Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS), Vol.7 No.3 September, 2024; p.g. 195 – 201; ISSN: 2695-2319 (Print); ISSN: 2695-2327 (Online)

POLITICAL PARTIES AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA

KENNETH GWEDIANANIE AMOS
Isaac Jasper Boro College of Education, Sagbama, Bayelsa State, Nigeria
Department of Political Science
School of Arts and Social Sciences
Phone: 08037440981, E-mail: amoskeng@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This article provides an in-depth examination of the role of political parties in Nigeria's quest for national integration. Utilizing systems theory, the study explores how the dynamics of party politics affect Nigeria's efforts toward unity. A qualitative research approach is employed, drawing from archival materials, journals, books, and other relevant data. The findings reveal that political parties, despite being essential to Nigeria's democratic process, have largely hindered national integration. Key issues identified include a lack of internal democracy, the use of violence in political contests, voter inducement and the manipulation of ethnic divisions. These actions have intensified ethnic animosity, further fragmenting the nation. The paper concludes that political parties in Nigeria have contributed more to division than unity and recommends a paradigm shift. Specifically, political parties must adopt more inclusive, democratic practices and reject the exploitation of ethnicity in politics to promote national cohesion.

Keywords: Political parties, National integration, Nigeria, Politics, Democracy.

Introduction

National integration is a universal challenge, faced not only by Nigeria but by many countries across the globe. Particularly in multi-ethnic, developing nations like Nigeria, the quest for unity has been fraught with difficulties since independence, marked by recurring crises that have sometimes threatened disintegration. Over the years, Nigeria has grappled with bad governance, corruption, underdevelopment, political party conflicts, and deep-rooted ethno-religious antagonism, all of which have undermined the country's efforts toward national cohesion. These divisions have often manifested in violent conflicts, political instability, and high-profile assassinations, reflecting the deep fractures within the nation.

One of the most significant sources of these issues has been political party conflicts, largely driven by the fierce competition for power and economic control. In Nigeria, politics is often seen as a route to wealth accumulation, and political parties frequently align along ethnic and religious lines, amplifying existing divisions. The legacy of colonial administrative policies—particularly regionalism and "divide and rule" tactics—further complicated the path to national integration. However, post-independence Nigeria has made conscious efforts to address this through political reforms. The government now requires political parties to have broad-based membership that cuts across ethnic and regional divides, with party offices mandated in every state, giving political entities a more national outlook. These efforts, while commendable, have yet to fully resolve the deep-rooted issues of disunity. In light of this, the study seeks to critically explore the role of political parties in Nigeria's ongoing quest for national integration. It is within this framework that we aim to investigate how political

parties either contribute to or impede the unification of the nation, and what can be done to enhance their role in promoting national cohesion.

Statement of the Problem

Despite Nigeria's long-standing efforts at national integration, significant barriers persist. These challenges include underdevelopment, corruption, ethnicity, religion, and bad governance. Among these factors, political parties have emerged as a critical area for deeper examination. Since 1923, political parties in Nigeria have often been organized around narrow ethno-religious and selfish interests rather than the broader goals of national unity. This has derailed meaningful efforts toward national integration, leading to continued calls for disintegration from various socio-cultural and political groups. Therefore, this research seeks to address the following questions: How have political parties contributed to or hindered national integration in Nigeria? What are the structural and operational flaws within political parties that perpetuate division rather than unity.

Research Objectives

This study, focusing on Political Parties and National Integration in Nigeria, will critically analyze the role of political parties in shaping Nigeria's national unity. Specifically, the study aims to:

- Examine the role political parties play in Nigeria's democratic process.
- Assess whether the activities of political parties have contributed to or detracted from national integration.
- Identify the challenges political parties pose to Nigeria's quest for national unity.
- Provide recommendations to improve the capacity of political parties in promoting national integration.

Theoretical Framework

This work is premised on systems theory. A theory is a set of interrelated concepts, ideas, variables, propositions and hypothesis logically laced together for the explanation of a particular situation or problem at any given time Akikibofiri (cited in Iseke 2024). From the sociological point of view, systems theory is an interdisciplinary examination of systems as they relate to each other within a larger, more complex system. It is imperative to note that, the basic thrust of the systems theory is hinged on the fact that, a complex system is made up of many smaller systems with inputs and outputs functions, and it is the interaction between the various systems as the functions that creates a complex whole.

The conceptual origin of the system theory or approach could be generally traced to the 19th century, in the works of Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkhem and August Comte as noted by Amos and Ogbotubo (2024). However, the modern day application of the systems theory is credited or could be found in the works of Ludwig Von Bertalanffy and Talcott Parson in the 1940s. Examining Political Parties and national integration in Nigeria, using the prism of the systems theory, no gainsaying, provides us with useful insights into the complex interplay of various factors bedeviling national integration in Nigeria since independence in 1960. The usefulness of the systems theory, in this work can be located in its ability to show how the multiple reinforcing dynamics within party politics and the broader Nigerian State, influences national integration in the federating system of Nigeria. It is imperative to understand that Nigeria is viewed as a whole system and the different socio-political and cultural institutions

such as political parties, religions organizations and ethno-linguistic groups that make it up are like component parts that work together for stability, development, peaceful co-existence and interdependence. Each of the aforementioned performs specific functions and this gives them identity. Hence, when threats are unleashed by any of them, for example, political parties, it reverberates through the system.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach using secondary data sources to examine the role of political parties in Nigeria's national integration. Data was collected through a documentary approach, drawing from academic articles, textbooks, reputable online resources, and government reports. Content analysis was used to analyze the collected data, focusing on identifying patterns and themes related to political parties' impact on national unity.

The analysis explored how political party formation, ethno-religious alignments, and governance practices have either supported or hindered national cohesion. By interpreting the findings within the context of Nigerian politics, the study critically assesses the role political parties play in shaping national integration, highlighting both their contributions and challenges. Through this methodology, the study offers insights into how political parties affect Nigeria's ongoing efforts toward unity.

Conceptual Elucidation

Political Party

Before defining political parties, it is essential to understand the concept of politics. Ekekwe (2015) describes politics as a collective process in which individuals or their representatives make decisions that serve the interests of all members, not just a select few. However, Ekekwe argues that in Nigeria and many African states, politics often aligns with narrow, parochial interests disguised as universal ones.

A political party, within this context, is the foundational structure of a democratic society, responsible for recruiting governmental and party office holders. It connects society with government through key institutions like the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. While scholars agree on the significance of political parties, precise definitions vary. Satori (cited in Thomas 2015) defines political parties as any group with an official label that competes in elections to place candidates in public office. In essence, political parties act as intermediaries between society and the government, translating social divisions into political cleavages while sometimes preventing social divisions from becoming politically charged.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (2012) outlines that political parties provide voters with choices of candidates and programs, helping determine which party or coalition will govern. In liberal multiparty democracies, like Nigeria, political parties are crucial for democratic functioning. According to Alapiki (2010), the success of political parties in performing their roles can promote national integration, while failure to do so could lead to catastrophic divisions.

National Integration

National integration lacks a universally accepted definition and is often used interchangeably with terms like nation-building and political integration. Agbodike (2003) defines national integration as a process that fosters political cohesion and loyalty to a central authority by individuals from diverse social and political groups. This definition is highly relevant in understanding Nigeria's quest for unity. National integration includes peaceful coexistence, national identity, and loyalty that transcend regional or ethnic divides.

Mezieobi (cited in Amos 2022) describes national integration as a process that builds social cohesion and strong institutions, ensuring peaceful interactions and long-term stability. This includes developing a national identity that supersedes local loyalties, thereby preventing threats of secession or disintegration. Coleman and Rosberg (cited in Mezieobi 2014) highlight two key aspects of national integration: bridging the "elite-mass gap" and promoting territorial integration. These scholars argue that reducing tensions between elites and the masses, and integrating different regions of the country, are essential steps toward achieving a stable political culture in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, the divide between the ruling elites and the general population is one of the main obstacles to national integration. The failure to bridge this gap has exacerbated regional and cultural tensions, threatening national cohesion and undermining efforts toward a unified political system. The evidence of political parties' failure to close this divide can be seen in the persistence of ethno-religious conflicts, political instability, and discontent among marginalized groups.

Discussion of the Findings

Role of Political Parties in Nigeria's Democracy

Political parties in Nigeria play a central role in shaping the country's democracy, acting as vehicles for the electoral process, governance, and public opinion formation. As highlighted by scholars like Tukura, Ibrahim, and Tukura (2019), political parties crystallize public opinion and present policy alternatives through their manifestos. Alapiki (2010) also notes that they educate voters and present candidates for elections, which helps to facilitate peaceful transitions of power. Furthermore, political parties recruit and train new political leaders, thereby promoting a continuous cycle of leadership within the democratic system.

However, in Nigeria, the performance of political parties extends beyond these roles, impacting national integration by either bridging or exacerbating social and ethnic divisions. Amos and Oba (2023) affirm that political parties contribute to the democratic process, but their effectiveness in fostering national unity is less certain. Their ability to bring diverse groups together depends heavily on their capacity to align their activities with national interests rather than narrow, parochial goals.

Contributions to National Integration

Political parties in Nigeria have made some efforts to promote national integration by seeking broad-based membership that cuts across ethnic lines. Ishiaki (2000) points out those major parties, such as those representing the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo, and Ijaw ethnic groups, aim to reflect the country's diverse population. The 1999 Constitution and the 2019 Electoral

Act also emphasize inclusivity in political party formation, ensuring that no ethnic group is left out of the political process.

Political parties also serve as a medium for aggregating social cleavages into political agendas, as Satori (cited in Thomas 2015) notes. This process can help to dismantle barriers to national unity by incorporating different ethnic interests into a single political entity. Despite this, the success of political parties in achieving national integration is mixed. While some progress has been made, parties have often struggled to transcend ethnic and regional biases fully.

Challenges to National Integration

Several challenges persist that prevent political parties from fully advancing national integration in Nigeria. One major issue is the lack of internal party democracy. As noted by Tukura, Ibrahim, and Tukura (2019), parties in Nigeria frequently resort to authoritarian methods for selecting candidates, leading to internal crises and defections. For example, the defection of five governors from the PDP to the APC in 2013 and the large-scale defections in 2018 demonstrate the deep divisions within political parties. This lack of internal democracy undermines party cohesion and, by extension, the broader goal of national integration.

Another significant challenge is the entrenchment of ethnic and regional divisions. Rather than promoting unity, political parties often reinforce these divisions. As Amos (2022) highlights, parties sometimes strengthen parochial loyalties and ethnic identities rather than fostering a collective national identity. This behavior has led to disaffection among various ethnic groups, further widening the gap between the ruling elite and the masses, which weakens national integration efforts.

The elite-mass gap also plays a critical role in hindering national integration. Political parties are largely controlled by elites who prioritize their interests over those of the general population. This exclusionary practice leaves the masses passive, as noted by Gboyega (1989), and hinders the development of a politically engaged society. Amos (2022) supports this view, arguing that national integration can only occur if political parties bridge this gap and foster a more inclusive political culture.

Additionally, electoral violence perpetuated by political parties further damages national unity. Amos and Ogbotubo (2024) report those political thugs and security operatives hired by political parties in the 2015 and 2019 elections led to violence and deaths, particularly in Bayelsa State. Such incidents exacerbate societal divisions and erode trust in the democratic process, making it harder to achieve national integration.

Implications for National Integration and Potential Solutions

The findings indicate that while political parties in Nigeria have the potential to promote national integration, they currently fall short due to internal crises, ethnic divisions, and the elite-mass gap. The consequences of these challenges are significant, as they contribute to political instability, social fragmentation, and weakened national cohesion. To improve the situation, several reforms are necessary such as:

1. Strengthening Internal Party Democracy: Ensuring transparent and democratic processes within political parties is essential. This could involve stricter enforcement of party rules and

guidelines during candidate selection and greater accountability for party leaders. By promoting internal democracy, parties can reduce internal conflicts and defections, fostering a more unified political system.

2. Promoting Ideological Cohesion: Political parties need to develop clear, national ideologies that go beyond ethnic or regional affiliations. By focusing on policies that address the needs of all Nigerians, rather than catering to specific groups, parties can contribute to a stronger sense of national identity.

3. Bridging the Elite-Mass Gap: Political parties must engage with the broader population and involve them in decision-making processes. This could be achieved through grassroots mobilization, inclusive policy formulation, and leadership development programs that target young people and marginalized communities. By empowering the masses, parties can create a more participatory political environment that fosters national unity.

4. Curtailing Electoral Violence: Political parties must commit to peaceful electoral practices and discourage the use of violence during elections. Strengthening electoral laws, providing better oversight of party activities, and penalizing parties that engage in violent behavior could reduce the destructive impact of electoral violence on national integration.

While political parties in Nigeria are vital to the democratic process, their current structure and practices present significant obstacles to national integration. Addressing these challenges through internal reforms, greater inclusivity, and a commitment to peaceful democratic practices can pave the way for a more cohesive and integrated Nigeria.

Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

This paper has highlighted that while political parties have positively contributed to Nigeria's democratic experience, they also play a significant role in hindering national integration. The contestation for power among political elites from various ethnic groups often leads to the manipulation of social divisions for electoral gains, fostering ethnic attachments rather than promoting national unity. The use of electoral violence by political parties further deepens social fractures, causing lasting discontent and eroding the potential for cohesive national integration.

The paper concludes that political parties in Nigeria have largely fallen short in advancing national integration. To address this, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Political parties should adopt clear, nationalistic ideologies that promote national integration, differentiating them from past parties focused on parochial interests.
- Internal democracy must be strengthened within parties by prioritizing collective party interests over individual ambitions, fostering unity and cooperation.
- Parties must reflect a broad-based, inclusive national outlook as mandated by the constitution to minimize ethnic tensions and promote cohesion.
- Electoral campaigns should reject violence and instead use peaceful, appealing strategies to win voter support.

Future research should explore the impact of these reforms on the functionality of political parties and their ability to foster national unity, providing deeper insights into how political institutions can bridge social cleavages for a more integrated Nigeria.

References

Agbodike, C. C. (2003). Federal character principle and national integration. In K. Amuwo (ed.), Federalism and political restructuring in Nigeria (pp. 177-190). Spectrum Books Limited.

Alapiki, H. E. (2010). Politics and governance in Nigeria. Shapes Publishers.

Amos, K. G., & Ogbotubo, L. S. (2024). Political parties and electoral violence in Nigeria: Examination of the 2015 and 2019 elections in Bayelsa State. *Sapienta Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies*, 7(5), 45-53.

Amos, K. G. (2022). Interrogating ethnicity and democratic politics in Nigeria. *Sagbaman Academic Journal of Arts and Humanities,* 1(1), 96-100.

Aniekan, E. E. (2011). Globalization of politics and democratic consolidation: A survey and appraisal of Nigeria under the fourth republic, 1999-2010. In O. A. Bamisaye & O. Awofeso (eds.), Democracy and democratic practice in Nigeria: Issues, challenges and prospect (Pp. xx-xx). MacGrace Publishers.

Ekekwe, E. N. (2015). Between power, parties, and principalities: Where are the people? Inaugural Lecture Series, University of Port Harcourt No. 118(3). UPPL.

Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2012). Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) report of the registration and election committee. Eddy Asacnig Press.

Gboyega, A. (1989). The public service and federal character in the Nigerian political system. In P. P. Ekeh & E. E. Osaghae (Eds.), Federal character and federalism in Nigeria (Pp. xx-xx). Fourth Dimension.

Genyi, C. A. (2010). Political economy: Analysis of Nigeria's governance crisis. *International Journal of Social Policy Research and Development*, 1(1), 49-63.

Inuwa, A. (2019, April 19). APC and the Zamfara conundrum. Leadership Newspaper. https://leadership.ng

Iseke, S. S. (2024). The Nigerian police and internal security crises in Nigeria: A case study of Bayelsa State from 2011-2021. Seminar paper presented at the Department of Political Science, Federal University, Otuoke, Bayelsa State.

Ishiaki, L. E. (2000). Fundamentals of Nigerian government and politics. Emhai Printing and Publishing Company.

Mizieobi, K. A. (2014). Ethnicity in Nigeria: De-ethnicizing roadmap. Priscilla Omama Publishers.

Otite, O. (1990). Ethnic Pluralism and Ethnicity in Nigeria. Shapes Publishers.

Thomas, C. I. (2015). Political parties and violent conflict in Nigeria. *International Journal of African and Asian Studies*, 13(1), 110-118.

Tukura, N. T., Ibrahim, N. D., & Tukura, D. F. (2019). Political parties and the challenge of internal party democracy in Nigeria: A comparative analysis of the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Paper presented at the 9th Conference of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt.