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## **Nigeria's Political Parties and the Development of National Consciousness: Observations and Appraisal**

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### **Abstract**

Political parties are an indispensable mechanism for the proper functioning of contemporary democracies. They perform crucial functions of recruitment of political actors, mobilization of the citizenry and provision of choice alternatives for the populace. It is thus believed that they should serve as rallying points for the building of the spirit of national consciousness, common identity and unity among the citizens. This article investigated the performance of political parties vis-a-vis the development of national consciousness in Nigeria from the First Republic and beyond. From the descriptive and historical analysis of data drawn mainly from the secondary sources, it was revealed that political parties in Nigeria have failed to promote national consciousness among Nigerian citizens. This, as the paper noted, has resulted mainly from ethnic inclination and other factors such as absence of ideological leaning, lack of common political aspiration and sentiment of unity among party members, inter and intra-parties crises, politics of exclusion and wrong view of political power as means of wealth for oneself and ethnic group by the founders/leaders of political parties. Accordingly, the paper recommended that the formation of political parties along ethnic/tribal instead of ideological line should be discouraged while those currently operating in the country with ethnic appeal and colouration should be deregistered by the electoral umpire.

**Keywords:** Democracy, ethnic politics, national consciousness, plural society, political parties.

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**Introduction:** Political parties are an important institutional component of liberal democracy and electoral process. Parties produce the candidates, set up parameters of issues and agenda within which elections are to be contested and are furthermore expected to perform these duties from one election to another. The growth of modern democratic

practice revolves around political parties, which stand out as organized platforms for the articulation of aspirations and canvassing for electoral vote. As conceptualized by Nnoli (1986), a political party is an organized group of citizens within a political system who pool their resources as a group with similar view and opinion and fundamental parties' issues in the political system with the intention to occupy the decisive positions of authority of the state.

Thus, in a representative democracy, political parties are indispensable structures that constitute the nucleus of the political process. Through their instrumentalities, the citizenry participate in the political process to control, influence and determine the kind of policies, programmes and authoritative distribution system in the polity. In some countries, like the United States, the citizenry appear predominantly to be divided along the traditions or political orientation of being identified as either Democratic or Republican. In Britain, it is Labour or Conservatives, though other minor parties exist (Ikpe 2000; Adebayo, 2006). Such political cleavages have grown and established themselves merely as a result of historical practice and emergence of little regulated political parties. However, the snag in Nigeria is that the reverse is the case. Nigerian political parties hardly live long enough before they are terminated by military incursion into politics. Their history too shows that they were/are ethnic based, while at the same time suffer from ecological fluidity prevalent in Nigerian politics.

Whereas in a plural and deeply divided society like Nigeria, it is believed that the weapon for achieving unity and national integration is the requirement for existence of political parties that can achieve national spread, endure over time and perform its socialization function through activities that encourages national consciousness among its members and the citizens in general. But where political parties are allowed to mushroom everywhere in a plural society, they may at best advance highly antagonistic, acrimonious, divisive, visionless and limited local interests. Consequently, the importance of political parties in a political system derives from the crucial roles they perform in the political process, such as re-ordering social priorities and re-directing their energies towards developing national consciousness among the citizenry.

It is against the above observations that this study becomes imperative. The study hopes to descriptively and historically examine the issues, problems and prospects of political parties in developing national consciousness in the Nigerian polity. It intends to provide an insight and unfold the lapses of political parties in the performance of their important role of developing national consciousness in Nigeria from the First Republic till date. Though the information in this study is limited to Nigeria and its electoral system references are made to other related issues and locations, where applicable, for comparative and analytical purposes.

It is obvious that political parties are of great importance in the political system vis-à-vis its functions and roles. Yet, in Nigeria there have been a lot of critical views about political parties not being able to provide the basis for rallying the nation into a common behaviour and thus serve as the nucleus of rebuilding the country and its citizenry, for the

establishment of social cohesion and development of national consciousness identity. Rather, they tend to play and encourage the politics of ethnicity and geographical groupings. Because of their nature, these political parties are not able to redirect the national will and vision from the politics of ethnic interest to that based on honesty, selflessness and determination to create social justice and harmony among the people. In view of the foregoing, the following pertinent questions were raised:

- (i) Have political parties in Nigeria been able to developed national consciousness in the country over the years?
- (ii) How has the ethnic nature of Nigerian political parties affected the development of national consciousness in Nigeria?
- (iii) What factors militate against the development of national consciousness by political parties in Nigeria?

In consonance with the above problematic, the objectives of this study were:

- (i) To ascertain if Nigerian political parties have been able to developed national consciousness in the country over the years.
- (ii) To determine whether ethnic leaning of Nigerian political parties has affected the development of national consciousness in Nigeria.
- (iii) To identify the problems militating against the development of national consciousness by political parties in Nigeria.

In order to address the questions in line with the objectives, this article critically examined opinions of some analysts and observers in the on-going discourse on the activities of political parties as it relates to the development national consciousness in Nigeria.

**Methodology and Theoretical Framework:** The study descriptively and historically analyzed data gathered mainly from the secondary sources such as textbooks, academic journals, magazines, conference proceedings, the internet and other library materials related to the subject matter of the study. The data were critically examined with a view to establishing the correlation between political parties and the development of the political consciousness in Nigeria's political terrain.

Given the multi-ethnic structure of the Nigerian state, this study was cast into the ambit of the theory of pluralism as put forward by Rabushka and Shepsle (1972) for its theoretical base. Pluralism is often used interchangeably with diversity (DahI, 1978). According to the proponents of the theory, a plural society is one in which there are diversities, especially ethnic and cultural diversities. Put differently, it is a society where cultural and ethnic sections are organized into cohesive political units. The theorists further argued that plural societies are characterized by the coexistence of incompatible institutional systems. The resultant effect is that conflicts, most especially ethnic conflicts, are rampant in these societies. According to Ducshit (1975), if these diversities are scattered in tiny pieces all over the country, conflicts will not assume alarming proportions as to threaten the existence of the country. But when diversities are arranged territorially, conflicts may assume very

serious dimensions that can threaten the very existence of the country. Thus, plural societies can be described as complex societies where diversities are territorially arranged.

Applied to this study, Nigeria is a plural society with more than 250 ethnic groups and 450 linguistic groups organized as a federation of 36 States and a federal capital territory. With such a large number of ethnic groups, certainly conflicts, particularly political warfare, along ethnic or tribal lines are bound to occur as various groups strive to hold on to political power. Political participation is based on ethnic parochialism. Party politics in Nigeria is nothing but ethnic struggles for power in view of the benefits accruable from holding power. From the First, Second, aborted Third Republics and indeed the Fourth Republic, party politics have been played along ethnic and regional lines. Ethnicity has to a large extent been used as a tool to influence party formation and voting behaviour during elections.

As noted by Tyoden (2002) party relations in Nigerian have been largely shaped by the character of the Nigerian society. The nature of the Nigerian society can be seen in terms of its plural character, its under developed economy and the centrality of the state in the affairs of the society. The heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian society defines the basis of social and political relations. Primordial considerations inform the formation of political parties and also have a major influence on party relations. Consequently, plural societies are considered responsible for instability and breakdown in democratic systems of government (John, 2000). In this context, Rabushka and Shepsle (1971) held that there is no way to demonstrate that stable democracy can be maintained in the face of cultural diversity and therefore submitted that viable democracy is a complete impossibility in plural societies. This is more so because in a plural society like Nigeria, ethnic sentiments transcends national interest and identity. Lending a voice to this, Oyadiran and Toyin (2016) asserted that in plural setting like Nigeria, its political parties tend to reflect the sectoral cleavages in the nation. The degree of conflict therefore corresponds to the extent of diverse groups and interests in its political system.

**Conceptualizing Political Party:** According to Udo (2003), a political party, generally, is an organization of adults (men and women) seeking to seize the power of government through democratic means for the purpose of projecting the national interest of the country through its own ideals and to enjoy the benefits from such control. He further stated that political parties are generally regarded as one of the primary institutions in every democratic system. Similarly, in the words of Nwankwo (1992:107) a “political party is a regular and permanent organization of a certain number of people concerned with either conquering power or keeping it”. According to him, the conditions or characteristics of a political party include ideology, membership, goals and objectives, manifesto, constitution and leadership. But the author observed that Nigerian political parties have been lacking the fundamental ingredients and conditionality’s of political organizations, and thus submitted that the formation of political parties in Nigeria has been influenced along ethnic lines.

In essence, a political party is a group of people and an organization like any other group or organization, except that it is distinguished from any other group or organization by its

unique objectives which, in a democratic setting, is seeking the control of government through nominating its candidates and presenting its programmes for endorsement via the electoral process in competition with other parties. In affirming this fact, Agbaje (1998:15-16) stressed that:

*Political parties have a crucial role to play in any democracy. Not to have a properly functioning party system in a democratic country is worse than tea without sugar; it is as trying to pass brown water as tea. There cannot be a meaningful democratic party without a properly functioning party process. It is obvious therefore that parties constitute the heart of democracy... the more vigorous and healthy they are the better assured is the health of the democratic process itself.*

In yet another observation, Agbaje (2005) remarked that although political parties are defined by a central function - the filling of political office and the wielding of governmental power - their impact on the political system is substantially broader and more complex. He cautioned that there are dangers in generalizing about the functions of political parties. Nevertheless, a number of general functions of parties can be identified, which according to him include: representation, elite formation and recruitment, goal formulation, interest articulation and aggregation, socialization and mobilization as well as organization of government. Furthermore, Agbaje identified the prerequisites for an organization to qualify as a political party to include: continuity in organization at the local level, self-conscious determination at both local and national levels to capture and hold the power of decision-making alone or in a coalition with others and the organization is expected to seek followers at the polls or in some manner strive for popular support.

Expressing the same line of reasoning, Diamond (1988) posited that political parties in democracies constitute a crucial institutional device not only for representation but for conflict management. They help to organize public opinion, facilitate communication between government and the governed, articulate the feeling of a community, and help in political recruitment. Given these basic functions, among others, Diamond (1988:26) observed that:

*There is no doubt that political parties are central to the longevity and vitality of democracy, and that their ability to aggregate freely, articulate, represent and organized within set limits is what determines the extent and contours of accountability in public life, including access to and use of power as well as political performance.*

Writing on the issue, Ikelegbe (2004) stressed that political parties relates directly to the political process in terms of impacting on the political system through its policies and programmes. The primary objective therefore is directly political, that of seeking governmental control or intention to seek to control or to participate in the government. He highlighted the fact that a political party is first of all an organized group with structures, hierarchy and leadership. Second, a political party has a political programme, which may differentiate it from others. The programme states its goals, policies, strategies and methods

of implementation. The programme is the basis for the mobilization of members and support. Third, a party's major goal is to control the governmental machinery solely or in co-operation with other parties. Fourth, parties seek popular support of the citizenry to achieve their goals. This is most important during elections.

In his analysis of political parties and party system in Nigeria, Dode (2000) argued that the number of parties may vary but the functions they perform in various systems are necessarily uniform, including political education and socialization of their members, articulation and aggregation of their members, mobilization of voters during elections, transformation of party programmes into concrete policies for national development, recruitment and monitoring of political office holders for public services. It is obvious from the foregoing that political parties are the mechanism for providing the voters with a menu of candidates and programmes from which to make their electoral choices. As a consequence, parties are indispensable to the functioning of contemporary democracies.

**On the Imperative of National Consciousness and Identity:** Consciousness may be viewed as the intangible metaphysical awareness of one's being and necessary belongingness to the world of existence. Consciousness is life assumed, and every person alive without it is dead, for, it creates an awakened refocusing of the mind, or redirects the being at where one should be. National consciousness is patriotism exaggerated and emboldened; and marks the first character and quality of citizenship (Yorgboro, 2013). According to Allen (1994) consciousness is the state of being conscious, that is, the physical and mental state of being awake and fully aware of one's environment, thoughts and feelings. National consciousness within the context of this study will mean the state of being awake and aware spiritually, physically and mentally of one's environment and the necessary feeling of bonding that goes with such awareness. It denotes a shared sense of national identity. To be nationally conscious is to identify with the spirit and aspirations of the nation as one soul in possession of one destiny and one identity.

From the above, five important concepts stand out: awakens, awareness, bonding, identity and destiny. As observed by Ozumba (2014), a nation is supposed to have one soul, one driving spirit headed towards one destiny through the same identity. It is the consciousness that forges the identity which in turn drives the spirit of the nation to national greatness. Consciousness binds us, welds us to the metaphysical and physical life of the nation and urges us to identify with the nation in all its travails because it is in its survival that we gain our survival. In effect, a rise in national consciousness is seen as the first towards a nation's greatness. In Nigeria there is no such consciousness that identifies us with Nigeria as a nation. For many, Nigeria is nothing but a mere geographical expression, for others, it is the orphaned cow that must be milked to death, for others, it is a no-man's-land where ethnic nationalities merely subsist in a marriage of convenience.

Identity is the state or quality of being a specified person or being which embodies the individual characteristics by which a person or thing can be identified (Allen, 1994). National identity is the characteristics that identify citizens of a country or nation state with the aspirations of their nation. This identity is seen in our actions, thoughts, aspirations

behaviours and speeches. All must depict not only a spiritual alignment with, but physical destiny of the nation. It is the consciousness that engenders the identity and the identity in turn reinforces the consciousness.

The truth that has to be known is that one nation means one destiny; we either stand or fall with it. We have only one natural nation of birth where we are entitled to all the rights and privileges. Our survival, our identity, our pride, our confidence, our prosperity, independence, etc, are derivable from that nation. When a person identifies with another person in all his travails, their souls are knit together and if it continues for a long time they build a common bond of unity. This is what happens in a properly integrated marital union (Ozumba, 2014).

Nigerians need to begin to see Nigeria as their only nation, we should identify with the developmental travails and aspirations of our nation. This will make us to be ready to swim or sink with our nation, to work for its holistic survival and its continuous progress. It is this that will make us to see every component unit of our nation as inalienable, and integral to our holistic well-being. This means that there will be a conscious effort to see every Nigerian as your kith and kin. As an instance, the Americans submerged their racial demarcation by voting Obama into the presidency. It is a process of assimilation, integration, bonding and coalescing which reduces the differences among tribes to the barest minimum and they all now share more things in common and show same readiness to defend the nation from political, cultural, political, economic, social or psychological invasion. This is a point where we all in sincerity see ourselves as stakeholders in the Nigerian project. Thus one find wisdom in the words of Obama (cited in Shaffer, 2009) that we need the audacity of hope which will engender the type of politics that brings us together rather than politics that breaks us apart.

**Thoughts on Political Parties and the Development of National Consciousness in Nigeria:** Obviously, political parties in Nigeria attempt to develop national consciousness through a number of ways. They fulfil this role through political education of the populace on their manifestoes, government policies, programmes and activities. They mobilize the masses and create socio-economic and political awareness amongst the citizens. They also generate and develop national consciousness through their political socialization role. This involves the process by which the political culture of a political system is transmitted from one generation to another. Thus, political parties, through political socialization, shape and transmit the Nigeria's political culture and consciousness (Eminue, 2005).

Again, political parties develop national consciousness through interest articulation role in the political system. This involves identifying and sorting out from numerous conflicting mass of problems, ideas and interests, those ones considered as more important, analyzing them and presenting such in form of policy options to the people for consideration. The political parties also bring to the notice of the general public some citizens possessing leadership attributes or capabilities by presenting them for elections and appointments through its leadership recruitment role. Thus, they create in the people the consciousness of electing their representatives based on their potentials and capabilities.

Nevertheless, political parties in Nigeria, especially those formed between 1999 and 2015, have not impacted much on the development of national consciousness in the country. The proliferation of political parties from three (3) in 1999 to thirty (30) in 2003, fifty (50) in 2007 and sixty-three (63) in 2011 in the country, most of which were formed around an individual or ethnic group, have negatively impacted on national consciousness. Such ethnic oriented political parties do not have good influence on the political system. This had been the case in the First Republic and its tendencies also manifested in the Second Republic and in the ongoing Fourth Republic. As observed by Dode (2000:51):

*The parties always fought for, defended, protected and promoted the regional and ethnic identity and interest of their areas of origin without any sense of compromise. Any political gain achieved by the parties was seen as victory for the ethnic group which dominated each political party.*

Furthermore, as maintained by Nnoli (1986), a condition of politicization of ethnicity and the use of government powers for ethnic socio-economic co-operation breed ethnic hostilities, hence the lack of oneness and national consciousness amongst the ethnic nationalities. It is worth noting that in the present crop of political parties, most of them lack national outlook and spread, they are hardly identified in most States and Local Government Areas in the federation, yet they are registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as political parties. Some of these political parties are mostly noted in terms of ethnic interpretations and affiliations, championing the interest of various ethnic groups. Moreover, these parties covertly and overtly used emotive ethnic symbols and played on alleged ethnic conflict or interest as means of mobilizing mass support for their own selfish class interest.

Sklar (1963), in his classical analysis of Nigeria's political parties and the nature of the party system during the First Republic postulated that the parties had ethnic fixation which was as a result of the system of administration (indirect rule), and divisive politics promoted by colonial regimes. He went on to state that ethnicity provided an organic solidarity among a group of people, but its consequences for political action makes it a highly conflicted phenomenon. Sklar rightly argued however, that although the ethnic bases and colouration of political parties are historically rooted, their consolidation and the ensuing conflict in national politics cannot be over-emphasized. This ethnic colouration of political parties with its negative effects has indeed extended beyond to the present day Nigeria. Due to ethnic character of Nigerian political parties less attention is paid to party programmes in most cases while emphasis is often shifted from party politics to ethnic background of party leaders and their stronghold of power.

That the activities of the Nigerian political parties were and are still fashioned along ethnic lines is evident in the pattern of mobilization of the masses for political support during elections. For instance, the National Council of Nigerian Citizen (NCNC), the Northern People's Congress (NPC) and the Action Group (AG) were the dominant political parties in the politics of the First Republic. These parties, however, became associated with the three ethnic groups: Ibo, Hausa and Yoruba and the three regions of the country: East,

North and West. These greatly influenced ethnic struggle for political power in Nigeria until the parties were decreed out of existence by the military government which came to power after the coup d'état of 15 January 1966.

The Second Republic parties did not do much better than those of the First Republic in terms of ethnic orientation, character and formation. The parties were formed and led by their leaders in the First Republic, except where the leader had been killed in the coup that terminated the First Republic. A modified, yet tripartite system of power sharing, with others hanging on, reappeared with the dominant party in the federation, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) being strongest in the Northern States, second placed strongest party the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) was located in the Yoruba axis, while the third placed strongest the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) was in the Igbo areas. Others fell into the category of the minorities. These parties were once again swept into oblivion by the military on December 31, 1983 through a bloodless coup d'état.

During the aborted Third Republic the military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida established two political parties, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC). The SDP was seen as the Southern party while NRC was seen as the Northern party. With this dichotomy between the South and North, ethnic manipulation was very visible and it culminated in the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election believed by many to have been won by Chief M. K. O. Abiola from the South.

Regarding the Fourth Republic, starting from the origin of the first three political parties, the then ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) was described as mixed bag of persons with different ideologies, that is, the conservatives, the radicals and the progressives who do not only misunderstand themselves but are regularly feuding. The Alliance for Democracy (AD) was Yoruba based party, formed just to see that power returned to the West. The compositions of All Peoples Party (APP) (later All Nigeria's People Party (ANPP)) are the set of politicians who supported or served under Abacha regime, taking more of Northern outlook while the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) emerged as the political nest of Igbo clan (Adebayo, 2006). This explains why the current political dispensation has witnessed more intra-party and inter-party conflicts than the previous ones.

Consequently, the parties have found it extremely difficult to emphasize politics of issues. Rather, their mobilization of popular forces have been largely driven by ethnicity and religion, as much as the influence of godfathers and money politics. These forces, more than anything else, also determine the pattern of electoral victory of the parties. In the circumstance, parties have suddenly descended to the level of being used to promote personal and sectional interests at the expense of the collective good and the will of the people especially national integration and development. For instance, in the build up to the 2003 presidential election, for example, General Mohammedu Buhari, the defunct ANPP presidential candidate, reportedly made a public declaration calling on Northerners and Muslims to vote for a Muslim candidate, apparently referring to himself. At the end of the

pool, the result indicated that he actually garnered most of his votes in the Islamic dominated Northern states. Other presidential candidates, including PDP's Obasanjo, also maintained this pattern in their respective bases (Omotola, 2004).

The situation painted above may have led Crowder (1978) to the conclusion that the greatest disservice of the colonialists to Nigeria was their decision to register political parties along ethnic/tribal lines. As if he had a premonition of what will become of Nigeria in terms of party politics, Crowder predicted that every epoch or phase of Nigeria's political evolution will be influenced to a large extent, by ethnic cleavages and parochial sentiments. Apparently, ethnicity in party politics has been the bane of political development of Nigeria. For instance, the result of elections over the years have showed voting behaviour along ethnic lines. These have resulted in parties recruiting thugs, hence rampant political killings in the country. Political parties are suppose to maintain and transmit the political culture of the country from one generation to another through the process of political socialization as well as provide effective political education and awareness to the populace which would have enhanced national consciousness in the people. Sadly, the political parties are rated low in these areas. Evidently, in most cases, the populace is not effectively educated on parties' manifestoes, nor the candidates presented by them have anything to offer the electorates or inform them of programmes and policies they will implement when elected into office.

One of the major features of a political party is its ideological inclination. In western democracies, political parties are usually registered on ideological grounds whereas from the analysis above, the reverse is the case in Nigeria. Obviously, most political parties in Nigeria are not inclined to any political ideology hence lack vision and direction. Political ideology performs the function of political socialization as well as serves as instrument for providing guidelines to the masses on appropriate political behaviours. It defines appropriate rules for the political game, the mode of competitive democracy and the channels available for conflict resolution within the system. But in the Nigerian context, there exist parties made up of strange bed fellows who do not have common goals and objectives, a situation which breeds frequent intra party conflicts. Such parties neither work for national interest nor think of working towards developing national awareness and consciousness in the polity. There is general insecurity, hopelessness, conflict and lack of real political freedom in today's Nigeria. Few political jobbers, through political parties in government, perpetually in the corridors of power surely constitute a great threat to democracy which can also destroy the rationality of one just Nigeria.

In essence, political parties in present day Nigeria are ill-equipped in developing national consciousness. They have not improved the country's political climate. There are still violence, thuggery, politics of bitterness and the winner-takes-all in the country as was the case in the First and Second Republics. Nigerian political parties have neither improved the orientation of the people towards nationhood, nor have they positively changed citizens' ways of doing things as a people for the better. Personal interests and gains have affected

the fabric of our political system, rendering the parties ineffective towards the development of national consciousness.

Political parties in Nigeria have not been able to impact on national consciousness because of their selfish and individual interests and their leaders' view of political power as a means for the acquisition of wealth. They therefore deviate from their fundamental role and seek to realize personal goals. Team work, team spirit and trust which are supposed to exist and bind members of political parties together are abysmally lacking.

**Impediments to the Development of National Consciousness by Nigeria's Political Parties:** Despite the claims by political parties towards developing national consciousness in Nigeria through its political socialization, political education and communication roles, certain factors combine to militate against the success of these efforts. Within the context of this study, some of these factors include:

**The view of politics as a means for acquisition of wealth:** Members of political parties see politics as a means of acquiring wealth; and political power as an instrument whose possession enable the holders, either as a group or as individuals to appropriate the society's wealth to one's ethnic group or to oneself. This had been the case from the First to the on-going Fourth Republic. Ikpe (2000) has succinctly expressed the view that of all the benefit sought for by the Nigerian political elite, accumulation of wealth is the most crucial. This accumulation of wealth is acquired principally through the use State power. In other words, the primary aim of the office/power seeker is the acquisition of wealth. As should be expected, the commodification of and privatisation of political office leads to a kind of political competition that is generally ruthless and normless. In this circumstance, it would appear that whatever methods which could give advantage to the competitors including bribery and harassment of voters, would be employed. The voters could then be described as victims of circumstance, manipulated by the elite with money, threats of violence, or ethnic solidarity. The essence of all these is to give the power seekers access to the coveted office and once this is achieved, the business of wealth accumulation for self, cronies and members of ethnic group begins oblivious of election promises and electorate.

**Ethnicity:** Most political parties in Nigeria tend to further and satisfy the interest of ethnic groups. They are formed around individuals or ethnic groups, thus negating its role of developing national consciousness among its members. According to Nnoli (1978), under condition of the politicization of ethnicity and the use of political powers for inter-ethnic competition, the struggle for national power is seen simply as the struggle as to which of the contending ethnic groups of Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba would control the national political power to appropriate the wealth of the nation in a way most favourable to its own ethnic group. The above evidence and indicator is not farfetched from how Nigeria's political centre stage is toady mostly influenced by sectional associations: *Afenifere*, *Ohaneze N'digbo*, Arewa Consultative Forum, Southern Leaders Forum, clique of top retired military brass, *Ijaw* National Congress etc. with each interest group articulating its own agenda (Abbas, 2016).

**Inter and intra-parties crises:** There have been so much intra and inter parties' crises in the country, creating factions to fight themselves. This has been the case in the dominant other political parties in the country. The infighting occasioned by serious leadership problems in most of the political parties has thus affected the performance of political parties in developing national consciousness within the Nigeria polity. For example, between 1998 and 2017, the PDP changed its national chairman twelve (12) times. It has been led by Alex Ekweme, Solomon Lar, Barnabas Gemade, Audu Ogbah, Ahmadu Ali, Vincent Ogbulafor, Okwesilize Nwodo, Haliru Muhammed Bello (acting national chairman), Kawa Baraje (acting chairman), Bamanga Mahmud Tukur, Adamu Mu'azu and Ali Modu Sheriff. An obvious fact is that none of these changes was succession orderly, open, free, independent and reflective of the actual wishes of the majority of the party loyalists. Rather, each (with the exception probably of the pioneer chairman), was predicated upon the endorsement, whims and caprices of a given faction of the party elite led oftentimes by the (incumbent) president (Momoh, 2013). At present (2017) the PDP is enmeshed in serious leadership tussle between Senator Ali Modu Sheriff and Alhaji Ahmed Markafi led factions over the party' national chairmanship position. The All Nigeria's People Party (ANPP) has also been led by Mahmood Waziri, Yusuf Ali, Don Etiebet, Edwin Eme-Ezeoke and Christopher Ogonnaya Onu in quick succession, while the Alliance for Democracy (AD) has had four leadership changes and yet in deep crisis of leadership. Though these two parties later merged with Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) to form the currently ruling All Progressive Change (APC) intra-party crisis still persist which borders on the issue of party leadership. This does not augur well for the development of national consciousness of oneness among party members and the leaders.

**Wrong view of political power and claim to rulership birth right:** Political parties view power as an end in itself rather than as a means for the realization of the aspiration of the entire society as an organic entity. Members of the political parties therefore see power as a means for the realization of their personal and individual goals rather than collective goals. This is quite evident in the current political dispensation in which the Northerners feel that political power should reside with them perpetually. As long as one section of the country sees rulership as her birth right, there can never be unity in Nigeria and where there is no unity there cannot be progress.

**Lack of civility and exclusionary politics:** Civility is one quality that is largely absent in Nigeria's political party life. The most important aspect of the internal functioning of political parties in Nigeria is that they have a persistent tendency to factionalize and fractionalize. As people go into politics to seek power and money, the battle for access becomes intense and destructive. Thus, violence and betrayal are often the currency for political party engagement. Indeed, the period leading to each election is marked by the assassination of party leaders, supporters and contestants for various offices as evident in the cases of Mr. Odunayo Olagbaju - a member of the Osun State House of Assembly on 19 December 2001, Ahmed Pategi - the State Chairman of PDP in Kwara State on 15 August 2002, Chief Ogonnaya Uche - ANPP Senatorial candidate in Imo State on 7 February

2003, Dr. Harry Marshal - National Vice-Chairman of the ANPP (South-South) on 5 March 2003, Dr. Ayo Daramola - PDP governorship aspirant in Ekiti State on 14 August 2004, Mr. Jesse Aruku - a Plateau State governorship aspirant of the Advanced Congress of Democrats (ACD) on 30 June 2006 and Eng. Funsho Williams - PDP governorship aspirant in Lagos State on 27 July 2006, Chief Paul Inyang - Akwa Ibom PDP State chairmanship aspirant on 20 June 2010, Mr. Okon Uwah - former Deputy Speaker and APC House of Assembly candidate in Akwa Ibom State on 18 March 2015 among other politically motivated killings.

**Disregard for the female politicians:** The female politicians are the major victims in the political process as the male politicians refuse to accept their female counterparts as colleagues in the business of politics. The female politicians in Nigeria suffer from various modes of marginalization many of which are hurtful and full of abuses. In general, party officials refused to take the candidature of female aspirants seriously. Most political parties fail to adhere to the 35% affirmative action for Nigerian women in party primary elections and leadership positions. This often engenders disparity which adversely affects parties' cohesion. Again, the level of violence, thuggery, and monetization of Nigerian politics provides a significant disincentive for women to take part as candidates during elections.

**Zoning:** This is another factor that militates against the development of national consciousness by political parties. Zoning and other forms of administrative act are used to exclude aspirants from certain areas by simply making sure that the party hierarchy zones out an electoral seat in question to an area where the aspirant being excluded is not an indigene. This in most instances degenerate into serious party crisis. In PDP for instance, besides the internal wrangling between former President Olusegun Obasanjo and his Vice, Atiku Abubakar, the issue of zoning within the party nearly broke the party into pieces. The rift within ANPP led to expulsion of twelve strong members in October 2002. Similarly, the crisis in AD at the beginning the fourth republic split the party into two camps and later led to the exit of prominent members of the party. The breakaway group formed a new party, the Action Congress (AC) which later metamorphosed into the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN).

**Violence:** Violence and the use of thugs, and sometimes government security operatives are employed by powerful candidates to intimidate and suppress political opponents even within the same party with a view to protecting and projecting the interest of a particular area to the detriment of others. According to Ezeilo (2012), the reality in the political field is that many political parties are essentially operated by political godfathers who use money and violence to control the political process. They engage in all forms of organized acts or threats – physical, psychological, and structural – aimed at intimidating, harming, blackmailing a political stakeholder before, during and after an election with a view to determining, delaying, or otherwise influencing an electoral process. The prevalence of electoral violence in the post-colonial Nigeria in particular contributed immensely to reasons why democracy in the first two major republics (first and second) could not only be consolidated but also be sustained. It could also be argued that the electoral processes as well as the kind of party politics (popularly known as zero sum game or winner takes all syndrome) played across the

country from then till the present republic are parts of the reasons why democratic rule could not be sustained in Nigeria.

The foregoing issues fuel the embers of resentment, rancour and divisiveness instead of engendering a sense of unity, progress, national consciousness and identity among party members and the entire Nigerian citizenry.

**Conclusion:** This study has explored the state of political parties and the development of national consciousness in the Nigerian polity from the First through the Fourth Republics, assessed the roles and performance of political parties in developing national consciousness as well as identified the problems thereto. The study was predicated on the assumption that the more political parties are ethnically formed, the more the chances of their inability to develop national consciousness in Nigeria. From the analysis of the prevailing political situations in the country, it is discernible that Nigerian political parties need to deviate from ethnic based parties to parties founded on ideological footings if it must fulfil the utmost task of developing national consciousness among the Nigerian citizens.

Within the purview of this study, political parties have been identified as indispensable instruments in representative democracy with an avalanche of roles such as interest articulation, interest aggregation, political socialization, political education and communication, political mobilization and leadership recruitment. It is also the function of political parties to develop national consciousness among Nigerians. Sadly, political parties in Nigeria have failed in this aspect because most of the parties are ethnocentric and formed around individuals and ethnic groups. They are selfish and tend to further their personal interest rather than national interest.

As political institutions, political parties should play an integrative role and embody objectives that transcend sectional leanings. Most of the parties are not national in outlook; they do not exist in most states and local government areas in the country. However, it is not the concept and practice of political parties in the polity that is at fault, but the political parties are ideologically barren with no explicit manifestoes, hence have nothing to offer the populace. Corruption, nepotism, ethnocentrism, intra party crises, hold onto power syndrome, as well as general lack of common political aspirations and sentiment of unity among Nigerian political parties and their leadership have been identified as some of the problems militating against the performance of political parties in developing national consciousness in the Nigerian political landscape.

The role of political parties in the task of developing national consciousness and mobilizing people to change their dismal conditions should be given more attention by political parties. As democracy brings joy, development and other dividends, Nigeria should not be an exception, thus political parties must work to achieve these for Nigerians and the polity.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study and to aid political parties to fulfil their role in developing national consciousness Nigeria the following recommendations are proffered:

- (i) The formation of political parties along ethnic instead of ideological lines should be discouraged. Hence, the Independent National Electoral Commissions (INEC) should not register political parties with ethnic colouration or those centred on individuals. This will discourage politicization of ethnicity and hero worshipping in the Nigerian political system.
- (ii) Political parties should use political goals, programmes and national earnestness to appeal to the conscience and feelings of the people with virtues of peace, stability and good will as the basis for national socio-economic development.
- (iii) The government or its agents should scrutinize the manifesto and ideology of any political association before registering it as a political party. It is obvious therefore that all political parties with ethnic appeal currently operating in the country should be deregistered while those with a touch of national flavour should be made to abide by their manifestoes and programmes.
- (iv) Political parties should not present themselves as platform for the polarization of the polity, of crises and ethnic explosions, but as bastions for national unity, stability and redirecting the national will for progress and social transformation of the society.
- (v) Political parties should look more inward and intensive in the performance of its socialization role in the Nigerian polity. They should improve in their effort at creating a unique and democratic political culture for the nation through intensive political education and awareness. This will help raise the level of national interest above primordial interests.
- (vi) Political parties should work towards making Nigeria a nation whose unity and stability is formed and based on the decisive concept of national cohesion, and organized people who are conscious of the disastrous consequences of baseless ethnic and geographical suspicion.
- (vii) The federal character principle should be strictly adhered to in the composition of parties' leadership hierarchy in order to eliminate ethnic sentiment and parochial interest. This will ensure national unity and integration as well as give every citizen a sense of belonging.

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