

Party Politics and National Integration in Nigeria: An Appraisal of All Progressive Congress 2019-2023

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ABSTRACT

This study examined party politics and national integration in Nigeria: an appraisal of All Progressive Congress (APC). It conceptualized political parties and national integration. The study raised two objectives namely: Ascertain how All Progressive Congress (APC) politics has promoted national integration in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023. Determine how All Progressive Congress (APC) politics has undermined national integration in Nigeria. Systems theory was used as the theory for the study. Ex-post facto design was used. Data used for the study were derived through secondary sources. Thematic content analysis was used to analyze the data. The findings of the study show that APC has made some contributions towards national integration in Nigeria. The finding of the study also shows that these efforts have their challenges which militated against them in the realization of their objectives. While the efforts were intended to achieve national integration, solidarity and unity, it ended up creating disunity among the people, and marginalization of one section by the other thereby leading to intense struggle for power between and or among people from different ethnic groups. The study concluded that due to the nature of party politics, APC as a political party has not been able to live up to expectation as a veritable instrument for national integration. Secondly, some of the party leaders are more powerful than the political party itself and as such their selfish personal interest overrides the interest of the party and the nation as the case may be. The study recommended that political parties must run issue-based campaigns devoid of hate speech or disinformation to restore their integrity in the eyes of citizens. Once elected and/ or appointed to political office, party members must follow through on the promises made during the campaign period. Also, political parties must be held accountable for their abuses of the system and failure to represent the interests of the Nigerian people.

Keywords: Political Party, Party Politics, National Integration

INTRODUCTION

Political parties are critical to democratic governance, linking citizens and government and acting as a platform for citizens to influence government. Important functions of political parties in democracy include promoting the interests of their members, gaining and maintaining power within the government and proposing policy options. Political parties are most effective when they bring together like-minded citizens with common political preferences and goals [1]. In colonial Nigeria, political parties provided an avenue through which to mobilize and educate citizens and grow the independence movement. After Nigeria attained independence in 1960, political parties were important channels for recruiting new leaders for the country's developing political sphere, and for allowing citizens choice and input into the selection of leaders. Political parties can also promote public accountability, collective action, popular participation, inclusiveness and legitimacy by ensuring the inclusion and consideration of citizens' principles, ideologies and goals in governance processes in Nigeria. However, parties' internal weaknesses and challenges in the political system have limited their effectiveness on these points [2]. The concept of national integration is the prime political problem facing the Nigerian nation. Many authors and political scientists have devoted time and attention to this problem but it seems to be more increasingly intractable. Political party's activities because of the determinative role they play in Nigeria and these roles should not always be taken for granted. Since political parties provide a link between the individual and the larger political community, they can be a mechanism for political socialization, mass mobilization and thus for achieving national integration [3]. National integration in totality may consist of political integration, social integration, cultural integration; economic integration etc. part of the problems of national integration is that initially the

colonialists arbitrarily lumped together various groups under the name Nigeria. In fact Nigeria has remained a society where forces of ethnicity, parochialism and religious diversity or pluralism seriously predominate over centripetal forces. The emergence of political parties in the fourth republic entails the formal convergence of various communities with their leaders and members as well as their loyalties behind [4]. The 2015 general elections provided an example of how political parties can act as a positive, constructive force in Nigeria's democracy. The APC, then in the opposition campaigned on an issue-based platform centered on corruption, shifting the focus of the election to the concerns of the Nigerian people. The APC's electoral success demonstrated how political parties could build support by responding to the priorities of voters. Hopes were high for a new era of democracy in Nigeria, and elections have become increasingly competitive. Yet instead of capitalizing on this success and maintaining a focus on citizen concerns, political parties have concentrated their energies on exerting greater influence over the electoral process to manipulate the outcome in their favour [5]. Nigeria's political parties could play a positive role in preserving and advancing the country's democracy; however, the rise of a strong opposition has distracted parties from achieving this aim. As the main levers of change in Nigeria, political parties must reorient their engagement to prioritize citizens and to restore the country's democratic gains ahead of the 2023 general elections. Despite recent progress, political parties in Nigeria remain beset by corrupt practices and do not consistently reflect the priorities of the Nigerian people. Political parties tend to be organized along ethnic, religious or geographic lines rather than around ideological issues. According to a recent poll conducted by IRI's Center for Insights in Survey Research (2020), 48 percent of people polled in Adamawa, Bauchi, Ebonyi and Sokoto States stated that they did not understand the platforms of major political parties, and 43 percent were unable to differentiate the major parties by their platforms. This confusion ultimately silences marginalized populations, particularly women and youths, as it allows no room for opposing voices or diverse perspectives on ideological issues. It also means that party leaders can change a party's position on major issues without consulting membership in order to enter into alliances with stronger parties or try to gain support ahead of elections, rather than acting in the best interest of the party or out of a commitment to ideological principles. In an effort to critically conduct an analysis of All Progressive Congress (APC) as a political party in Nigeria, the following questions are considered fundamental.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study;

1. How has All Progressive Congress (APC) politics promoted national integration in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023?
2. How has All Progressive Congress (APC) politics undermined national integration in Nigeria from 2015-2023?

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to analyze party politics and national integration in Nigeria: a study of All Progressive Congress (APC) from 2015-2023. However, specific objectives of the study include to:

1. Ascertain how All Progressive Congress (APC) politics has promoted national integration in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023.
2. Determine how All Progressive Congress (APC) politics has undermined national integration in Nigeria from 2015-2023.

Literature Review

Political Party

Many definitions of political party abound but for the purpose of this paper a few of them will be required. Hence, [7] maintains that: "a political party is a more or less organized group of citizens who act together as a political unit, have distinctive aims and opinions on the leading political questions or controversies in the state, and who by acting together as a political unit, seek to obtain control of the government" (pp.537-538). [8], define a political party as "an organized group of people who have similar political opinion and ideology and work together to gain the control of government, so as to be able to implement their party programmes based on their ideology". [8], defines a political party as a "group of persons bonded in policy and opinion in support of a general political cause, which essentially is the pursuit, capture and retention for as long as democratically feasible, of government and its offices". He further maintains that a political party is a group of people and an organization like any other group of organization, except that it is distinguished from others by its unique objective which in a democratic setting is seeking the control of government through nominating its candidate and presenting its programmes for endorsement via the electoral process in competition with other parties. [9], defines political parties as any group of people organized for objectives from time to time, publishing a manifesto, explaining its programme and canvassing for membership and support in its quest for power. [10], defines political party as a group of people who shares common conception of how and why state power should be organized and used. This idea is sometimes

expressed in a different way when it is argued that a political party is an organization concerned with, the expression of preferences regarding the emergence of consolidation and use of state power. In other words political party is all about politics and contesting control of the Chief policy making offices of the government. In other words, party structures are very crucial and important tools for determining the strength and weaknesses of political parties. The Nigerian political parties had federalist structures. They all had similar structure. This research shall give one indebt knowledge of the structure of Nigerian political parties. Political parties in Nigeria have been said to lack ideological vigour. The comprador bourgeois who are members of the parties has influenced party ideologies in Nigeria. [11] in [12] regarded political parties as the process of unifying a society, which tends to make it a harmonious city base upon an order. He described modern political parties as a twentieth century mechanism designed to solve the problem of how to bring "the people" the new mass voters into the community. He further argued that to bring the masses to the political system means to encourage parties that are not merely aggregate of local and personal interest, but parties that give or profess to give to the man in the street, a voice in politics.

Party Politics

Party Politics in this context refers to the activities of political parties in the course of capturing state power and in exercising that power through the formation and implementation of public policy as initiated and executed by political actors (politicians) which direct the affairs of political parties [13]. These activities cut across several actions and decisions taken by politicians during campaign exercise, during Intra and inter-party electoral processes, decisions of the government on political appointments, distribution of powers among levels of government, allocation of resources, etc, some of which may be injurious or supportive to national integration. It also includes the activities of political elites, both as members of ruling and opposition parties, with conflicting interests of either defending government policies even when they are wrong or promoting actions that could destabilize the ruling party and discourage national unity [14]. Party politics and the bid for national integration at the beginning of the Nigerian Fourth Republic brought hopes and aspirations to Nigerians. But this hopes and restoration of greatness were dashed when politicians particularly from dominant political parties saw party politics as an instrument of self-glorification, personal career and not service to the electorates [13]. This characteristic instigated ethnic militias, regional militancy and insurgencies, Islamic fundamentalist popularly known as Boko Haram, youth unrest, more of arm-robbery in the street, and girls' exploitation. This situation was aggravated when elections reflected only the will and mandate of certain oligarchy in the country against the majority. Electoral violence, intimidation, thuggery, and so on marked several election in Nigeria. Citizens' votes and voices were not properly recognized in party politics in Nigeria within the 16 years of PDP leadership and other opposition parties in Nigeria. Conversely, [15] noted that the coming in of another party (the All Progress Congress, the APC) under Gen. Mohammed Buhari (Rtd) as at 2015 signalled another bundle of hopes and confidence. But the eight (8) years of the APC under President Mohammed Buhari and other opposition parties seem not to be different from the style of the PDP. The role of party politics towards national integration in the Nigerian Fourth Republic is still much in doubt as a result of neopatrimonialism or rent-seeking style of politics in Nigeria. However, more of this has been revealed below from the exclusive interview received during the fieldwork.

Functions of Political Party

Whether elite or mass party, political parties perform the following functions:

1. Political parties select and recruit leaders or political office holders.
2. They organize, educate and enlighten the masses or electorates and make political discussions clearer and meaningful.
3. They promote interest in politics
4. Political parties serve as a link between rulers and the ruled.
5. They present their programmes and manifestos to the public. This enables the electorates choose the right set of national objectives. Hence political parties determine national policies and objective.
6. Political parties unite people from different parts of the country that cut across ethnic or religious lines, thus promoting national unity, etc [16, 17]. The functions outlined here will help us in analyzing the role of political parties in national integration in Nigeria.

National Integration

Integration may be viewed simply as a way of getting things done through coordinated group efforts. Integration is a process intimately linked to the German notion of "gemeinschaft" of community emphasizing the mutuality of feeling and a willingness to share for the common food of its members. National integration requires that the various ethnic groups should undermine their ethnic identity and consciousness holding them together for a sound corporate existence and development. National integration is also referred to as nation-building which means the

progressive acceptance by members of the polity of the legitimacy and necessity for a central government, and the identification as a result of widening horizons of parochial loyalties with the central government. Again and most importantly national integration involves the acceptance of other members of a “corporate” nation of the rights of other members to a share of common history, resources, values and other aspects of the state buttressed by a sense of belonging to one political community. It involves the feeling that all are entitled to a share of the bitter and sweet experience. Nation building, therefore, is the wide spread acceptance of the process of state building. It is the creation of a political community that gives a fuller meaning to the life of the state. [18], described national integration as a strategy for communally fragmented societies in which the political system accommodates the communal groups and at the same time attempt to promote a sense of common loyalty to the national entity. The import of the above statement is that, the state and its institutions have vital roles to play in the process of national integration. According to [19] integration is “the process whereby nations forego the desire and ability to conduct foreign and domestic policies independent to each other, seeking instead to make joint decisions or to delegate the decision-making process to a new control organ”. [19], hinged his definition on three different comparative conditions which include;

- i. The development of central institutions and policies;
- ii. The assignment to those institutions of important specific tasks;
- iii. The continued commitment of member states on such arrangement

Also, [20] as cited by [17] conceived integration as the “attainment, within a territory of a sense of community” and institutions and practices strong enough and widespread enough to assure dependable expectations of “peaceful change” among its population. He argues that by sense of community he means a belief that common social problems must and can be resolved by process of peaceful change.

The concept of integration is one of those elusive concepts in terms of definition [21]. The literature on integration is replete with different definitions of the term [22]. According to [23], it is often not clear how the concept is to be interpreted. Besides, the concept is used interchangeably with nation-building, national development, political development and sometimes as a term embracing all the three. [24] in [17] define integration as “a relationship of community among people within the same political entity ... a state of mind or disposition to be cohesive to act together, to be committed to mutual programmes”. Drawing from the above definition, it is observed that there is lack of relationship of community among Nigerians, to this end there is lack of common commitment to mutual programmes. [25], sees national integration as a process leading to political cohesion and sentiments of loyalty towards a central political authority and institutions by individuals belonging to different social groups or political units. [26] also cited by [17], see it as the progressive reduction of cultural and regional tensions and discontinuities in the process of creating a homogenous political community. Deutsch defines it as “the attainment within a territory, of a ‘sense of community’ and of institutions and practices strong enough and widespread enough to assure, for a long time, dependable expectations of peaceful change among its population”. The above definitions have given us a great insight into the basic elements of national integration which will help us in finding the position of political parties in national integration in Nigeria and also to enable us find whether the political parties have been able to live up to expectation in integrating the different entities that make up Nigeria.

National Integration Efforts in Nigeria

The coming into being of the Nigerian state as a colonial creation made it an imposed state obviously lacking in normative acceptance by the society [27]. As a product of British experiment in political cloning, Nigeria is a politically arranged country [28] consisting of a conglomeration of ethnic groups and fatherlands which are heterogeneous in many respects [25]. Nevertheless, the political history of Nigeria has been dominated by efforts at fashioning a system that will suit the people who are diverse in so many areas including: pluralism of language, religion, socio-political and economic formations as well as administrative styles, social norms and personality types, historical evolution, disproportionate population; size, unequal economic resources and educational attainments. There are also differences in social wants, needs and preferences as well as talents and opportunities [28, 25]. These diversities tend to generate mutual suspicion and misunderstanding which tends to keep the people separated [25]. The colonial administration bequeathed an enduring legacy of mutual suspicion and contempt to their Nigerian wards. The thirst for power among the Nigerian nationalist politicians between 1945 and 1959 gave rise to series of intrigues. [29] argues that: “none of them loved Nigeria but were concerned with building both political and financial empires; hence the spirit of nationalism gave way to regionalism and ethnicity”. The political elites in Nigeria maintained the structure of European dominance by immediately engaging themselves in the pursuit of life of ease, amassing of wealth, development of political empires and distribution of the national cake. These were politicized along ethnic lines, meritocracy was thrown overboard and a culture of mediocrity was gradually given seat to operate and lord it over the rest of us [29]. During the post-

independent period, the political parties still maintained the tilt toward ethnic groups [29]. Consequent upon the above, the initial effort towards unity and national integration resulted in state creation. According to [28]:

The attempt to redress North-South regional imbalance resulted in the creation of states but it resulted in weakening the south against the North. This then became the justification for other methods for the promotion of a sense of belonging in the country by eliminating or at least minimizing domination resulting from imbalance in appointments.

Implicit from the above is that state creation could not solve the problem of national unity in Nigeria and can never solve the problem as there are still more agitations for state creation in the face of increasing signs of disunity. To solve the problems of domination and marginalization and to ensure structural balance of claims and gains by various groups and interests in Nigeria, the federal character principle was conceived. The term was coined by the Constitution Drafting Committee that drafted the 1979 constitution. The federal character principle was enshrined in section 14(3) of the 1979 and 1999 constitutions. Hence section 14(3) of the 1999 constitution states:

The composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that Government or any of its agencies.

The reason for federal character in Nigeria is to ensure harmony, promote national integration and stability of the nation. It emphasizes the need for ethnic-balancing as a necessity in the evolution of Nigerian citizenship and for ensuring less acrimonious relationships among the various peoples of Nigeria. However, while stressing the imperative of ethnic balancing, the federal character principle invariably enthrones ethnicity and de-emphasizes the nation. It also strengthens the parochial, particularistic orientations and primordial ethnic attachments of Nigerians. The federal character principle may be used to satisfy the quest for representativeness and proportionality in allocating resources and in appointments. But in the application of the formula choices are made on the basis of criterion other than merit. This leads to lowering of standard against national interest. The quota system does not help matter after all. It leads to production of sub-grade soldiers and officers in the army. Standards and professionalism are endangered and compromised in the civil and other public services [30].

It was against the backdrop of the political crisis emanating from the June 12, 1993 presidential election that the idea of rotational presidency became a serious issue in political discuss in Nigeria, if the marginalization of segments of the country will come to an end – [27]. The idea of rotational presidency would have been laudable but at present, it lacks constitutional backing as it is yet to be enshrined in our constitution. Nevertheless, major political parties in recent time have bought the idea and have incorporated it in their party constitutions. But unfortunately, personal and selfish interests of the party leaders have in most cases rendered their constitutions impotent thereby frustrating the idea of rotational presidency.

Political Parties and National Integration in Nigeria

The outlined functions of political party shows that political party is a tool or instrument for national unity. It unites people from different parts of the country. And by extension, political party can be a veritable instrument for national integration in Nigeria. Political parties promote national interests, unite, simplify and stabilize the political process. They bring together sectional interests, overcome geographical disturbances and provide coherence to divisive governmental structures [31]. It is observed that political parties since inception have fallen short of expectation as instruments of national integration in Nigeria. Apart from the NCNC that had national outlook, other pre-independence political parties were regional in outlook and pursue mainly regional interest. The motto of the NPC and the activities of the AG speak volume on this. The political parties were born out of the desire to fill legislative council seats for the regions at the time. When independence was achieved the parties were preoccupied with the interest of their regions rather than national interest. Most of the party leaders wanted to use the parties as instruments for personal enrichment. No concerted effort was made to use the political parties to achieve national integration. Promotion of national interest formed the priority of the programmes and manifesto of the second republic political parties. But unfortunately, the structure of the parties tended to promote private interest. The party leaders failed to implement their party manifestoes and electoral promises through the use of state power. They used state power to pursue personal interests, rather than pursuing national integration [32]. Quoting the constitution drafting committee, [32], argues that: “given the conditions of underdevelopment, power offers the opportunity of a life-time rise above poverty and squalor”. This has led to the politics of “do or die”, in their bid to occupy political position. However, political parties in this fourth republic have not done better than the previous ones. In terms of spread, some of the parties have wider national spread like the PDP, APC e.t.c., but the activities and programmes of these parties have not helped matter in the area of national integrations. [33]

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argues that there is so much similarity in policy positions, manifestoes, ideological leanings and strategies particularly among the major parties. The parties according to him are not organizational platform for alternative views and programmes of governance and development but associations, factions, cliques, and networks for power and resource struggles. He maintained that the only common thing among the political parties is the intense struggle to access state power and resources. The parties according to him have been weak political institutions. Party activities are reinforced by ethnicity and religion [31] at the detriment of national unity and integration. Many of them are centered on a few persons or hijacked and dominated by money-bags, political patrons and political machines. Some are hijacked by a few chieftains and godfathers or sole founders. The leadership of the parties has been plagued by selfish maneuvers and interests, disputes and fractionalization. The party elites are greedy, opportunistic, self-serving and deceitful and are actually to some extent, coalitions of various factions of regional and economic rent seekers [33].

Formation of All Progressive Congress (APC)

The All Progressives Congress (APC) was formed in February 2013, when opposition leaders orchestrated the merger of the country's largest opposition parties; the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), and part of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA). The new party was officially recognized by Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission in July 2013. The party's numbers grew as some PDP politicians quit joining the APC [34]. The party's manifesto emphasized issues of concern to many Nigerians. Of significance was the worsening security situation in the country, particularly in the north, which for years had been terrorized by Boko Haram, an Islamic militant group. Other issues embraced by the APC included improving government functionality, eliminating endemic corruption, and accelerating development in the country. As the APC prepared to participate in its first national-level elections, the party's message to the electorate was a promise of change. At the APC's convention in December 2014, Muhammadu Buhari, a former military head of state, was chosen to be the party's presidential candidate. The APC performed extremely well in the March 2015 elections, with Buhari triumphing over the incumbent president, Goodluck Jonathan of the PDP. Buhari's victory marked the first time in Nigeria's post-independence history that an incumbent had been defeated, and the ensuing transfer of power in May 2015 was the first time power was handed from one party to another. The APC also won a majority of seats in the country's legislative bodies, the House of Representatives and the Senate. The next round of national elections, held in February 2019, saw similar success for the party's candidates. Buhari was reelected president, and the APC maintained its majorities in both legislative bodies. The APC, which holds the record of being the first successful merger of major political parties in the nation's history, went ahead to win the 2015 presidential election. It also formed the government in most states of the federation where election was conducted, and produced the majority in both chambers of the National Assembly [35]. The party, which claims to have 40 million registered members, retained power at the centre in 2019. But about nine years after, the expectations of some Nigerians that a better administered party had arrived appear to have sunk. The party, whose government runs a country of about 200 million people, is troubled, leading to allegations that it cannot run itself.

Theoretical framework

This study is predicated on the systems theory which was first propounded in 1930s by a biologist named Ludvig von Bertalanffy [36]. The theory was applied by sociologists like Robert K. Merton and Talcott Parsons and so on. Further, it finally got into use in political science, by David Easton, Gabriel Almond, Mortan Kaplan, among others [37]. Within the purview of political science, David Easton popularized the systems theory which has been widely acknowledge political phenomenon such as corporate government and public policy making in a democratic system. To [38], the basic methodological foundation or assumption of systems theory is that political system consists of all interacting elements, which contribute to the authoritative allocation of values for a society. Also, the theory posits that political life, therefore, concerns all activities that significantly influence the formulation and implementation of authoritative policies and programmes for a society. The theory further assumes that political phenomena can best be analyzed by viewing them as part of reduces whole. As [39] aptly put it, system theory reduces every phenomena to a whole, made up of interdependent parts, which contributes to the proper functioning of the whole. Thus breakdown of any parts or unit ultimately affects the entire system. Hence, for there to be harmonious operation of the system, all parts thereof must function properly towards goal attainment. Certain key concepts are central to the understanding of the systems theory are the input and output. Input refers to the forces generated in the environment that affect the political system. It can take the form of demand and support. Demand involves actions by individuals and groups seeking authorities allocation of values from the authorities. Support comprises of actions rendered in favour of government such as obedience to the law and payment of taxes. Inputs are generated from the environment and are fed into the black box of decision making (otherwise called the conversion box) to produce output. Outputs are the decision and policies of the authorities,

which reflect the input, made into the political system. Another concept used in the systems theory is the concept of feedback and conversion box. The conversion box implies decision-making authorities in a political system that may be referred to as the government. The feedback is a mechanism of sending the outcome of a policy back to the conversion box. Analytically, using the systems theory, the political parties are seen as input makers into the conversional mechanism. Their inputs are in the form of political recruitment and demands seeking authoritative allocation of values to the different units of the political system. These functions or inputs also include political socialization and education, interest articulation and aggregation and other input functions, which determine the nature and character of the policy decision of the government in particular, and the stability of the general political system. Hence, the system theory would help us to ascertain the nature of inputs made by the political parties in Nigeria and how these inputs have affected the national integration.

Empirical Review

[18] examined the socio cultural variations of the entity vis-à-vis the expected roles of political parties in national integration. Thus, drawing heavily from experiences since 1999, it is held that Nigerian political parties are yet to comprehend or appreciate its role in the task of national integration and nation building. Rather, the contradictions they engender do reinforce the integration crises. Political Parties and National Integration: An Assessment of the Nigerian State since Independence was a review study carried by [40]. The crux of the study was to interrogate how political parties in Nigeria since independence have fared in building a cohesive and indivisible nation-state. The paper argues that political parties, in spite of their over ninety years of existence in Nigeria, are yet to play adequate role in integrating the nation. Rather, the poor performance and ethnic inclinations of the parties have culminated in bad governance disunity of the country. [37], study investigated the party politics and national integration with a view to analyzing the nature and structure of the People's Democratic Parties (PDP) between 1999 and 2015 in order to ascertain how it has promoted National Integration in Nigeria. The study found that the structures of parties in fourth republics tended to promote ethnic and private interest and this really affected national integration. The ruling class demonstrated their private interest through awarding contracts to party loyalists who abandon those contracts and embezzle the money and nothing would be done. [41], sought in his study to analyze the activities of political parties in Nigeria to establish that in Nigeria, parties are unable to tackle the stubborn issue of national integration. The study revealed that formation of parties in Nigeria follow ethnic lines and continue to fight for and protect ethnic or regional interests. Thus, he indicated that the ethnic tendencies have rendered the Nigerian parties inactive in the performance of this important task of national integration especially as party leaders defend their regions. [42], examines the role of political parties in achieving National integration in Nigeria. After using the primary and secondary sources of data collection analysis it was obvious that political parties have continuously failed in integrating the society due to a strong hold on ethnic divides, corruption, unfulfilled promises, thuggery among other negative portraits. [13], study examined party politics and challenges of national integration in Nigeria. It utilised a qualitative research technique with the aid of the interview guide. The findings of the study revealed political violence and conflicts in Nigeria are the resultant effects of non-performance of Nigerian politicians. This and among others have stymied national integration in Nigeria. [17], conducted a theoretical study on political parties and national integration in Nigeria. According to them, Nigeria is a plural society with multi-ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic diversities. Since the amalgamation, efforts have been made to integrate the country through constitutional means and the adoption of various policies, but these have not really produced the desired effect on the unity of the country. The finding of the study showed that political parties have serious role to play in forging national integration but that over the years, political parties have not lived up to expectation. [43], in their study on 'two decades of democracy in Nigeria' wrote that the year 1999 marked a watershed moment in the political history of Nigeria with the transition from military to civilian rule and the beginning of the Fourth Republic. The study therefore interrogated two decades of democratisation in Nigeria in the context of the two main parties, the conduct of elections, and the level of representation of marginalised groups, particularly women.

METHODOLOGY

The study involves secondary data analysis. The study relied on secondary source of data collection. The study adopted observation method of data collection. Observation method is used to obtain in-depth information and concept clarification so as to facilitate instrument designs. More so, secondary data will be collected for the study. Data gathered were analyzed using thematic content analysis involves summarizing the information generated through secondary sources.

APC Distribution of Party Offices as a Tool of National Integration

The party maintains federal character principles in the distribution of positions to its members at each level. First, according to the party constitution, the following constitute the principal organs of the party:

- i. National Convention

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- ii. National Advisory Council
- iii. National Executive Committee
- iv. National Working Committee
- v. Zonal Congress
- vi. Zonal Executive Committee
- vii. State Congress
- viii. State Executive Committee
- ix. State Working Committee
- x. Senatorial District Committee
- xi. Local Government Area/Area Council Congress
- xii. Local Government Area/Area Council Executive Committee
- xiii. Ward Congress, xiv. Ward Executive Committee, and
- xiv. Polling Unit Committee [44].

The above organs of the party indicated that it covers all the levels of government in Nigeria and as well as all the geopolitical zones of the nation. Thus, all regions have representative in the policy making organ of the party [44].

APC and Internal Democracy

Absence of internal party democracy manifested itself in the form of flagrant and mindless imposition of candidates from Presidential down to the State House of Assembly level, leading to massive party stakeholders and stalwarts, commencing effectively with the defection of five (initially seven) PDP Governors to opposition APC (except that Babangida Aliyu of Niger State and Sule Lamido of Jigawa State became lethargic at the last moment). Five PDP Governors jumping boat was an earth-moving political event, followed by the carpet-crossing of dozens of PDP National Assemblymen, including the former Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Rt. Hon Aminu Waziri Tambuwal to the opposition APC, which automatically became the majority party in both chambers of the Legislature, except that, in compliance with subsisting court order, it maintained the status quo and restrained itself from using its new majority to change the leadership of the National Assembly. Quite honestly, you cannot flagrantly violate the party constitution, guidelines and principles of fairness and still expect cohesion, comradeship and common ideals to exist in the party [45]. Jigawa State presents an interesting illustration of how absence of internal democracy or the mindless imposition by State Governors of candidates at all levels for the 2015 elections had adversely affected the fortunes of the PDP in the States. In the case of Jigawa, imposition of candidates precipitated the routing and collapse of the Lamido political dynasty, for, whereas prior to the 2015 Elections, the APC had only one seat in the Jigawa State House of Assembly, with the Governorship, all Senate, all House of Representatives and all the other State House of Assembly seats remaining in the stranglehold of the PDP, the 2015 Elections produced a rather melodramatic result, with the Governorship slot, all the three Senate seats, all the eleven (11) seats in the House of Representatives, and twenty-five (25) out of 30 seats in the State House of Assembly going to the APC, with the PDP managing to retain only 5 seats in the State House of Assembly (Leadership, 16 May 2015). PDP's failure in Jigawa was fatal and underscores the inadvisability of Lamido undemocratically imposing unpopular candidates, thereby compelling popular candidates to find political space in the APC where they could achieve their ambition in a relatively more competitive setting. In many states, The APC aptly cashed lack of internal democracy to criticize PDP and harp on the urgent need for change. The party presented a candidate whose integrity is better accepted by many electorates for the presidency with a political structure that posed significant challenge to the ruling party at a time that the electoral management body (Independent National Electoral Commission - INEC) was committed to conducting credible elections. The message of change was well understood by most Nigerians who had suffered much in the hands of political leaders that rode on their back to positions and alienated themselves from the people that they were meant to govern. Clearly, sovereignty and mandate belong to bigwigs and power brokers and the people [45].

APC position on Power Rotation in Nigeria

Section 14 (3) of the constitution stated clearly the need for zoning and power rotation to ensure national cohesion so that there will not be dominance of a particular ethnic group or tribe. "When we examine various sections of the 1999 constitution, it is clearly written, especially in chapter 2, that the framers of the constitution had envisaged that we were going to get to this stage in our national lives. So enough provisions have been made to accommodate national cohesion, to carry everybody along in governance and to ensure unity, equality and justice in the distribution of power and offices. "In particular, I'll refer to section 14 of the 1999 constitution, in particular section 14(3), which talks about the need for there to be a spread in the distribution of offices and composition of government, in such a way that there is no dominance of a particular state, ethnic group, or a tribe should have that dominance in terms of the sharing of power. "So in that regard, it is meant that we should promote national

cohesion and unity and a sense of loyalty amongst all the ethnic groups and indeed the geopolitical zone that makes the federation of Nigeria. The constitution itself before that provision had envisaged that there must be that national spread and balance, in such a way that a particular ethnic group or tribe is not seen as dominating. Zoning was first deliberately introduced to select political party officials during the Second Republic by the National Party of Nigeria, NPN, to ease interethnic tensions in the aftermath of the civil war. Later, following the annulment of the 1993 elections which further exacerbated ethnic tensions in the country, a number of prominent leaders advocated rotating the presidency among the country's six geopolitical zones (north-central, north-east, north-west, south-east, south-south, and south-west) during the National Constitutional Conference of 1994 -1995. But the proposal was rejected in favour of North and South rotation to reflect the religious cleavage and persuasive bents between the mostly Christian South and the mostly Muslim North, leaving political parties to decide from which geopolitical zone to produce their presidential candidates. And rightly so, because the political parties have different support bases, and should be left alone to determine their different election strategies. Since then, the idea of rotation and balancing power between the north and the south has been codified by a number of parties. Article 20(vi) of the APC constitution provides:

Without prejudice to Article 20(ii) and (iii) of this Constitution, the National Working Committee shall subject to the approval of the National Executive Committee make rules and regulations for the nomination of candidates through primary elections. All such rules, regulations and guidelines shall take into consideration and uphold the principle of Federal Character, gender balance, geo-political spread and rotation of offices, to as much as possible, ensure balance within the constituency covered [44].

The question, though, is whether the APC will bear true faith and allegiance to their constitution and uphold its provision on zoning and power rotation. The fact that the aspirants for the presidential tickets of the two major parties are predominately from the South is a reflection of the mood of the people and fortunately for both parties there is a Southern strategy. [46] while citing Ngige, who is a chieftain of the All Progressives Congress (APC) argued that zoning and rotation of power create stability, unity, equity and progress of the country. According to him, power rotation engenders confidence and patriotism and ensures that no one ethnic group or section of the country, dominates the other. He also cited Section 14 (3) of the constitution is clear on the composition of government at the national, states and even local government level, in such a way that there should be no actual or perceptions of domination by any single tribe or group of persons from one ethnic nationality so as to engender confidence and patriotism.

Factionalization in APC

Despite APC claim to be a national party, [37] Ashindorbe and Danjibo (2022) argued that the party involvement in electoral contests in Nigeria have been fierce, riddled with tensions, violence, mass rigging, thuggery and intimidation. This is understandable given the narrow conception of political power as an instrument for primitive accumulation and state capture. This ugly political behaviour continued into the Fourth Republic, where candidates are routinely imposed on party members and the electorate by 'godfathers', while rigging and the falsification of votes remain pervasive [43]. The current governing party in Nigeria, the All Progressives Congress (APC), is not exactly the progressive party the name suggests. The APC was formed in 2013 when four major opposition parties merged with the sole aim of challenging the hegemony of the then governing party, the PDP. The APC also suffers from the same defects and incongruence that characterise the PDP. Like the party it displaced from office, whose main aim was to stop the military from perpetuating itself in office, evidence suggests that the overriding drive in the formation of APC was to have a platform strong enough to challenge the hegemony of the PDP and not necessarily to provide a credible alternative. The founding members are typical political demagogues and political grandees, adept at propaganda with little in the way of substance and performance. The party claims to be left of centre in the ideological spectrum; but in reality, it is at best a motley crowd with discernible elements of both progressivism and conservatism. The APC lacks internal cohesion and has been unable to fuse its legacy parties and situate the party as a credible platform. The leadership of the party and members in government subscribe to much the same political opportunism as its predecessor, the PDP [47]. The national consensus on the need for an alternative platform to challenge the dominance of the PDP in 2015 may have overshadowed the glaring dysfunctions and internal contradictions of now governing party. The goodwill and groundswell of support that propelled it to electoral victory happened to coincide with a competent and reform-minded electoral management body that was ready to deliver on its mandate. It is important to state that this massive goodwill is fast dissipating as the party's performance in office has been underwhelming. Early in its rule as the governing party, there was controversy over the choice of which of the four original factions should produce the leadership and principal officers in the legislature. This depicts the APC as undisciplined and as a party of convenience whose members are only concerned with sharing the spoils of electoral conquest. The party failed to recover from that early false start throughout its first term in office. The views of two associate fellows of

the Africa Programme at Chatham House capture the essence and origin of the APC. They argued that the party is an 'uneasy alliance of autonomous elite networks bound together by little more than incumbency and a collective desire to stay in power through 2023 and beyond' [48]. Also, a report by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2018, p. 10) on the state of the two main political parties in Nigeria stated that:

Little distinguishes Nigeria's two main political parties – the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) party and the opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP). Both are constellations of fluid national, state, and local elite networks. Both are almost identically structured, non-ideological organizations. Both rely on misappropriated public funds to finance election campaigns. Neither values internal party democracy, allowing money and high-level interference to corrupt candidate selection processes.

Regardless of this inchoate and apparent dysfunction, what is undeniable is that the emergence of two dominant parties has sharpened the role of the parties as strategic institutions for the survival of Nigeria's democratic aspirations. The Nigerian political system has demonstrated greater resilience and delivered more credible democratic transitions of power on this occasion when the polity gravitates around a two-party formation. The APC have become pillars for the nurture and sustenance of the country's collective optimism in democracy and good governance, and have acquired a historic mission and importance that transcends their present faults.

Management of Electoral Outcomes

Elections in transitional democracies and deeply divided societies like Nigeria are often dented with animosity and violence, failing in the process to satisfy the test of legitimacy. Since the formation of APC, Nigeria has successfully organised three national elections, in 2015, 2019 and in February 2023. The majority of these elections were characterised by widespread malpractice, rigging, ballot box stuffing, vote buying, maiming and fatalities [49]. Violence during elections is designed to disable and disrupt the opposing party in order to prevail at the polls, to vitiate the election altogether by undermining the integrity of the results, or to influence voting behaviour through threats and intimidation [43]. The pervasive nature of violence is not peculiar to the current democratic dispensation in Nigeria. Election-related violence and fatalities are a central theme that runs through the history of Nigeria from the time of independence. The collapse of the First and Second Republics was partly attributed to disputed electoral outcomes that resulted in the expression of various forms of violence, such as the destruction of properties, maiming and killings, which necessitated military intervention [50]. While democratic elections should ideally serve as mechanisms for peace building, more often than not they trigger violent conflict. Because of the zero-sum disposition of key actors and the weaponisation of ethnic and religious differences in Nigeria, every election tends to complicate the process of national cohesion and threatens the very existence of the state [51]. For this reason, elections mean more than the routine or regular periodic exercise liberal democracies presume them to be. Paradoxically, the persistence of election violence, the threat to life and monumental malpractices have not exerted any decisive impact in discouraging citizens from seeking participation in the electoral process. They continue to show their conviction in the ballot box as the means of leadership succession [52]. The rentier and prebendal character of the Nigerian state has for decades been the site for violent, zero-sum electoral competition among the factional political elite who scheme to gain access to and control of the vast economic power that public office confers [50]. The political mobilisation and weaponisation of ethnic and religious identities are also implicated and tend to fuel violent election-related conflict. There is no general election that is not coloured by the ethnic consideration of the candidates, a trend that is even more visible in presidential elections. Interestingly, the presidential elections that feature candidates from similar ethnic groups are contested on the grounds of candidate popularity, their charisma, the spread of their parties and ability of one party to out-ridge the other [51]. Because of the high level of electoral malfeasance and blatant official meddling, electoral outcomes have been the subject of intense litigation with high numbers of election petitions filed in court by aggrieved politicians after each election circle. The 2015 elections attracted the lowest number, with 297 petitions filed; however, the numbers increased again to 766 after the 2019 elections [53, 54]. The outcome of the 2019 elections won by APC seems not to have met the standards set by the 2015 election. The final report of the European Union Election Observer Mission rated the overall conduct of the election as poor, noting that they were 'marked by severe operational and transparency shortcomings, electoral security problems, and low turnout' [55]. In its final report, the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room concluded that 'the elections did not meet the credibility threshold based on the patterns of abuse of the process and the consequent lack of integrity observed' [55, 56]. President Buhari won both the 2015 and 2019 presidential elections with change as his party campaign slogan, promising to tackle insecurity, fight corruption and grow the economy. The message of change resonated deeply with the majority and many thought he would deliver on these promises. With less than a year to the expiration of his second term in the office, none of the key campaign promises have been fulfilled; rather, the fortunes of the country seem to be deteriorating. The 2023 general elections in Nigeria already shaped up to be the most keenly-contested since the return to civilian rule. Being an open-seat election with no incumbency factor,

incendiary verbal exchanges by political gladiators over which ethno-regional bloc should produce the next president undermined the clamour for national integrity. Party politics has influenced the togetherness of Nigerians on two occasions. The first one was the nationalists fight for independence; and the second one was the incidence that engulfed the June 12, 1993, presidential election. Nigerians from all quarters were united to demand the winner of the election and it sprang into the coming in of the first president in the Fourth Republic. The Fourth republic sets new agenda, happiness and dreams for Nigerians to deepen democracy and national integration. But the political class as it was in the first and second republics displayed self-centredness; parochialism; and ethnic hatred to each other which endangered Nigerian democratic stability and national integration. The above observation also revealed the views of one professor of Political Science in his article who stated that the Nigerian state has witnessed poor party politics as a result of lack of internal party democracy, ethnicisation of party politics, poor political leadership and lack of clear cut party ideologies [57]. He added that the aforementioned factors have snowballed have threatened the survival of the Nigerian Fourth Republic, and by extension national integration. The analyses above also reflected the summation of Giovanni M. Carbone in his investigation on African politics identified that African parties have often conveyed the image of patronage and tribal politics [58]. In a study by [59] cited in [60], revealed the effect of ethnic politics as follows:

Wastage of enormous human and material resources in ethnically inspired violence, encounters, clashes and even battles, heightening of fragility of the economy and political process, threat to security of life and property and disinvestment of local and foreign components with continuous capital flight and loss of confidence in the economy; and increasing gaps in social relationship among ethnic nationalities including structural suspicions and hate for one another. Ethnic nationalism is equally responsible for the uprising of ethnic militias across the country.

The feeble nature of political parties in Nigeria has marred all the basic elements of institutionalization, which has further eroded patriotism among Nigerians. Recruitment and other functions of political parties in Nigeria are tilted and controlled by the elites for personal gains. These have made political parties not to perform and contribute to national integration in Nigeria. The most serious problem has, however, been the unhealthy suspicion, rivalry and conflict among the ethnic groups. Nigeria has many ethnic groups with three large ones. Each of the three groups was in terms of geographical extent and population strength capable of existing as an independent nation. The heightening of inter-ethnic conflict could, however, be ascribed to colonialism. Though many factors ranging from ethnic to cultural divergences pose serious difficulties for integration and national unity, this is not to say that in pre-colonial times, there had been no form of cooperation among the various [60].

Party Structures and National/ Private Interest

For proper, efficient and effective organization, party structures were set up in Nigeria. A badly organized party will not only groom disintegration but would also cause general disarticulation. [11] wrote that party structure constitute the greater setting for the activities of members; the form impose on their solidarity and it also determines the machinery for the selection of leaders and decides their powers. Party structures are very crucial and important in determining the strength and weakness of political parties. In Nigeria, the federalist structure of government reflected on party structures. In terms of organization, Nigerian parties could be said to be direct in the sense of membership recruitment, following that constitutional provision is an individual basis and open to all. In general terms, party structure specially defines the lie of political power within the party and the process of decision-making. This is referred to as centralization and decentralization. Decentralized parties do not make for proper political integration in the sense that local interest will not often be subordinate to national interest since both leaders are assumed to represent the interest of various levels and since they assume greater autonomy. In centralization the central executives take decisions for the entire society. all their decision were taken by the central bodies and they are binding to the local bodies. In the Nigerian context with the heterogeneous nature of the society and federalist and structure, local levels are given certain considerable autonomy while the federal retain some. The influence of oligarchy, the notables or the dominant class in Nigerian party politics and the ineffective party structures makes for weak integration. The structures of political parties in the second and third republics tended to promote private interest, which in turn affected national integration. There was a high level influence oligarchy. These oligarchies were party members and saw the parties as their private enterprises. They donated money and helped in raising funds for parties at the end, they wanted to control these parties. This has caused a lot of problem in Nigeria. These oligarchies often impose candidates on parties and ensure that these candidates win. It has been noted therefore that the structure of Nigerian political parties has given these notable oligarchs the lee ways to influence party politics in Nigeria. This study has proven that APC party politics has undermined national integration Nigeria, and that it has further increase the tendency disintegration in Nigeria from 2015 to 2023. 1999 and 2015, therefore based on the data analysis, we upheld our hypothesis one.

CONCLUSION

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The study has examined political parties in this fourth republic and national integration. It could be deduced that they have not done better than the previous ones. In terms of spread, some of the parties have wider national spread like the APC but the activities and programmes of the political party has not helped matter in the area of national integration. There is so much similarity in policy positions, manifestoes, ideological leanings and strategies particularly among the major parties. The party is not organizational platform for alternative views and programmes of governance and development but associations, factions, cliques, and networks for power and resource struggles. The only common thing among the political parties is the intense struggle to access state power and resources. The parties according to him have been weak political institutions. It was found that APC as political party anchors on ethnicity at the detriment of national unity and integration. Many of its activities are centered on a few persons or hijacked and dominated by money-bags, political patrons and political machines. Some are hijacked by a few chieftains and godfathers or sole founders. The leadership of the parties has been plagued by selfish maneuvers and interests, disputes and fractionalization. The party elites are greedy, opportunistic, self-serving and deceitful and are actually to some extent, coalitions of various factions of regional and economic rent seekers. As such, the leaders of the political party struggle for their personal economic gains, no time was left to think of national interest and particularly national integration. Instead, the leaders employ tribal, ethnic and religious sentiments to woo people from their region to support their selfish personal interest and struggle, and this has left the different parts that make up Nigeria more divided and separated than united and integrated.

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