive politically inferior. This was evident in the decision by Ahmadu Bello and Michael Okpara to remain as Premiers of Northern and Eastern Regions, respectively, while moving for their parties to nominate their deputies to the Senate at independence in 1960.⁵ This was the process that threw up Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa as the Prime Minister, while a source had it that the leader of opposition (Action Group) in the Federal Legislature, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, regretted not doing the same thing by sending Chief Samuel Akintola who was then his deputy in the same manner like Ahmadu Bello and Michael Okpara to the Upper House during the time in question.⁶

⁵ Ahmadu Bello was of the Northern Peoples Congress, while Michael Okpara was of the National Congress of Nigerian and Cameroons which later become National Congress of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) after the 1961 Plebiscite that ceded of the Camerounian territory that was under Nigeria colonial government under the UN Trusteeship to French Cameroun.

⁶ See J.M Ostheimer, *The First Republic*, Harper and Row Publishers, San Francisco, 1973; p.42; Femi Adegbulu, "Politics of the First Republic", in Akinjide Osuntokun, David Aworawo & Florence Masajuwa (eds), *Issues in Nigerian Government and Politics*, Rex Charles & Connel Publications, Ibadan, 2003, p.98.

Nigeria's presidential system of government shares the features of an Executive arm of government depicted in the Presidency, a bi-camera legislature (Senate and House of Representatives) and a Supreme Court. The country's resort to presidential system of government in 1979 was borne out of its tumultuous experience with early post-independence politics which oscillated between constant ethnic bickering, coups and counter-coups, civil war and protracted military rule. The goal of the Presidential system is thus to create a strong presidency that is capable of holding together the diverse ethnic and sectional groups under the oversight of powerful National Assembly. One common feature of the Nigerian federal system is the constitutional provision for elections into all executive positions at the three-tier structure of governance – Federal, State and Local Council and the maximum two-term limit for any elective office.

III. The Structure of state

The troubled nature of Nigeria's historical experience is reflected in its challenge of how to structure and run the affairs of the state in a manner that accommodates the interests of all, irrespective of their ethnic, religious and social leanings. This challenge, often captured in public discourse as "the National Question"⁷, has precipitated repeated political restructuring now sharply evident in the existence of six geopolitical zones,⁸ increased number of the country's region from three at independence in 1960 to 36 States since 1998, with Abuja as the Federal Capital, and the number of local governments which has increased from 131 in 1963 to the present 774.⁹ In each of the 774 Local Government Areas are several other traditional polities ranging from districts, villages and towns, emirates and chiefdoms which more or less operate within jurisdictional areas.¹⁰

Structurally, the Nigerian state operates in three main branches of government – i.e. Legislature, Executive and Judiciary. The National Legislature comprises the Upper House known as the Senate and the Lower Chamber called the House of Representatives. The Senate has 109 seats with three elected members from each of the 36 states of the federation and one from the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, all under principal officers headed by the Senate President. The House of Representative is a 360-member House headed by a Speaker. The number of seats per state in the

⁷ On the 'National Question', see Abubakar Momoh and Said Adejumo, *The National Question in Nigeria: Comparative Perspectives*, Ashgate, England, 2002.

⁸ The concept of six geopolitical zones emerged from the 1995 Constitutional Conference. The zones are: North-east (Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Taraba, Gombe & Yobe); North-central (Plateau, Benue, Nasarawa, Kogi, Kwara, Niger & Abuja); North-west (Kano, Kaduna, Kebbi, Katsina, Jigawa, Sokoto & Zamfara); South-east (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu & Imo), South-south (Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo, Rivers & Cross River); and South-west (Lagos, Ekiti, Ondo, Ogun, Osun & Oyo).

⁹ Dauda S. Garuba & John G. Ikubaje, "Stocktaking of Social Accountability Initiatives in Africa: A Case of Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative/Publish What You Pay in Nigeria" (Forthcoming).

¹⁰ National Boundary Commission (NBC), "Evolution of Nigeria's Boundaries" <http://nbcnigeria.org/evolution.html>

House of Representatives is determined by population. Election into the National Assembly is by popular votes of a maximum of four-year term, which could be renewed for another legislative term of four years. Both the Senate and the House of Representatives of Nigeria make laws with which the country is governed.

Distribution of the House of Representatives and the Senate of Nigeria

Party	House of Representatives	Senate
People's Democratic Party (PDP)	262	85
All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP)	62	16
Action Congress (AC)	32	6
Progressive People's Alliance (PPA)	3	1
Labour Party	1	-
Accord Party	-	1
Total seats	360	109

Distribution after the last legislative elections, held on 21 April 2007.
Source: IPU Parline

The Executive arm of government is headed by the President, who, like the legislators, is elected by popular votes for not more than two terms of four years each. The President operates in a cabinet comprising Ministers he nominated, but subject to confirmation of the Senate after a screening exercise. Others public officers that operate under this arm of government include all appointees of the President and ministers, including advisers, assistants and heads/members of various boards of parastatals and regulatory agencies.¹¹ Most of these people have professional qualifications, the criteria for their appointments are largely dependent on political affiliation.

The Judiciary interprets and applies the laws of Nigeria in accordance with necessary procedures. Such matters could be criminal cases or civil disputes between and among individuals and groups, including political authorities in parallel and vertical relationships. This important function of the judiciary through its courts underscores the reason for its independence from the Legislature and the Executive branches of government. The Nigerian legal system anchored on a combination of statutory (legislative) law, English law, and customary or Islamic (Shariah) law. The court system is pyramidal in power structure with the Supreme Court of Nigeria (SCN) operating at the apex, followed by Appeal Court/Shariah Court of Appeal and Federal High Courts in Abuja with numerous sitting venues across the country, State High Courts, and then the Customary Courts. There are other specialized courts

¹¹ Eme Awa, "Democracy in Nigeria: A Political Scientist's View", in Oyeleye Oyediran (ed), *Governance and Development: Essays in Honour of Professor Billy J. Dudley*, Oyediran Consult International, Ibadan, p.8.

like the federal revenue court and the industrial courts, as well as other arbitration panels. The method of appointment and removal of judges from office and the system of remuneration are the main safeguards for ensuring the independence of the courts under the judiciary. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court is appointed by the President who is the Chief Executive Officer, but subject to confirmation of the Senate, while other judges secure their appointments based on recommendation by the National Judicial Commission (NJC). Since the dawn of democracy in 1999, Nigeria has also moved pragmatically on the issue of remuneration of judges as a way of freeing them from accepting bribery offers and insulating them from being at the beck and call of the legislative and the executive arms of government.

While the above explains for the political structure of the Nigerian state, it is necessary to add that the structure at the level of the component states in Nigeria replicates the federal structure, except that the chief executive officer at that level is the Governor with a cabinet of Commissioners and other political appointees, and that there is only one legislature (House of Assembly) that makes laws for the running of each state. The House of Assembly, which performs the same function as that of the two chambers of the National Assembly, is also headed by principal officers who are on the overall headed by the Speaker. Also, the states judicial systems are in a sense linked to the federal judicial system in that cases from courts under state control can be taken to appellate court (Appeal Court or Shariah Court of Appeal) and the Supreme Court in that order.¹²

The local government which seemingly represents the closest tier of government to the people is headed by a Chairman and his Supervisory Councilors whose actions, as applicable at the central and state structures, are regulated by Bye-laws legislated by elected Councilors.

There are challenges inherent in the functioning of the Nigerian state structure. For instance, although the female gender had been presumably active in the political scene since colonial times, their roles and representations have been very minimal, as a result of obviously inhibiting factors, thus making them the most vulnerable and marginalized social category in political sense.¹³

Perhaps the greatest challenge to the Nigerian political structure has been the tendency to centralize governance, while laying claim to federalism principles and credentials. While there may not be a universal definition of federalism as it has varied, diversified, dynamic characters to the extent that different writers on the system of government tend to emphasize its different aspects,¹⁴ there is a common agreement on the fact the concept is "a

¹² While Customary Courts mostly associated with southern states, Shariah courts are known to be peculiar to northern states.

¹³ Dauda S. Garuba & John G. Ikubaje, "Stocktaking of Social Accountability Initiatives in Africa: The Case of Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and Publish What You Pay in Nigeria" (Forthcoming). For details, see Jibrin Ibrahim & Amina Salihu (eds), *Women, Marginalisation and Politics in Nigeria*, Global Rights: Partners for Justice, Centre for Democracy & Development and Open Society Initiative for West Africa, Abuja & Lagos, 2004.

¹⁴ In discussing federalism, some emphasise the constitutional federal structure as the dependent variable; others stress legalistic and juridical aspects that see the constitution as the independent variable and social

descriptive catch-all term for all political organizations that combine what Daniel Elazar called 'shared rule and self-rule'" (O'Leary 2001:277). Put differently, it is a form of political arrangement in a multi-ethnic country whereby powers are shared constitutionally between at least two units of government – central and component – to enable them function separately and independently without undue interference as expectedly exemplified in such empirical elements as a codified and written constitution, bi-camera legislature and Supreme Court.¹⁵

IV. Administrative organization of the state

The administrative organization of the Nigerian state owes much to the British colonial system of administration. The colonial administrative system divided Nigeria into protectorates, provinces, divisions, districts, native authorities and federated communities for administrative convenience. Interestingly, successive post-independence Nigerian constitutions from 1960 to date have adopted this system and further increased their numbers, though not without adopting different nomenclatures such as Regions, States and Local Government Areas. In 1963, the Mid-western Region was created out of the defunct Western Region of Nigeria. Four years later (1967), a more drastic restructuring of the nation was undertaken by the Yakubu Gowon regime, which broke the country into 12 States structure. This was further followed by another exercise in States creation in 1976 when General Murlala Mohammed gave the nation the 19 States structure. In 1987 and 1991 two and nine additional States respectively were created by the General Ibrahim Babangida regime. The Military regimes of General Sani Abacha and Abdulsalami Abubakar created another more states in 1996 and 1998 to bring the number to 36 states country excluding the Federal Capital territory (FCT), Abuja. These administratively divided states are organized into six geopolitical zones, namely: *North-east* (comprising Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Taraba, Gombe & Yobe); *North-central* (consisting of Plateau, Benue, Nasarawa, Kogi, Kwara, Niger & Abuja); *North-west* (Kano, Kaduna, Kebbi, Katsina, Jigawa, Sokoto & Zamfara); *South-east* (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu & Imo), *South-south* (Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo, Rivers & Cross River); and *South-west* (Lagos, Ekiti, Ondo, Ogun, Osun & Oyo). All the State creation exercises except that of 1963 were either followed by or done side by side with the creation of more Local Government Areas. The States on their parts embarked on creation of additional Districts, Village Areas, Chiefdoms, Emirates and Autonomous Communities.

outcomes as the dependent variables. Yet still, some emphasize the party system under federalism, while others bother themselves with inter-governmental institutions for structuring political and social interaction. See Dauda S. Garuba, "Oil and the Politics of Natural Resources Governance in Nigeria", paper presented at the XIV Biennial Congress of the African Association of Political Science (AAPS) held in Hilton Hotel, Durban, South Africa, from June 26 – 28, 2003; Oronsaye A.O. & .E. Imhanlahimhim (1996), "Theory and Practice of Federalism as a Form of Government: Reflections on Lessons for Nigeria", in A. Oronsaye (ed.) *Nigerian Government and Politics*, Benin City: Petersam Publishers.

¹⁵ D. S. Garuba, *Ibid.*

The component elements of the administrative organization of the Nigerian state have been grouped into: (1) the civil service; (2) special administrative agencies such as the civil service commission, councils of universities, Army, Police, Immigrations and Prison pension commissions; (3) parastatals like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Nigerian Television Authority, Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) (4) Regulatory Agencies such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the Security and Exchange Commission (SEC), Energy Commission of Nigeria (ECN), National Food Drug Administration Commission (NAFDAC), National Electricity Regulatory Commission, Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), Code of Conduct Bureau; and (5) Public enterprises majority of which has been sold for private ownership and management through the governments privatization and commercialization programme started in the second half of the 1980s.¹⁶

Beyond the fact that recruitment into these services are expected to be of high capacity, attempts to ensure equitable ethnic, state and regional balances have prompted the adoption of *Federal Character* – meaning roughly proportional ratio distribution – in dealing with appointments to positions in the country's services. The same balance is sought at both state and local government services.

The steady political and economic decline combined with long-lasting military rule have together destroyed a once functioning administrative system and massively undermined public safety and order. It is this imperfection that is depicted in the myriads of militant groups composed, mostly young elements that have sprung in almost all regions of the country, demanding 'fair' share of what is now known in political parlance as "the national cake." The opportunity provided by the return of Nigeria to democracy has reinforced the basis upon which these social categories navigate their ways.

V. Main political parties

In Nigeria, the evolution of political party was rooted in "a multitude of associations that were devoted to community improvement, political reform, and racial liberation."¹⁷ The greatest motivator for the emergence of political parties was constitutional development that ran from 1922 – 1959. The colonial government's adoption of legislative principles in the Clifford's Constitution of 1922 precipitated the birth of political parties from the precursory of Nationalist movements which had leaders such as Herbert Macaulay, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Samuel Akinsanya, Ernest Ikoli, H.O. Davies, J. K. Randle, J.C. Vaughan, among others, who took the forefront of political activities and party formations.¹⁸ The window of opportunity provided by the

¹⁶ Eme Awa, "Democracy in Nigeria:", p.10.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. xiii.

¹⁸ The Clifford Constitution of 1922 provided for four elected seats into the legislative council. Of these, Lagos was allotted three seats, while Calabar was allotted one.

Clifford Constitution of 1922 for the evolution of political parties did not only precipitate the formation of the first ever political party in Nigeria – i.e. the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) – which contested the 1923 elections into the forty-six member Legislative Council, it also open the door for subsequent constitutional developments like the Richards Constitution of 1946, the McPherson Constitution of 1951 and the Lyttelton Constitution of 1954; all of which retained and expanded on the legislative Assemblies and created regional Houses of Assemblies that in turn gave birth to several other political parties up to the time the First Republic collapsed in January 1966. The parties were: the Lagos Youth Movement (later renamed Nigerian Youth Movement); National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (later renamed National Convention for Nigerian Citizens – NCNC – in 1963 after the Plebiscite that excised Southern Cameroun from Eastern Region); Action Group which emerged as a transformation of a pan-Yoruba cultural organization called *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* in 1945 after the collapse of the National Youth Movement; and the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC), which, like the AG, was an offshoot of a northern cultural organization called *Jamiyyar Mutane Arewa* formed in 1949.

Other splitter and largely smaller political parties also emerged to protect certain minority interests in all the regions of Nigeria. In the north were: the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) founded by the late Malam Aminu Kano for the *talakawa* (peasantry in the north) in 1950; the J.S. Tarka-led United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) formed for the allegedly deprived people from the Middle Belt (north-central Nigeria) in 1955; the Borno Youth Movement of Alhaji Ibrahim Waziri; and the Ilorin Talaka Parapo (ITP) founded by Josiah Adedoyin with membership from Ilorin and Kabba provinces in present day Kwara and Kogi states, respectively. In the Eastern region were: the National Democratic Party (DPN) founded and led by Prof. Eyo Ita; the United National Independent Party (UNIP) which broke away from the NCNC; the Chike Obi-led Dynamic Party; and the Chief Dappa Biriye and Melford Okilo-led Niger Delta Congress. In the Western Region were: the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) which was a fusion of Chief S.L. Akintola-led Action Group and the Chief Remi Fani-Kayode-led NCNC; while the Mid-western Region had the Dennis Osadebey-led Benin-Delta Peoples Party which was later renamed Mid-west Democratic Front.

Notwithstanding the multiplicity of these parties, only four –i.e. NCNC, AG, NPC and NEPU– were identified as clearly established on a broad territorial foundation with each incarnating a distinctive political idea, though the first three of these parties were commonly identified as harbouring ethnic group interests. The NCNC was adjudged as standing for political democracy in a classical and individualistic form; the AG was for a federalist democracy that would safeguard the rights of cultural communities; the NPC depicted the modernization of traditional political authority; while NEPU espoused egalitarian democracy.¹⁹

As distinctive as the political ideas of these parties were, there were common grounds on which alliances were forged from the pre-independence

¹⁹ Ibid.

election year of 1959 up to the end of the First Republic in 1966. A case in point was the alliance between NCNC and NPC on the one hand and Action Group and other progressive parties on the other hand during the Independence elections of 1959; and the United Progressive Grand Alliance which was an inter-regionalist alliance between the AG and NCNC with other smaller progressive parties in the north, in opposition to the Nigerian National Alliance formed by the NPC with its inter-regional allies in the southern Nigeria. Despite these efforts to forge alliance, the political parties of the First Republic remained largely dominated by ethnic colouration, with each not only maintaining a base and stronghold in the region of its leaders, but also was ostensibly used by its leaders as political machines for the acquisition and consolidation of political power.²⁰

While the above depicts the character of party politics in Nigeria up to the fall of First Republic, the experience of the post-civil war political party system shared some degree of difference, though the parties that emerged were largely a re-incarnation of the broader territorial foundation of those of the First Republic. The Military incursion into politics and the subsequent attempts to strengthen federal structure in which state system replaced regional arrangements informed the decision of the regimes of Generals Murtala Mohammed and Olusegun Obasanjo to restrict the rights of political parties to compete in elections to "demonstrably national, rather than ethnic, religious or sectional foundation."²¹ General Mohammed was so disgusted about the negative impacts of ethnicity in the Nigerian First Republic politics that he suggested to the Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) to consider, where possible, a democracy without political parties or alternatively, one with a limited number of parties which shall be nationally focused.²² While the CDC did not recommend 'zero-party system' for Nigeria because it negates the entire principles of democracy, it nevertheless agreed with the position of Gen. Mohammed that a free market of political parties would, against the country's past historical experience, be unhealthy for democratic stability. In particular, the CDC report reads:

"In a segmented pluralistic society such as Nigeria, allowing parties to form on a free associational basis could very easily result in an anatomised pluralistic party system, and hence in an unstable political system".²³

It was against the backdrop of the foregoing that the CDC drew up certain conditions for qualification of party registration by political associations, as eventually incorporated in the Electoral Decree No 73 of 1977 and the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1979. Under the law political

²⁰ Ibid; James S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1958; Okundiba Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, Fourth Dimension Publishers, Enugu, 1985.

²¹ Ibid, p.xvi

²² S.W. Ibodje & Robert Dode, "Political Parties, Voting Pattern and National Integration", in Atahiru Jega & Okechukwu Ibeanu (eds), *Elections and the Future of Democracy in Nigeria*, Nigerian, Political Science Association, Abuja, 2007, p.127.

²³ Ibid, p.128.

parties were not only expected to register their names and addresses with the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO), make its membership open to all Nigerians (without regard to place of origin, sex, ethnicity and religion) which makes them national in outlook, and ensure that names, emblems and mottos of parties were not connoted of or associated with any religious, ethnic and sectional activities, they were also mandated to submit themselves to relevant programmes and activities of the Political and Directive Principle of State Policy as entrenched in Section 80 (i) of the constitution.²⁴

It was in this light of the above that only five political parties secured registration out of the 15 applications received from among the 53 political associations formed when the ban on politics was lifted in September 1978. The five parties were: (1) National Party of Nigeria (NPN) which was largely an offshoot of the NPC, given its support base from Hausa-Fulani, Middle Belt and Southern minorities; (2) the Nnamdi Azikiwe-led Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) which was a reincarnate of the NCNC with large following from old NCNC politicians, admirers and supporters of Zik as its leader was fondly called; (3) the Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP) which, though shared similar ideology, orientation and programmes with the NPP, had its ethnic based in Kanuri, the place of Alhaji Ibrahim Waziri, who was its leader; (4) the Aminu Kano-led Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) which reincarnated from NEPU; and (5) the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) which represented an offshoot of the AG with a heavy support base in the old western region inhabited by the Yoruba and people from present day Delta and Edo States.²⁵ The Nigerian Advance Party (NAP), originally launched under the leadership of Tunji Braithwaite since September 1978, joined as the sixth political party in 1983 when it secured registration from FEDECO in 1983 to run in the electoral process of that year.

As positively inclined as the intention were to have nationally entrenched political parties, the federal and state governments formed on the basis of the elections contested by the parties in 1979 and 1983, like those of the second republic, failed Nigerians. Notwithstanding that, the requirements for eligibility of party registration in the subsequent programmes of political transitions under Generals Ibrahim Babangida, Sani Abacha and Abdulsalami Abubakar only merely modified the content of the 1979 Constitution, except that the Babangida regime provided for a two party system, namely: the National Republican Convention (NRC) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP). The two parties, ideological categorized as of *left of the centre* (SDP) and *right of the centre* (NRC), were decreed and imposed on Nigerians by the Babangida regime after its refusal of registration of the entire 13 applications submitted out of the 50 political associations that were formed on the basis of the guidelines on party formation by the National Electoral Commission

²⁴ Ibid, p.129.

²⁵ Ibid; A.O. Ikelegbe, "Political Parties, Interest Groups and Elections in Nigeria", in R.F. Ola (ed), Nigeria Political System: Input, Out Put and Environment, Department of Political Science, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria, 2005, pp.132-134; "Political Parties and Elections in Nigeria" in Akinjide Osuntokun, David Aworawo, Nse Akpan & Florence Masajuwa (editors), *Issues in Nigeria Government and Politics*, Rex Charlse Publications & Connel Publication, Ibadan, 2003, pp.175-177.

(NEC). To ensure that members of each of the two parties were equal, the government made followers of either of the parties 'joiners' and not 'founders' and prepared and handed down their office structures across the entire country, constitutions, manifestoes, emblem, funds, as well as define their, methods of organization (including election of executives) and programmes.

While the deceptive manner of Gen. Babangida's political transition that climaxed in the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential elections which Chief M.K.O Abiola was poised to win eclipsed the NRC and SDP and what was supposed to be their crowning moments, it nevertheless opened yet another era of party formation, but now under Gen. Abacha's stiff guidelines.²⁶ It is worth alluding to that party politics in Nigeria under Gen. Abacha regime was not any better from the regimes that preceded it. The character of the five parties that emerged from the party registration exercise supervised by the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) – i.e. United Nigeria Congress Party (UNCP), committee for National Convention (CNC), National Centre Party of Nigeria (NCPN), Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN) and Grassroot Democratic Movement (GDM) – elicited questions concerning their capacity to act as agents of change and societal transformation. This became more evident when they, in a laughable circumstance, jointly adopted Gen. Sani Abacha as their presidential candidate in an ostensibly bid to effect the self-transformation of the latter into a civilian president, thus prompting the late Bola Ige, former governor of Oyo State and Minister of Justice, to describe them as the "five fingers of a leprous hand".

While the sudden death of Gen. Abacha may have saved Nigeria from the dangers that it was being led, the situation did not preclude the country from the same policy of official regulation of political parties in which the trio of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), All Peoples Party (now All Nigeria Peoples Party – ANPP) and Alliance for Democracy (AD) were registered to contest the 1998/99 transitional elections. While the decision to register only three political parties by the military authorities during the period in question went unchallenged due to the anxiety of virtually all Nigerians to ease the military out of power, the song changed in the wake of 2003 general elections when the people rose against the grand design by the Obasanjo Presidency, in brazen conspiracy with the leadership of National Assembly (of Pius Anyim and Umar Ghali Na'aba), to shrink the political space by manipulating the 2001 Electoral Act in contradiction to the prerequisites for party formation contained in Section 222 of the 1999 Constitution. The Supreme Court of Nigeria's interpretation of the relevant section of the constitution in favor of advocates of more political parties resulted in the registration of additional 27 parties to bring the number of parties at the time of the 2003 general elections to 30. The number increased to 50 in the run up to the 2007 elections, though only four have demonstrated prominence, lately. These

²⁶ Dauda Garuba, "Transition without Change: Elections and Political (In)stability in Nigeria", in Atahiru Jega & Okechukwu Ibeanu (eds), *Elections and the Future of Democracy in Nigeria*, Nigeria Political Science Association, Abuja, 2007, p.95.

are: PDP, ANPP, Action Congress (AC) and All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), while AD has lost its followers to the AC and PDP.

Having said that, a cursory analysis of political party system in Nigeria from colonial time above reveals much about rhythmic dislocations and disruptions and how this has foreclosed opportunity for an enduring, coherent and relevant party system. While party system may have started well in Nigeria, except for the recurring ethnic traits in their character, the condition of party organizing has grown worse since the return of the country to civilian rule in 1999 as efforts at institutionalizing a durable political party system that is capable of providing an abiding and workable platform have ended in further uncertainties, thus reinforcing the contradictions inherent in the Nigerian party system at the turn of the 21st century and its implicit difficulty in attaining the desired level of "coherence and validity". The sheer lack of ideology among existing parties and their followers have become the greatest problem in this regard, and as rightly argued by Chief Chukuwemeka Eziefe, former state Governor, Presidential candidate and Senior Special Adviser to the President on Political Parties, *"unless parties are formed based on ideology, no party can be better than a group of armed robbers who have agreed on how to share loot"*.²⁷

The absence of ideology in contemporary party politics in Nigeria has evicted large scale degeneration of parties, including the ruling PDP, on account of indiscipline. Chief Audu Ogbe, former Chairman of PDP once pointed to this when he said that:

"...the biggest problem confronting PDP is that, the party is yet to become a political party. It is more a rally. The biggest tragedy in PDP is gross indiscipline where individuals mistake democracy for anarchy" ²⁸

As the 'largest party in Africa' in terms of its membership, the PDP controls the National Assembly (Senate and House Representatives) with overwhelming majority. With due precaution to recent verdicts by the various Election Petition Tribunals across the country which are still under consideration at the Appellate Courts, the party also has established control of 28 out of 36 states in April 2007 elections and most states Houses of Assembly. These advantages have worked more against the party than they have worked for it because of constant daggers-drawn among its followers.

²⁷ *Newswatch (Lagos, Nigeria)*, April 9, 2007, p.6.

²⁸ See *ThisDay (Lagos, Nigeria)*, Wednesday, July 24, 2002, p. 6.