

Political Parties and the Quest for Political Stability in Nigeria

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Abstract

Reputed as the “makers” of democracy, political parties are by all standards one of the most outstanding and distinguishing elements of modern government. Indeed, democracy is unthinkable in the absence of viable political parties. Parties are expected to participate in the political socialization of electorates, contribute to the accumulation of political power, facilitate recruitment of political leadership, and serve as a unifying force in a divided polity. Parties can cope with these pivotal roles only provided that they are viable: well institutionalized, internally democratic, coherent, disciplined, and autonomous. Can Nigerian parties stand the test of time when assessed against these currencies? This essay engages this crucial question in relation to Nigeria’s quest for political stability. After a review of current trends in party activities under the Fourth Republic, the essay concludes that Nigerian parties have tended to become more of a democratic liability than an asset in the country’s quest for political stability. It identifies the limiting dimensions of effective party politics and offers useful recommendations.

Key words: Political party, political stability, democracy, democratic consolidation, political ideology, godfatherism, election, violence, Nigeria.

Political parties are indispensable institutions of democracy and democratic societies. Indeed, sustainable democracy is unthinkable without a viable political party system. In an ideal setting, political parties basically are expected to serve as a formidable democratization force by articulating and aggregating public opinion and interests, engendering popular participation, and promoting political education and national integration. By promoting these virtues, political parties can contribute overtly to the political stability of

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the system. A polity can be said to be politically stable when and if there is a “congruence between the constitution and the regulatory rules of the system, such that changes within the action-set, either in terms of the realignment of forces in the set, or in its configuration, can be made to follow from and conform with the regulative rules of the system.”¹ Indeed, political stability is coterminous with political order and depends on the relationship between the level of political participation and the level of political institutionalization, which can be measured in terms of system maintenance, civil order, legitimacy, and governmental effectiveness.²

The level of institutionalization of political parties and their institutional strengths are, therefore, directly correlated to their ability to perform these and related functions, and by extension, to the strengths of democracy. If well-institutionalized, political parties can serve as a set of mediating institutions through which differences in ideas, interests, and perceptions of political problems at a given time can be managed.³ When the reverse is the case, the democracy project and the general system stand the risks of perversion and/or outright erosion or collapse.

This essay seeks to explore the relationships between political parties and the quest for political stability in Nigeria, with the aim of highlighting the high and low points of Nigerian parties in advancing political stability. This is important because, outside the developed democracies, and recently from the Latin American and post-communist European experiences, very little is known about the role of parties in the consolidation of democracy.⁴ This knowledge gap is most acute in Africa, in general, and Nigeria, in particular. As it has been rightly pointed out, “much of what we know about the role of parties in democratic consolidation comes from the relatively new democracies of Portugal, Spain and Greece in the years following the end of their dictatorships in the mid-1970s, and from a range of Latin American countries.”⁵ The essay begins with a theoretical discourse, positing political parties as building blocks of political stability in a democratic setting. This is followed by a panoramic overview of Nigeria’s political terrain, showing in fair detail the high degree

¹ Billy J. Dudley, *Instability and Political Order: Politics and Crisis in Nigeria* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1973), 38.

² See for example, Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in a Changing Society* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968).

³ Tunji Olagunju, “Building Party-Based Democracy in Nigeria,” in *Democracy, Good Governance and Development in Nigeria*, ed. Ibrahim Y. Lame and Haruna Dabin (Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books, 2000), 62-75.

⁴ For a comparative insight from the Latin American experience, see Robert H. Dix, “Democratization and the Institutionalization of Latin American Political Parties,” *Comparative Political Studies* 24, no. 2 (1992): 488-511.

⁵ Ian McAllister and Stephen White, “Political Parties and Democratic Consolidation in Post-communist Societies,” *Party Politics* 13 (2007): 197.

of instability that has enveloped the system over the decades. The essay then provides a critical analysis of the attempts to adapt Nigerian parties to the goal of achieving political stability, drawing insights from both constitutional and practical experiences. The essay next identifies and explains some of the constraints of Nigerian parties in promoting political stability, and offers useful suggestions on how to reposition Nigerian parties for greater productivity in the country's quest for political stability, before concluding. The main argument of the essay is that, while the identified problems are largely internal to the parties, they are also partly a reflection of the broader problem of nation-building, for despite several policy interventions, the prospects of sustainable nation-building in Nigeria continue to falter.

Political Parties as Building Blocks of Democratic Stability

A political party, according to Edmund Burke, is “a body of men united, for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest, upon some particular principles which they are all agreed.”⁶ Elaborating on this definition, Lapalombara and Anderson define a political party as “any political group, in possession of an official label and a formal organization that links center to locality, that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections (free or non-free), candidates for public offices.”⁷ For Remi Anifowose,⁸ a respected Nigerian political scientist, political parties are a means of organizing the people so that they can select from themselves an elite group, which will control the process of public decision-making on their behalf. Herbert Simon defines a party as “a system of interdependent activities characterized by a high degree of rational direction of behaviour towards ends that are objects of common acknowledgement and expectations.”⁹ Elsewhere, Lapalombara defines a political party as “a universally adopted tool for mobilizing large numbers of persons to engage in forms of political participation, voluntary or coerced, that are not limited to voting.”¹⁰

Flowing from the foregoing, political parties have a responsibility to present candidates for elections, with the primary aim of capturing political

⁶ Edmund Burke, *The Works of Edmund Burke*, vol.1 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1939), cited in Joseph Lapalombara and Jeffrey Anderson, “Political Parties,” in *Encyclopedia of Government and Politics*, vol. 1, ed. Mary Hawkesworth and Maurice Kogan (London: Routledge, 2001), 394.

⁷ Lapalombara and Anderson, “Political Parties,” 394.

⁸ Remi Anifowose, “Political Parties and Party System in the Fourth Republic of Nigeria: Issues, Problems and Prospects,” in *Issues in Nigeria's 1999 General Elections*, ed. Iai Olurode and Remi Anifowose (Lagos, Nigeria: John West Publications, 1999), 55-78.

⁹ Herbert Simon, “Comments on the Theory of Organizations,” *American Political Science Review* 46, no. 4 (1962): 1130.

¹⁰ Joseph Lapalombara, “Reflections on Political Parties and Political Development, Four Decades Later,” *Party Politics* 13, no. 2 (2007): 143.

power for the furtherance of the common good. This responsibility becomes much more challenging, tasking, and arduous in plural societies where it is often difficult to build societal consensus on critical national questions. As Yolamu Barongo has pointed out:

Pluralist democracy rather than disperse[d] and balance[d] political power in society actually encourages the acquisition and monopoly of power by a few individuals and groups and provides grounds whereby the stronger group of individuals pre-empts and dominates public policy.¹¹

In this context, political parties, expectedly, should provide a formidable platform for consensus-building on crucial national issues, especially in plural societies such as Nigeria. In such settings, “Political parties have an instrumental central role to play in emerging democracies, by identifying, politicizing and representing social divisions,” including ethnicities, religions, classes, and geographies. It is for this reason that it has been contended that perhaps more than any other factor, the success of democratic consolidation in a country is contingent on the effectiveness of political parties in structuring political conflict.¹² Political parties can discharge these roles adequately, provided that they live up to their responsibilities. But this is seldom the case in some emerging democracies, especially in Africa. From a comparative African perspective, studies have shown that political parties falter in the representation of social groups,¹³ becoming, instead, tools for the promotion of neo-patrimonialism and violence.¹⁴

The responsibilities of political parties operate on three levels: electorate-related functions, government-related functions, and linkage-related

¹¹ Yolamu R. Baronge, “Ethnic Pluralism and Democratic Stability: The Basis of Conflict and Consensus,” in *Democratic Experiment in Nigeria: Interpretative Essays*, ed. Samuel E. Oyovbaire (Benin City, Nigeria: Omega Publishers, 1987), 67.

¹² See among others, Matthias Basedau, Gero Erdmann, and Andreas Mehler, eds., *Votes, Money and Violence: Political Parties and Elections in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Uppsala, Sweden: Nordic African Institute, 2007); Scott Mainwaring and Edume Zoco, “Political Sequences and the Stabilization of Interparty Competition: Electoral Volatility in Old and New Democracies,” *Party Politics* 13, no. 2 (2007): 155-178; Scott Mainwaring, “Political Parties and Democratization in Brazil and the Southern Cone,” *Comparative Politics* 21, no. 1 (1988): 91-120; and Dix, “Democratization and the Institutionalization of Latin American Political Parties.”

¹³ Vicky Randal, “Political Parties in Africa and the Representation of Social Groups,” in *Votes, Money and Violence: Political Parties and Elections in Sub-Saharan Africa*, ed. Matthias Basedau, Gero Erdmann, and Andreas Mehler (Uppsala, Sweden: Nordic African Institute, 2007), 82-104.

¹⁴ E. Gyimah-Boadi, “Political Parties, Elections and Patronage: Random Thoughts on Neo-Patrimonialism and African Democratisation,” in *Votes, Money and Violence: Political Parties and Elections in Sub-Saharan Africa*, ed. Matthias Basedau, Gero Erdmann, and Andreas Mehler (Uppsala, Sweden: Nordic African Institute, 2007), 21-33.

functions.¹⁵ Parties' electorate-related functions entail political representation, expression of peoples' demands through interest articulation and aggregation, and the simplification and structuring of electoral choice. They also include the integration of voters into the system through political education and mobilization. Government-related functions include making government accountable by effectively implementing party policies and exercising control over government administration. In between the government and the electorates, political parties play a type of mediatory role. They do this by aggregating and channeling public interests and recruiting and training political leaders.¹⁶ In support of the foregoing functions of political parties, Reilly speaks about what he calls the "deeper, systemic support" of political parties that "help make democracy work effectively."¹⁷ According to him,

- a. They mediate between demands of the citizenry on the one hand and the actions of the government on the other, aggregating the diverse demands of the electorate into coherent public policy.
- b. They make effective collective action possible within legislatures. Without the predictable voting coalitions that parties provide, there would be chaos as legislative majorities shifted from issue to issue and vote to vote.
- c. By providing a link between ordinary citizens and their political representatives, parties are also the primary channel of democratic systems for holding governments accountable for their performance.¹⁸

It should be noted, however, that the discharge of these tasks is not a given. Much depends on the degree of institutionalization of the political parties with respect to organization, discipline, internal democracy, and cohesion.¹⁹ When these are lacking, political parties are likely to be reduced to mere formalities just to fulfill the sense of righteousness, but democracy exists in such circumstances without real political competition. When an atmosphere of this nature prevails, parties become deficient and ill-equipped to cope with

¹⁵ Mick Moore, "What Do Political Parties Do?" (2002) <http://www.ids.ac.uk/gdr/reviews/review-13.html> (accessed October 13, 2005), and Vicky Randal and Lars Svasand, "Introduction," *Democratization* 9, no. 3 (2002): 1-10.

¹⁶ Adigun A. B. Agbaje, "Political Parties and Pressure Groups," in *Elements of Politics*, ed. Remi Anifowose and Francis Enemuoh (Lagos, Nigeria: Malthouse Press, 1999), 191-209.

¹⁷ Benjamin Reilly, "Introduction," in *Political Parties in Conflict Prone Societies: Regulation, Engineering and Democratic Development*, ed. Benjamin Reilly and Per Nordlund (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2008), 3-24.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

¹⁹ Scott Mainwaring and Edume Zoco, "Political Sequences and the Stabilization of Interparty Competition: Electoral Volatility in Old and New Democracies," *Party Politics* 13, no. 2 (2007): 155-178, and Mainwaring, "Political Parties and Democratization in Brazil and the Southern Cone."

their responsibilities. In these circumstances, various interest groups may be tempted to devise alternative devices to channel their demands, including grievances, not only within the parties but also throughout the entire system. The end result, if unmitigated in time, will be an overloading of the system with more than it can shoulder at one time, resulting in the weakness of the system and possibly the breakdown of political order and stability. This is partly why there is growing worry over political parties as a destabilizing force, or even as a threat to the consolidation of democracy, in transitional democracies.

Again, Reilly gives a vivid description of the main features of political parties in such contexts. As he argues, “in many countries, particularly in transitional democracies, parties struggle to play these roles. Instead, parties exhibit a range of pathologies that undercut their ability to deliver the kind of system benefits on which representative politics depends.”²⁰ Some of these pathologies, according to Reilly, are that,

- a. they are frequently poorly institutionalized, with limited membership, weak policy capacity and shifting basis of support;
- b. they are often bound around narrow personal, regional or ethnic ties, rather than reflecting society as a whole;
- c. they are typically organizationally thin, coming to life only at election time;
- d. they may have little in the way of a coherent ideology;
- e. they often fail to stand for any particular policy agenda;
- f. they are frequently unable to ensure a disciplined collective action in parliament, with members shifting between parties; and
- g. as a result, parties often struggle to manage social conflicts and fail to deliver public goods and thus to promote development.²¹

The point is that a political party can provide a basis for societal conflict or consensus, depending on its organization, internal discipline, coherence, and understanding of democracy. The higher the level of its institutionalization, the more the system benefits in terms of political stability and vice versa. Yet, whatever their direction, whether as sources of conflict or consensus in society, political parties have crucial roles to play as “makers” of democratic government, and modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of parties.²²

²⁰ Reilly, “Introduction,” 4.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Elmer Eric Schattschneider, *Party Government* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1942); Paul Allen Beek and Frank J. Sorauf, *Party Politics in America*, 7th ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 1992); and Benjamin Reilly and Per Nordlund, eds., *Political Parties in Conflict Prone Societies: Regulation, Engineering and Democratic Development* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2008).

Historical Background of Nigerian Parties

Philips W. Shively²³ observed that, although the political party had become useful for a variety of tasks that required control or communication, it was first invented for more limited and self-serving purposes. This observation aptly captures the Nigerian reality. At their inception on June 24, 1923, following the introduction of the elective principle by the Clifford constitution, Nigerian parties had very limited and self-serving objectives. The main goal perhaps was to buy legitimacy for the colonial government through very limited franchise, restricted to Lagos and Calabar. Richard Sklar, in his seminal work, *Nigerian Political Parties*, articulately demonstrates how the emergence of political associations, such as the People's Union, was only in response to the prevailing realities of colonial administration.²⁴ Little wonder; when the first political party in Nigeria, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), emerged in 1923 under the leadership of Herbert Macaulay, its activities were restricted to contesting elections for the Lagos city council.

For years, the NNDP was hegemonic in its dominance in electoral politics in the country. This was to be challenged by the Lagos Youth Movement—later the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM)—formed in 1934, which defeated the NNDP for the three seats allocated to Lagos that year. By 1944, the increasing tempo of nationalist agitation had resulted in the formation of another political party—the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC, later renamed the National Congress of Nigerian Citizens)—under the leadership of Herbert Macaulay and later Nnamdi Azikwe.²⁵ This was followed, in quick succession in 1950, by the transformation of the Egbe Omo Oduduwa, a Yoruba socio-cultural organization, into a political party, the Action Group (AG), under the leadership of Chief Obafemi Awolowo. The Northern People's Congress (NPC) had earlier emerged in 1949 with dominance in the northern region. By 1951, a breakaway faction of the NPC, consisting mainly of radical youth based in Kano, formed the Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU). These parties dominated the political landscape of the country, particularly in their respective regions, in the march toward independence and in the First Republic.²⁶ Ideologically, the NPC was an essentially conservative and elitist party, the AG appeared to be progressive and socialist, while the NCNC was “welfarist,” predicated upon nationalist ideology. Even at that, it may

²³ Philips W. Shively, *Power and Choice: An Introduction to Political Science* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1997), 200.

²⁴ See Richard L. Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), and James S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958).

²⁵ Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties*.

²⁶ Billy J. Dudley, *Instability and Political Order: Politics and Crisis in Nigeria* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1973).

be difficult to delineate the specific ideological orientation of these parties. They share, however, a common feature of ethno-regional ideology, seeking to capture and consolidate power in their respective spheres of influence or region. They were also driven by a commitment to the nationalist struggle against colonialism, though in varying degrees.²⁷

Although the Second Republic (1979-1983) witnessed the emergence of more political parties, there was not much difference from those established under the First Republic. Rather, what happened was the reincarnation of parties of the First Republic under different nomenclatures, with some additional parties. The parties included the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), and the Nigerian People's Party (NPP), replacing the NPC, AG, and NCNC, respectively. Others were the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) and the Great Nigerian People's Party (GNPP), and later the Nigerian Advance Party (NAP), which was registered in 1982, after failing the first round of registration in 1978.²⁸ These parties constituted major actors in the Second Republic, during which the country was "once again mired in a vituperative and vicious politics."²⁹ This was graphically captured by the unprecedented pace of intra- and inter-party factionalization and conflicts. Political vagrancy permeated the political landscape, leaving in its wake major realignments and coalitions among the parties.³⁰

Under the aborted Third Republic, there was a fundamental change in the mode of party formation in Nigeria. This pertains to the official formation of two parties by the state after a series of experiments with different political associations.³¹ The parties were the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC). As argued elsewhere, "ordinarily, the existence of two political parties should represent two different ideological camps, as has been the case between the Labour and Conservative parties in Britain and Democrat and Republican parties in the USA."³² This was not the case with respect to the SDP and the NRC in Nigeria. While the SDP was a

²⁷ J. Shola Omotola, "Nigerian Parties and Political Ideology," *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences* 1, no. 3 (2009): 612-643.

²⁸ Eghosa E. Osaghae, *Crippled Giant: Nigeria since Independence* (London: C. and Hurst, 1998).

²⁹ Nuhu Yaqub, "Political Parties and the Transition Process," in *Transition Politics in Nigeria, 1970-1999*, ed. Browne Onuoha and M. M. Fadakinte (Lagos, Nigeria: Malthouse Publisher, 2002), 118-134.

³⁰ Osaghae, *Crippled Giant*, 139-144, and Omotola, "Nigerian Parties and Political Ideology."

³¹ Oyeleye Oyediran and Adigun Agbaje, "Two Partyism and Democratic Transition in Nigeria," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 29, no. 2 (1991): 123-137, and Said Adejumo, "The Two Political Parties and Electoral Process in Nigeria," in *The State and Democracy in Africa*, ed. George Nzongola Ntalaja and Margaret C. Lee (Harare, Zimbabwe: African Association of Political Science, 1997), 126-140.

³² Omotola, "Nigerian Parties and Political Ideology," 635.

little to the left and the NRC a little to the right, nothing much differentiated the parties, at least not in ideological dispositions.³³ This official (artificial) creation of the two parties, initiated after the dissolution of the thirteen associations that applied for registration, was part of the grand design to execute a “hidden agenda” to perpetuate the military regime in power.³⁴ The eventual annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election by the Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (IBB) military regime lends some credence to this claim. Nuhu Yaqub observed about party politics under the Third Republic that,

The way incompatibility had been manifested in the two parties...was not fundamentally due to serious ideological divisions (in any case, the manifestoes of the parties, despite phrase-mongering of “a little to the left”, and “a little to the right”, did not articulate much [sic] programme differences), but to assert, that even if we are to borrow Babangida’s words, the “old lines of cleavages and primordial loyalties” once again simply asserted themselves.³⁵

The country once again returned to multiparty democracy in 1999, following the transition inaugurated and successfully completed by General Abdulsalm Abubakar. Initially, three political parties—the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), the All People’s Party (APP), later the All Nigerian People Party (ANPP), and the Alliance for Democracy (AD) were registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).³⁶ By December 2002, the number of registered parties rose to thirty, while an additional three political parties were registered in January-February 2006.³⁷ Today, Nigeria has well over fifty registered political parties. This presupposes the opening up of the political space for democratic opportunities and development. But in reality, the

³³ Adele Jinadu, “Electoral Administration in Africa: A Nigerian Case Study under the Transition to Civil Rule Process,” in *The Political Economy of Nigeria under Military Rule, 1984-1993*, ed. Said Adejumo and Abubakar Momoh (Harare, Zimbabwe: SAPES Books, 1995); Peter M. Lewis, “Endgame in Nigeria? The Politics of a Failed Transition Programme,” *African Affairs* 93 (1994): 323-340; and Omo Omoruyi, *Parties and Politics in Nigeria* (Boston: Advancing Democracy in Africa [ADA], 2002).

³⁴ Osaghae, *Crippled Giant*, 220.

³⁵ Yaqub, “Political Parties and the Transition Process,” 128.

³⁶ J. Shola Omotola, “The 2003 Nigerian Second Election: Some Comments,” *Political Science Review* 3, nos. 1 and 2 (2004): 126-138, and Said Adejumo and Michael Kehinde, “Building Democracy without Democrats? Political Parties and Threats of Democratic Reversal in Nigeria,” *Journal of African Elections* 6, no. 2 (2007): 93-113.

³⁷ Antonia Okosi-Simbine, “Political Vagrancy and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria,” in *Elections and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria*, ed. Godwin Onu and Abubakar Momoh (Lagos, Nigeria: Nigerian Political Science Association [NPSA], 2005), 17-32, and Godwin Onu and Abubakar Momoh, eds., *Elections and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria* (Lagos, Nigeria: NPSA, 2005).

opportunities associated with such openings are yet to be positively exploited for the political development of the country. This may not be unconnected with the poverty of ideology that characterizes Nigerian parties. This poverty of party ideology, as will soon be illustrated, took firm root under a succession of military interventions in politics, which derailed the flourishing party system, first in the First Republic, and later in the Second Republic. This climaxed under Babangida's transition program that did not allow parties to germinate from within the society, but instead imposed artificial parties from above.

Overview of Nigeria as an Unstable Political System

Nigeria presents a standard laboratory in the experiment of political instability. Beginning from the precolonial period to date, Nigeria has been a country in a perpetual state of transition. The phases of its transition began from its forceful transfer from indigenous governance to colonialism and later to independence. The post-independence period, in itself, has witnessed a series of transitions from parliamentary democracy, military regimes, and civil war to presidential democracy. Each of these phases has had its own ups and downs in terms of the stability of the political system.

Because of space constraints, this section highlights only some of the critical incidents of political crisis in the country, beginning from the late and final phase of colonialism. As the country reached an advance stage in its struggle for political independence by the nationalists, following a series of constitutional engineering and reengineering, there was a major controversy over the question of self-government for Nigeria. For the southern part of Nigeria, consisting of the Western and Eastern Regions and led by the Action Group, a motion for granting self-government to Nigeria was moved by Anthony Enahoro on March 31, 1950, in the House of Representatives. In his words, "this House accepts as a primary political objective the attainment of self-government for Nigeria in 1956."³⁸ This proposal was not received in good faith by the northern delegates. Through Alhaji Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto and Premier of the Northern region, the Northern People's Congress moved the adoption of an amendment changing the words "in 1956" to "as soon as practicable." The attendant debate, according to Coleman, was so "bitter and tempestuous"³⁹ that the National Congress of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) and AG members walked out of the House. The AG and NCNC were to later send delegates to the North to campaign for self-government. The result was the outbreak of a four-day riot in Kano, which resulted in 277 casualties, including thirty-six deaths (fifteen northerners and twenty-one southerners).⁴⁰

³⁸ Quoted in Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, 399.

³⁹ Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, 399.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 400.

The attainment of political independence in 1960 was to add another dimension to the trend, essentially the stepping up of political crisis. The western region was the first crisis spot in post-independence Nigeria. Following the AG crisis between Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief Ladoke Akintola and its attendant impasse, a state of emergency was declared in the region in 1962, leading to the imposition of an interim government, headed by Chief M.A. Majekodunmi. This was to be followed, in quick successions, by the census crisis of 1963 and the election crisis of 1964. These crises deepened political trauma in the country, the poor handling of which partly resulted in the first military coup of January 15, 1966. For example, the refusal to allow Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, whose NCNC United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) with the AG reportedly won the 1964 election, to assume office as premier of the region, engendered politicized ethnicity and political instability. The crisis also reflected the use of federal might by the power at the center to capture political control at all costs in opposition-dominated regions. Between then and October 1979, Nigeria witnessed a series of coups and counter-coups, during which Nigeria experienced a thirty-month agonizing civil war from 1967 to 1970.⁴¹

As the country returned to democracy in 1979, some level of stability had returned. However, the Maitatsine riot of December 1980 in the North would go down in history as a major politico-religious upheaval in the country. In it alone, more than five thousand lives were lost, including those of soldiers and police, and property worth millions of *naira* was destroyed.⁴² Under the second military interregnum (1983-1999), the country was also a haven of political crisis. There were several cases of aborted coups, the most deadly being the April 22, 1990 coup led by Major G. Okar. In April 1991, there was Muslim-Christian conflict in Bauchi. The Ogoni uprising of the 1990s, led by Ken Saro-Wiwa's Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), remains legendary owed to its destabilizing effects. The subsequent hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists of the MOSOP extraction on November 10, 1996, was to heighten the tempo of the crisis.⁴³

The peak of political crisis and instability came with the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election by the Ibrahim Babangida (IBB)

⁴¹ See J. Shola Omotola, "From Importer to Exporter: The Changing Role of Nigeria in Promoting Democratic Values in Africa," in *African Politics: Beyond the Third Wave of Democratisation*, ed. Joellen Pretorius (Cape Town, SA: Juta Academic Press, 2008), 32-54, and Osaghae, *Crippled Giant*.

⁴² Osaghae, *Crippled Giant*, 132-133, and Isaac O. Albert, "Violence in Metropolitan Kano: A Historical Analysis," in *Urban Violence in Africa: Pilot Studies*, ed. Eghosa E. Osaghae et al. (Ibadan, Nigeria: IFRA, University of Ibadan, 1994).

⁴³ Eghosa Osaghae, "The Ogoni Uprising: Oil Politics, Minority Agitation and the Future of the Nigerian State," *African Affairs* 94, no. 376 (1995): 325-344, and J. Shola Omotola, "Dissent and State Excesses in the Niger Delta, Nigeria," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 32, no. 2 (2009): 129-145.

regime, which was adjudged as the freest and fairest election in the country, on frivolous grounds. In the aftermath of the annulment, there emerged massive resistance, leading to the radicalization of civil society groups and prodemocracy movements.⁴⁴ The mass media, following their “hunting” by the military government for their pro-June 12 stance, had to devise alternative strategies of survival. These included their operations from burial grounds, particularly by *Radio Kudirat* and *Tell* magazine.⁴⁵ Indeed, the level of political turbulence generated by the annulment was unprecedented, save for the period of the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970).

The Abacha regime that sacked the Interim National Government (ING), a contraption hurriedly packaged by the departing IBB regime as a face-saving device and headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan, did little to restore peace and stability. Abacha’s self-succession bid marked a significant turning point in the super-radicalization of prodemocracy groups and other segments of civil society. Frequently, there were engagements between the civil society and the state. For example, as Daniel Kanu of the Youth Earnestly Ask for Abacha (YEAA) organized his one million man march in Abuja, at the prompting and expense of Abacha, prodemocracy groups, headed by Chief Gani Fawehinmi, organized a counter-rally five million man march in Lagos, which was much more successful. Political tension completely enveloped the country until the death of Abacha on June 8, 1998.

As Nigeria transitioned to democracy in 1999, expectations were that the new democracy would usher in a new era of peace, stability, and development. Political parties representing the core institutions of democracy expected to play key and positive roles in this regard. Contrary to expectations, the country has witnessed several incidents of political turbulence and communal and religious violence across the country.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ J. Shola Omotola, “The Civil Limitations of Civil Society: Insights from Nigeria,” *Unilag Journal of Politics* 2, no. 2 (2005): 58-68.

⁴⁵ Emmanuel O. Ojo, “The Military and Democratic Transition in Nigeria: An In-depth Analysis of General Banbangida’s Transition Program (1985-1993),” *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 28, no. 1 (2000): 1-20; id., “The Mass Media and the Challenges of Sustainable Democratic Values in Nigeria: Possibilities and Limitations,” *Media, Culture and Society* 25, no. 6 (2003); Ayo Olukotun, “Traditional Protest Media and Anti-Military Struggle in Nigeria, 1998-1999,” *African Affairs* 101, no. 403 (2002); and id., “Authoritarian State, Crisis of Democratization and the Underground Media in Nigeria,” *African Affairs* 101, no. 404 (2002): 317-342.

⁴⁶ Wale Adebaniwi, “Democracy and Violence: The Challenge of Communal Clashes,” in *Nigeria’s Struggle for Democracy and Good Governance: A Festschrift for Oyeleye Oyediran*, ed. Adigun A. Agbaje, Larry Diamond, and Ebere Onwudiwe (Ibadan, Nigeria: University Press, 2004), 327-348, and Olayemi Akinwumi, *Conflicts and Crises in Nigeria since 1960: A Political History* (Münster, Germany: LIT Verlag, 2004).

Political Parties to the Rescue?

The drafters of the 1999 constitution of Nigeria must have envisaged the possibility of adapting political parties as a basis of conflict and consensus in a plural society such as Nigeria. The constitution contains provisions that spell out, in an unambiguous manner, the expected roles of Nigerian parties as much as the conditions attached to their existence. The 1999 constitution, in its Section 221, provides that,

No association, other than a political party, shall canvass for votes for any candidates at any election or contribute to the funds of any political party or to the election expenses of any candidate at an election.⁴⁷

Section 222 provides that no association by whatever name called shall function as a political party, unless,

- a. the names and address of its national officers are registered with the Independent National Electoral Commission;
- b. the membership of the association is open to every citizen of Nigeria irrespective of his place of origin, circumstance of birth, sex, religion or ethnic grouping... .

These provisions, no doubt, are born out of the intention to differentiate political parties from other organizations such as pressure groups in terms of their roles, and to ensure smooth transition/succession in the political system. By conferring on political parties the monopoly of the right to field candidates for elections and to establish the conditions under which they may operate, parties are expected to be a viable basis of consensus-building. In furtherance of this concern, the constitution forbids any political party from having or operating on its own, any form of quasi-military organizations, including the use of thugs. Thus, Section 227 of the 1999 constitution states that,

No association shall retain, organize, train or equip any person or group of persons for purpose of enabling them to be employed for the use of display of physical force or coercion in prompting any political objective or interest or in such manner as to arouse reasonable apprehension that they are organized and trained or equipped for that purpose.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Federal Republic of Nigeria, *The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* (Lagos, Nigeria: Government Printers, 1999), A990.

⁴⁸ As stated in section 227 of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria.

In reality, however, Nigerian parties honor these provisions merely on paper. The manner of origin of Nigerian parties, especially in recent times, tends to limit their capability to sustain political stability. As Omo Omoruyi has rightly observed, what we have since 1999 in Nigeria as political parties has nothing in common with the political parties of the First or Second or Third Republic. Their manner of origin, according to him, “does not fit into what we know from literature. Their composition is fluid and unstable; they can be viewed as instruments of transition from military to civilian rule and for the future and with prospect of more parties, they raise more questions than answers to the lingering political problems of Nigeria.”⁴⁹

A critical assessment of the performance of Nigerian parties since 1999 reveals that they actually raise more questions than answers to the problems of the country, especially the challenge of maintaining political stability. In his own assessment, Omoruyi concludes that since 1999, “the so-called parties are not in competition with one another. They are in factions; these factions are more in competition with themselves than with another party.”⁵⁰ The situation is so bad, that the three dominant parties (1999-2003) functioned as ethnic or regional defenders. This tendency was reflected in the trends of electoral fortunes of parties and candidates, particularly in the presidential and National Assembly elections.⁵¹

Another major issue has to do with the way in which parties manipulate electoral processes in their spheres of influence. As studies have shown, Nigerian parties are known for massive rigging of elections. The experiences of the 2003 and 2007 general elections remain potent, having precipitated post-election conflicts and instability across several parts of the country.⁵² To

⁴⁹ Omo Omoruyi, *Parties and Politics in Nigeria* (Boston: Advancing Democracy in Africa, 2002), 8.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵¹ Samuel W. E. Ibodje and Robert Dode, “Political Parties, Voting Pattern and National Integration in Nigeria,” in *Elections and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria*, ed. Godwin Onu and Abubakar Momoh (Lagos, Nigeria: NPSA, 2005), 272-293, and Dauda S. Garuba, “Transition without Change: The 2003 Elections and Political Stability in Nigeria,” in *Elections and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria*, ed. Godwin Onu and Abubakar Momoh (Lagos, Nigeria: NPSA, 2005), 181-203.

⁵² J. Shola Omotola, “‘Garrison’ Democracy in Nigeria: The 2007 General Elections and the Prospects of Democratic Consolidation,” *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 47, no. 2 (2009): 195-221; J. Shola Omotola, “The Limits of Election Monitoring: The 2003 Nigerian General Elections,” *Representation: A Journal of Representative Democracy* 42, no. 2 (2006): 57-67; M. O. Aloysius, “Electoral Fraud and the Future of Elections in Nigeria: 1999-2003,” in *Elections and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria*, ed. Godwin Onu and Abubakar Momoh (Lagos, Nigeria: NPSA, 2005), 432-447; Emmanuel O. Ezeani, “Electoral Malpractices in Nigeria,” in *Elections and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria*, ed. Godwin Onu and Abubakar Momoh (Lagos, Nigeria: NPSA, 2005), 413-430; S. O. Mudashiru, “Political Conflicts and the 2003 General Elections,” in *Elections and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria*, ed. Godwin Onu and Abubakar Momoh (Lagos, Nigeria: NPSA, 2005), 476-488; Eugene N. Nweke, “State, Youth and Electoral Violence in Nigeria,” in *Elections and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria*,

make matters worse, these electoral frauds were committed in most cases with the active connivance of institutions saddled with the administration of the electoral processes, particularly the Independent Electoral Commission and Security Forces (military and police).⁵³ The most eloquent testimony today remains the Anambra state's saga, where the state witnessed a protracted period of instability. Although the crisis was largely due to the collapse of the accord between then Governor Dr. Chris Ngige and his godfather, Chris Uba, subsequent events have revealed the criminalization of politics in the state. Most notable recent evidence was the emergence against popular wishes of Professor Charles Soludo, a former governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, as the gubernatorial candidate of the PDP in the February 2010 governorship election in the state. Contrary to the party's constitutional provision for election, the party hierarchy at the national level decided to impose Soludo as the party's flag-bearer in the 2010 election. Similar cases exist across the country, as shown by the overturning of electoral results in several instances by electoral tribunals.⁵⁴ Irregular practices have been made possible by the fact that the parties are not sufficiently rooted in society, which allows party financiers to hijack the parties for personal interests, including the imposition of "anointed" candidates.

At another level, Nigerian parties have not been able to maintain stable inter- and intra-party relations. Within parties, there have been crises of high magnitude that have threaten their corporate existence. The most recent example is the ruling People's Democratic Party, which during the struggles of 2007, was almost torn into shreds. For some time, many of the co-founders and financiers of the party, such as Chief Sunday Awoniyi (now dead), Solomon Lar, Audu Ogbe, Dr. Alex Ekweme, and so on, have either broken away, indicated their readiness to break, or have become totally indifferent to the party's activities due to irreconcilable differences. The core of these people formed the Movement for the Defence of Democracy (MDD) and the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD), aspiring to become a distinct political

ed. Godwin Onu and Abubakar Momoh (Lagos, Nigeria: NPSA, 2005), 385-393; M. C. Oddih, "Electoral Fraud and Democratic Process in Nigeria: The Case of the 2003 General Elections," in *Elections and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria*, ed. Godwin Onu and Abubakar Momoh (Lagos, Nigeria: NPSA, 2005), 448-475; Derin Ologbenla, "Political Instability, Conflicts and the 2003 General Elections," in *General Elections and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria*, ed. Remi Anifowose and Tunde Babawale (Lagos, Nigeria: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2003), 68-101; and Antonia Okosi-Simbine, "Political Vagrancy and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria," in *Elections and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria*, ed. Godwin Onu and Abubakar Momoh (Lagos, Nigeria: NPSA, 2005), 17-32.

⁵³ Isaac O. Albert, "A Review of Campaign Strategies," *Journal of African Elections* 6, no. 2 (2007): 55-78, and Solomon Akinboye, "INEC and the Management of 2003 General Elections: Lesson and Prospects," in *Elections and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria*, ed. Godwin Onu and Abubakar Momoh (Lagos, Nigeria: NPSA, 2005), 294-315.

⁵⁴ Omotola, "'Garrison' Democracy in Nigeria, and id., "From Importer to Exporter."

party. During Obasanjo's presidency, Obasanjo and his vice president, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, were at each other's neck over the question of 2007. This peaked with the third-term agenda that tended to elongate Obasanjo's tenure in office beyond the statutory two terms in office.⁵⁵ The division between them was so sharp that the media fed on it while it lasted. The story is not so different in other political parties, particularly the Alliance for Democracy following its near-total eclipse in the 2003 general election in its base, the Southwest. The implication has been to further damage the polity.

The crises afflicting Nigerian parties also have resonated in the realms of governance, particularly in Inter-Governmental Relations (IGRs). At the horizontal level of IGRs, executable-legislative relations have been very problematic, with incessant crisis over budget presentation and approval and ratification of appointments, as well as frequent resort to impeachment threats by the legislature. This came to a peak with the August 3, 2002 impeachment motion against President Obasanjo by the House of Representatives. More than any other threat, the attendant impasse generated deep-rooted tension across the country and beyond, giving rise to palpable fears and instability in the system. The low degree of political institutionalization of the parties came to the fore in their poor management of the crisis.⁵⁶ Across the states of the federation, the situation was not so different as several state governors have been in continual conflicts with the legislature, with the latter resorting to threats of impeachment. The worrisome dimension is the fact that the trend is not so different even in a state where a given party has control over both the cabinet and parliament.

The inherent weaknesses of political parties to enforce rule-based politics both within the party and the larger governance context have contributed to criminalization of political contests. Such criminalization manifests in several cases of political assassination that cut across various political parties. Some notable ones include the assassination of Chief Bola Ige of the AD while serving as a minister under the PDP's government; Chief Harry Marshall, vice chairman of the All Nigerian People's Party, South-South (Niger Delta); Ahmed Pategi, Kwara State PDP chairman; Asari Dikibo, vice chairman of PDP, South-South; Luke Shigaba, chairman of the Bassa Local Government Area, Kogi

⁵⁵ J. Shola Omotola, "Constitutional Review and the Third Term Agenda: Nigeria's Democracy at the Crossroads," *The Constitution: A Journal of Constitutional Development* 6, no. 3 (2006): 57-77.

⁵⁶ J. Shola Omotola, "Impeachment Threats and Nigeria's Democracy," in *Challenges of Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria*, ed. Emmanuel O. Ojo (Ibadan, Nigeria: John Archers Publishers, 2006), 183-208; id., "Democracy and Constitutionalism in Nigeria under the Fourth Republic, 1999-2007," *Africana* 2, no. 2 (2009): 1-29; E. Remi Aiyede, "Executive-Legislature Relations in Nigeria's Emerging Presidential Democracy," *Unilag Journal of Politics* 2, no. 1 (2005): 64-87; and E. Remi Aiyede and Victor A. Isumonah, *Executive-Legislative Relations and the Budgetary Process: Towards Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Development Policy Centre, 2002).

State; Philip Olorunnipa, chairman of the Kogi State Electoral Commission, and so on.⁵⁷ These and related deaths were politically motivated killings due to intra- and/or inter-party conflicts, lawlessness, and the devastating influence of godfatherism.

The results of all these conflicts have been frequent breakdowns of political order, leading to instability across the country. In the process, several lives have been lost and property worth millions of *naira* has been damaged. By extension, governmental attention and scarce resources have been diverted away from developmental goals to service the crises, leading to a situation whereby party politics has become more of a liability than an asset to the common man and the system at large. Why has it been so and what should be done to salvage the situation?

Predisposing Factors and the Way Forward

From the preceding section, it has become clear that the problems afflicting Nigerian parties are deep-rooted such that they cannot, in their present form and character, midwife democracy and stability. One way to remedy the problem is to first identify correctly what the problems are. It would seem that Nigerian political parties suffer from “poverty of ideology.” Ideology should serve as the road map for party operations, provide it with a veritable tool for mobilization, conflict management, and identification, and serve as a prescriptive formula, that is, a guide to individual action and judgment.⁵⁸

Although Nigerian parties do have their manifestoes from which their ideological leaning can be gleaned, such manifestoes have always proved to be insufficient in reality for obvious reasons. For one, there are usually few differences in the manifestoes of most parties, making it difficult to differentiate among them ideologically. This was particularly the case with parties under the Fourth Republic, as parties of the First and Second Republics could easily be identified with some form of specific ideologies. Similarly, the form and character of political contestation in Nigeria, usually informed by the character of the state and the elite, give little or no consideration to ideological dispositions. Rather, forces of identity such as ethnicity and religion assume dominance. It is not surprising, therefore, that when one party captures power it tends to govern on the basis of the whims and caprices of the power holder, not so much by party manifestoes. Opposition parties behave in

⁵⁷ Osisioma B. C. Nwolise, “Electoral Violence and Nigeria’s 2007 Elections,” *Journal of African Elections* 6, no. 2 (2007): 155-179, and Samuel Ogundiya and Tanko Yahaya Baba, “Electoral Violence and the Prospects of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria,” in *Elections and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria*, ed. Godwin Onu and Abubakar Momoh (Lagos, Nigeria: NPSA, 2005), 369-384.

⁵⁸ Omotola, “Nigerian Parties and Political Ideology,” and Okudiba Nnoli, *Introduction to Politics*, Revised Second Edition (Enugu, Nigeria: PACREP, 2003).

similar fashion. This explains the ignominious pattern and trends of political vagrancy in Nigeria's political system. As a commentator points out, while political vagrancy, a condition whereby politicians cross-carpet from one party to another, is not inherently bad, it becomes a liability when the shift is not informed and based on ethical and philosophical considerations. In such situations, it can lead to the "confusion of political followership, constricts development, if not completely destabilize[s] the political process,"⁵⁹ with heavy tolls on democratic consolidation.

The point being made about forces of identity such as ethnicity and religion as bases of mobilization in Nigerian politics, instead of ideology, should not be confused. After all, mainstream Western European parties also are drifting closer and closer to each other (for example, the Social Democrats and Christian Democrats in Germany), and increasingly are based on ethnicity (for example, Basque, Catalan, Corsican) and religion (for example, Protestant, Catholic). While nothing may be inherently bad about this tendency, the difference is that in advanced democracies, particularly the examples highlighted above, the real identities of the parties are well-known. They are never concealed to deceive anybody. This is not the case with Nigerian parties. The problem here is that Nigerian parties pretend to be what they are not, thereby creating some form of electoral and democratic confusion in society. This problem is most acute in terms of structuring the voter's choice, but could not have been different in the face of political uncertainty.

The preponderant manifestation of gross indiscipline among Nigerian parties represents another explanatory factor for the lack of democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The level of indiscipline of the parties is best exemplified by the high rate of intra-party squabbles, often to the point of irreconcilability. Both PDP and AD have experienced such at different times under the nascent democracy. The inability of the parties to effectively resolve internal differences, which should have been treated as "family affairs," is apparent. A good illustration was the inability of the ruling PDP to internally resolve the August 2002 impeachment crisis, the height of legislature-executive face-off under the Fourth Republic, despite its near absolute majority in the National Assembly. It took the intervention of third parties, both domestic and foreign, to arrive at a compromise between the contending parties.⁶⁰ The Obasanjo-Atiku saga over tenure elongation and succession politics for the most part of 2006-2007 is another example.

The situation has been complicated by the absence of internal democracy within the parties. This is exemplified by the fact that party primaries have been

⁵⁹ Okosi-Simbine, "Political Vagrancy and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria," 24.

⁶⁰ J. Shola Omotola, *Public Attitudes Towards Impeachment Threats in Nigeria's Fourth Republic* (Unpublished M.Sc. Thesis, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria, 2003), and J. Shola Omotola, "Constitutional Review and the Third Term Agenda: Nigeria's Democracy at the Crossroads," *The Constitution: A Journal of Constitutional Development* 6, no. 3 (2006): 57-77.

reduced to mere jamborees, where executive decisions are vetted. The attempt to rebuff such measures by aggrieved party stalwarts has most often resulted in internal crisis. For example, presidential aspirants from the South had to walk out of the ANPP convention in Abuja in 2003, arguing that the candidature of General Mohammed Buhari had been settled before the convention. The same thing happened in the PDP, when other aspirants alleged that an arrangement was made in such a way that gave Obasanjo, the incumbent president, an edge over and above others.⁶¹ Another in the series was the 2005 convention of the PDP. It was a typical case of convention without choice, whereby the presidency using state resources, ensured the return of the incumbent party officers, particularly their cronies, at all levels. Such practices were so widespread that in most states, local governments, and wards, opposition elements within the party were totally rigged out of contest. The process of nominating party flag-bearers at various levels of governance in the 2007 general elections, especially the presidential and gubernatorial elections, provided the worst-case scenarios. Candidates who triumphed in party primaries, but who were not the godfather's favorites, had their names substituted within the electoral body. Notable examples include Rotimi Amaechi of Rivers State and Ifeanyi Ararume of Imo State.⁶²

It is important to note that elite factionalization also has been central to the problem. This perhaps derives from the character of the Nigerian State and politics, where the "discovery" of the state has almost foreclosed other channels of development, particularly community development, through self-help projects. As champions of their respective ethnic groups and interests, the elites compete for power, though pretentiously. When their pursuits are threatened for whatever reason, it does not matter to elites anymore whether they belong to the same political party. The pull and push effect of the struggles has potential to weaken party institutionalization and solidarity. Nigerian parties have been victims of such pull and push forces.

What can be done to salvage the situation? It is important to begin by addressing the character of the Nigerian State. This requires serious commitment to ascertaining why the acquisition of power remains at the heart of inter-group conflicts in Nigeria at all levels. One plausible reason for this is the over-concentration of power and resources at the center. The state, therefore, requires critical reforms in a way that will decongest the center at national and individual state levels of their overbearing influence and control of resources. This can help to reduce the unhealthy competition for power by various groups

⁶¹ J. Shola Omotola, "The 2003 Nigerian Second Election."

⁶² J. Shola Omotola, "Elections and Democratic Transitions in Nigeria under the Fourth Republic," *African Affairs*, 109, no. 437 (2010): 535-553; id., "Godfathers and the 2007 Nigerian General Elections," *Journal of African Elections* 6, no. 2 (2007): 134-154; and id., "'Garrison' Democracy in Nigeria."

at all levels.⁶³

The leadership question is also very important. There is need for the emergence of political leadership that is truly nationalistic, detribalized, sacrificial, and that knows what to do, when and how. Such a leadership must be willing and able to use power in the overall interest of all. This kind of leadership is required not only at the national level, but also at the level of political parties, interest groups, states, local governments, and communities. It must be such that it can effectively mobilize and forge consensus-building among the political elites on crucial national issues.

Moreover, socio-political education and reengineering are very important. Emphasis should be on the value of unity, handwork, tolerance, and discipline. Here, civil society is very critical in sensitizing, mobilizing, and educating the masses through a process of social mobilization. When this is achieved, whatever reforms that are targeted at the parties can be of good effect. In any case, reforms must address the issues of internal coherence, discipline, and democracy in all parties. Achieving these goals requires putting in place effective regulating agencies to control the activities of parties, especially in terms of political finance. Moreover, measures to enthrone internal party democracy should be instituted. This requires the political socialization of political actors at both the elite and mass levels to make them democratic in orientation and actions, for democracy cannot be built without democrats. With these changes, political parties can be well-institutionalized and play their roles accordingly. Whatever the odds, the parties should be allowed to continue, despite their shortcomings, so as to learn from their mistakes.

Concluding Remarks

This essay has examined the role of political parties in Nigeria's quest for political stability. It argues that ideally, political parties are building blocks of stability, given their important functions to the electorate and the government and as intermediaries between the two. It also reviews briefly Nigeria's political terrain from the immediate pre-independence period, showing the flash points of political crisis and instability in order to underscore the need for the intervention of political parties. The study reveals that although the constitution envisages roles that may enhance stability for Nigerian parties, the reality has differed substantially, particularly under the Fourth Republic. This may not be unconnected to factors such as poverty of ideology of the parties; absence of internal discipline, cohesion, and democracy in the parties; and elite factionalization, precipitated by the character of the Nigerian State and its politics.

⁶³ Remi Anifowose and Dele Seteolu, "The State Politics and Economy under the Obasanjo Government, 1999- 2003," *Unilag Journal of Politics* 1, no. 1 (2004): 38-57.

While the described problems are largely internal to the parties, they are also a reflection of the broader problem of nation-building in Nigeria. Despite various policy measures to foster national integration in Nigeria—for example, the constitutional adoption of secularism, which seeks to promote a culture of religious pluralism, and the federal character principle, which also seeks to promote ethnic pluralism through the balancing of ethnic representation in government establishments at all levels—inherent centrifugal tendencies, particularly forces of identity such as ethnicity and religion, continue to cast an ominous shadow over the integrative, democratic, and developmental aspirations of the country. This is why devising policy responses to the problems of political parties, as identified above, may not be sufficient in effectively dealing with the problems. Rather, there is need to fundamentally rectify the character of the Nigerian State, and in the process, to ascertain why the acquisition of power has been central to inter-group conflicts at all levels. There is a need for dedicated and truly nationalistic leadership at all levels, socio-political reengineering, and social mobilization as bases for building elite consensus on crucial national questions. When achieved, reforming Nigerian parties for greater productivity can be attained.

