

## The Rise and Fall of the Two Party-System: The Nigerian Example

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**Abstract:** The aim of this study is to examine the origins of the two party system consisting of the defunct Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC) brought into existence through, the military administrative fiat of Rtd. General Babangida. The study points out that the annulment of the June 12 presidential election of 1993, the post election crises and Abacha's palace coup were the 3 principal factors that stifled and removed the two party system from Nigeria's political history thereby paving way for the present multi-party state structure.

**Key words:** Political party, multi partism, Nigeria, Africa, federalism, military regime

### INTRODUCTION

A combination of many variables such as social, economic and political problems irretrievably paved way for Nigeria's military incursion on December 31st, 1983. Thus before, the August 1983 presidential election, it was already feared that there was going to be a succession crisis through election rigging and thuggery. Two general fears were exercised about the election aftermath, a total breakdown of law and order as a result of election rigging and military intervention as a temporary measure (Ifidon, 2002). Both of these were experienced and in the words of Nwolise (2007). The military once more seized the opportunity to halt Nigeria's march to democracy' (Nwolise, 2007). It took 10 years later before Nigerians could have the opportunity to vote again.

The new military administration under Major General Muhammadu Buhari did not concern itself with the returning of the country to civilian regime rather, the regime's intention was focused on the economic recovery of the country.

However, throughout, the 20 months of Major-General Buhari's regime, the administration did not deem it appropriate to return the country to the civilians. But there was a disagreement among the then members of the supreme military council-the then highest ruling making body-as to why the administration was silent on the return to the civilian administration. It was against such a deliberate silence that the coup of August 27, 1985 came into existence which brought in President Babangida as the head of state. Barely 4 months after which the regime came to power, a strong confirmation surfaced as the administration through President Babangida announced the return to civil rule in 1990 during the budget speech of 1986 (Diamond, 1995; Agbaje, 1996). It was that

culminated into the appointment of a 17 member Political Bureau which was inaugurated in Abuja on January 13, 1986 to engage in a collective search for a new political order. It was headed by Dr. Samuel Cooley.

The desire to do away from the past mistakes which had riddled Nigeria's political system necessitated the setting up of the Political Bureau. The Bureau which was inaugurated in Abuja on January 13, 1986 submitted its report one year and 3 months later (Ironuasi, 2000). The Nigerian government has constantly pre-occupied itself with how to come up with an enduring political system. This is why, any fault found in the existing system is quickly addressed. Constitutions have changed from time to time, electoral laws reviewed, court cases have changed election results among others.

It was in line of creating a sound political system that the idea of whether political party and how many political parties would be necessary in the system came up. Generally speaking, political parties are essential in any democratic system. Adejumo and Kehinde (2007) have reiterated this when they remarked that: 'Political parties are not only a major agency for the recruitment and enthronement of political leaders they are the foundation of democratic evolution (Adejumo and Kehinde, 2007). Similarly, Mimiko (2007) pointed out the unbroken link between political parties, elections and liberal democracies.

Seeing the inevitability of political parties in a democratic system, Nigerians according to the Bureau, expressed their willingness for the institution of political parties, but diverse political party systems were suggested such as a zero party option, a one party option, multi-party option and a 2 party option (Adeniran, 1991).

The Bureau's White paper's report in which it recommended 2-partyism was endorsed by Babangida's

regime. Even though, the regime endorsed two partyism initially, two party system was subsequently accepted by the government and was given legal sanction with the promulgation into law of 1989 constitution through Decree No12 of 1989 (Adejumobi, 1997). Similarly, the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria (Promulgation) Decree Clause 220 (1) of the 1989 constitution recognized the institutionalization of the two party system in the country. However, there is a need for clarification between two-partyism and two party system. A two-partyism only allows 2 political parties and no others to operate, while a two party system institutionalizes two dominant political parties while several others continue to exist (Momoh and Adejumi, 1999).

### THE EVOLUTION OF THE TWO PARTY SYSTEM

The Nigeria's federal military government made its position clear that only two political parties would be in the 3rd Republic. Consequent upon this and in a characteristic manner of the behaviour of the past military regimes, the lid placed on political activities was once uncovered by May 1989 signifying that politicians were free to float political associations among, which suitable ones would be registered as political parties to steer the ship of Nigeria's Third Republic. What was most surprising was that within the month of May when the ban on partisan politics was lifted, between 60 and 88 political associations sprang up (Agbese and Kieh, 1992).

Government's position was decisively different from the position of the political leaders as governments favoured and sanctioned two party system, which was backed up by decree number 23 of 1987 section 3. In line with this, the National Electoral Commission (NEC) which was to recommend the two political parties from the numerous political associations set up rigorous NEC inspection for any political association becoming a political party (Chizea, 2004). It was in the fear of meeting such stringent measures of the national electoral commission that forced the associations to begin to merge. The associations were however, given between May and July, 1989 to organize themselves and file their applications for registration. Before the registration, the numerous political associations had whittled down to 13 political associations which were:

- The People's Front of Nigeria (PFN).
- Nigerian People's Welfare Party (NPWP).
- Nigerian National Congress (NNC).
- People's Solidarity Party (PSP).
- Republican Party of Nigeria (RPN).
- Nigeria Labour Party (NLP).

- National Union Party (NUP).
- Liberal Convention (LC).
- Patriotic Nigerian's Party (PNP).
- Ideal Peoples Party (IPP).
- All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP).
- People's Patriotic Party (PPP).
- United Nigeria Democratic Party (UNDP) (Badejo, 1997).

These 13 political associations submitted their applications to National Electoral Commission (NEC). Thereafter, NEC officials went to the field to verify the claims of these political associations so as to be guided in recommending those associations to approve. But to NEC's dismay, none of the 13 political associations was qualified for licensing as a political party. The National Electoral Commission (NEC) accusing these associations claimed that:

- All the associations have performed poorly: they made exaggerated claims about their membership size and organizational strength.
- That out of a sample size of 1,635,485 for all the associations, NEC was able to verify 467,132.
- Most associations are poorly organized at all levels of government in spite of the obvious evidence of window dressing.
- Virtually, all the associations derive their roots from the politics of the first and second republics in varying degrees.
- There is little substantial difference between the associations as reflected in their manifestos and policy papers.
- All the associations have poor financial base and therefore, stand to be hijacked by the wealthy individuals within them.
- Virtually, all the associations are rent by factionalism as a result of power struggle which portends ill for the third republic (Badejo, 1997).

The abysmal performance of these 13 political associations notwithstanding, the National Electoral Commission (NEC) recommended the following top 6 political associations and their scores to the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) to select any two to be registered as political parties:

- People's Solidarity Party -43.90%.
- Nigerian National Congress -42.62%.
- People's front of Nigeria -41.20%.
- Liberal convention -38.08%.
- Nigerian labour party -17.90%.
- Republican party of Nigeria -17.00%.

The Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) found none of the six recommended political associations acceptable. Instead, the AFRC considered 7 options from which the body (AFRC) picked the last option. These options considered were:

- All political association electoral competition and elimination.
- Merger conference and voluntary Merger among the Associations.
- Repeat exercise.
- Ideologically-based parties.
- Labour-centric two-party system.
- The serial order/descending order of performance.
- Grassroots two-party system (Adeniran, 1991).

It was the endorsement of the last option that led to the creation of the two grassroots democratic parties, that is, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC). President Babangida (the then head of state) himself justified the creation of the two political parties when he said:

The AFRC is convinced that something revolutionary in our thinking needs to be introduced, given the context of the failure of all our experiments. Only ...the grassroots democratic two party system provides the kind of revolutionary departure we need for establishing a mass two party system (Adejumobi, 1997).

#### **The Emergence of the Social Democratic Party (SDP):**

The formation of the social democratic party was necessitated by the ill-prepared exercise that marred the coming up of the political associations following the release of the national electoral commission guidelines on political party formation. The exercise was marred because, there was a substantial deviation from the Political Bureau's recommendation which was also backed up by section three of Decree Number 23 of 1987 which clearly stated that only two political parties would be recommended by the National Electoral Commission (NEC).

However, at the time of the release of the guidelines, leaders of the prospective political organizations that came up did not take the Political Bureau's recommendation into cognizance. What really emerged was that between May 3, 1989 when the ban on partisan politics was lifted for the 3rd Republic and July 19, 1989 which was the deadline for the submission of papers and documents by the leaders of political associations for the purpose of considering them for recommendation as political parties, no fewer than 88 political associations came up which later merged to become 13 political

associations. Each of the leaders of these associations were so confident that their associations would be registered; but the outcome of the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) proved them wrong as none of them was found acceptable. It was after the banning of these 13 political associations that the Federal Military Government created the Social Democratic party.

#### **Aims and objectives of the social democratic party:**

Article four of the party's constitution specified the aims and objectives of the party. Accordingly, the aim of the party is in conformity with the fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy in Nigeria's democratic constitution of 1989. The party shall pursue the political, economic, social, education and other objectives as well as the directive principles and policies as stated in the specified constitution. The party's objectives were:

- To attain political power through democratic and constitutional means for the purpose of creating socio-economic conditions in which the productive energies of individuals citizens and corporate groups are enhanced and utilized for national development.
- To promote participatory democracy at all levels of government in the belief that sovereignty belongs to the people from which government through the Nigerian constitution derives all its power and authority.
- To sponsor candidates for elections into the local Government Council and similar councils in the Federal Capital Territory, legislative houses and to the offices of governor and deputy governor and of the president and vice president.
- To educate other activities which in the opinion of the party are ancillary, incidental or conducive to the promotion of the aforementioned aims and objectives.

**Ideology, finance and organisation of the party:** The party's ideology was a little to the left. In this respect, the social democratic party aimed at building a self-reliant economy that would develop on the strength of the nation's resources and the effort of the Nigerians. In the pursuit of this, the social democratic party aimed at embarking on the following:

- The state will play a leading role in the economy in order to achieve a self reliant and just society.
- Diversification of the economy will be promoted in order to reduce reliance on oil and foreign capital.
- Improved and effective revenue collection through a system of progressive taxation would be undertaken. Gaps between the rich and the poor will be narrowed through an equitable income distribution policy.

- Formation of co-operatives as a strategy of economic development would be encouraged.
- Full and gainful employment for all citizens would be facilitated.

Government provided the bulk of initial funding. However, it is note worthy to point out that in Nigerian politics especially before the Second Republic, political parties were funded through the common sources associated with the traditional methods of party organization. Such methods included registration fees, monthly dues, donations, levies, contributions, economic activities, loans and government grants (Babawale and Ashiru, 2006). The advent of Babangida regime and the administration policy regarding the funding of the party made most of the above mentioned sources to become moribund. This notwithstanding, other funds flowed into party coffers. This was not unconnected with the high demands of the two political parties (Welch, 1995). Structurally, the party was organized in pyramidal nature. The ward was the established base of entrance for each member. The local government area represented the second layer of the political structure, followed by the state and the federal levels. Party organs were established for each level. These organs included:

- The Ward Executive Committee.
- The Ward Congress.
- The Local Government Area Executive Committee.
- The Local Government Area Congress.
- The Local Government Area Conference.
- The State Executive Committee.
- The State Congress.
- The State Conference.
- The National Executive Committee.
- The National Conference.
- The National Convention.

The national convention was the highest organ of each party, while each organ was composed of party officials, functionaries and operatives who were answerable to the next higher organ of the party. Membership of every organ was through election (Adeniran, 1991).

**Emergence of the national republican convention:** Like the social democratic party, the national republican convention was necessitated by the cancellation of the 13 political associations that filed in their applications seeking registration with the national electoral commission. Unfortunately, none of these 13 political associations passed the national electoral commission's requirements nor that of the Armed Forces Ruling Council. It was as a result of this that

the Armed Forces Ruling Council went ahead to create the National Republican Convention.

Article 1 of the constitution of the national republican convention further stated that the party would be known with the name National Republican Convention in accordance with the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1989.

**Aims and objectives of the national republican convention:** Article 4 of the party constitution stated the aims and objectives of the party. The constitution pointed out that the aims of the party should at all times and in all spheres conform with the fundamental objectives and Directives Principles of State Policy as enshrined in chapter II of 1989 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and accordingly, the party would pursue the political, economic, social, educational and other objectives as well as the Directive Principles and policies stated in the said chapter II of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

The party's objectives were to:

- Attain political power through democratic and constitutional means for the purpose of creating socioeconomic conditions in which the productive energies of individual citizens and corporate groups are enhanced and utilized for national development.
- Promote participatory democracy at all levels of government in the belief that sovereignty belongs to the people from whom government, through the Nigerian Constitution, derives all its powers and authority.
- Sponsor candidates for elections into the Local government Council and similar Councils in the Federal Capital Territory, Legislative Houses and to the Offices of Governor and Deputy Governor and of the President and Vice President.
- Undertakes other activities to which the opinion of the party are ancillary, incidental or conducive to the promotion of the aforementioned aims and objectives.

**Ideology, finance and organization of the party:** The party's ideology was a little to the right (liberal capitalist). The central focus of the party's economic policy was the greater participation by Nigerians in the economic affairs of the nation by releasing individual creativeness and energies and channeling them into productive processes. But government would still control key sectors of the economy such as natural resource industries and basic infrastructures. The party aimed at redefining the role of government in national economic life in such a way as to concentrate on area such as industrial and agricultural research, education and health,

infrastructures, physical infrastructures, internal security and a conducive environment that would support a vibrant economic life.

Since, the party was created by the Federal Military Government, it was likewise funded by the government. The government became the financier of political parties in order to curtail the excessive use of money in politics and besides, to avoid the parties being hijacked by the money bags.

There were four levels of party organisation. These levels were: the ward, Local Government area, the state and the National Level. Each of these levels of the party organization had a functioning secretariat. Party organs were established for each level. These organs were: the Ward Executive Committee, Ward Congress, the Local Government Area Executive Committee, the Local Government Area Congress, the Local Government Area Conference, the State Executive Committee, the State Congress, the State Conference, the National Executive Committee, the National Conference and the National Convention.

**Operations of the two political parties:** The politics of the third republic substantially deviated from the past Nigerian politics. Past Nigerian party politics was narrowly organized as the political parties were not allowed to have a national base. The nationalists regarded taking politics to the grassroot level as a delay tactics. The military government that created both the National Republican Convention (NRC) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) created an agency known as Mass Mobilisation for Social and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) to enlighten the citizenry on the importance of voting. Citizens awareness of democratic principles assumed greater prominence. The heart of MAMSER's work centred on mass political education through political awareness rallies, community lectures, musical messages, radio advertisements and discussions, touring drama troupes, visits to primary and secondary schools, development of special curricula for the schools and specialized programs. In fact, MAMSER sought to mobilize Nigerians out of ignorance (Ikpe, 1999). These two political parties had many organs. They were created to give equal rights and opportunities to all Nigerians to participate in the political process irrespective of their wealth, religion, geopolitical backgrounds and professional endeavours. In fact, the only route through which these political parties came to power was through the local government rather than the national. President Babangida himself pointed this out in his speech entitled *The Dawn of a New Socio-Political Order* when he said inter alia:

Government will be accused of imposing a structure and this will be true, even though, all that would be done would be to stimulate the political process to grow from below, from the grassroots (Nwagboso, 1989).

The Ward Executive Committee formed the nucleus of the party machinery at the Ward level. It met at least once in a month. The quorum for any meeting at this level was formed by 4 members of the committee. The Ward Executive Committee was responsible for the recruiting members of the party and as well as drew up strategies for political campaigns, administer the party affairs at the ward level, mobilize voters during elections and be responsible to the ward congress (Adeniran, 1991). When the two political parties took off, for more than one year, there was no ward congress being held. The ward executive committee was as a result of this relating directly to the local government area executive committee. This lukewarm attitude with which these political parties started virtually affected all their organs. For instance, the local government area congress of each party was not held for some time. Instead, what transpired was that the local government executive committee was running the affairs of each party at the local government level and relating to the state executive committee and to the local government area executive committee. While, the local government executive Committee has been relating to the state executive committee, the state executive committee has failed in its part to relate with the national executive. The \$50 million made available to each of these political parties helped to establish grassroots penetration and interaction among the various levels (Local, State and National).

**Sign posts to the demise of the two party system:** For the first time in the development of Nigeria's party system, the military came up with the creation of 2 political parties, the National Republican Convention (NRC) and Social Democratic Party (SDP). In a broadcast to the nation on August 27, 1989, President Babangida emphasized that:

The registration of 2 political parties will be another important milestone in Nigeria's journey to a democratic polity... This administration has no vested interest in the registration of any particular political association as a political party. The criteria for registration of political parties have already been spelt out by the NEC. I wish to assure the nation that the political associations

will be assessed on the criteria and no extraneous considerations will be allowed to influence the outcome of the party registration exercise (Akinola, 1990).

With the creation of the two party system, the Babangida's administration thought that all the centrifugal forces plaguing Nigeria would have been subdued; but, power sharing based on a two party system in a multi-ethnic political systems such as Nigeria is fraught with enormous problems. There were those that came under the umbrella of liberal democrats and the main stream both of which were engaged in intra-party squabbles, which greatly weakened the party's capacity to consolidate.

We shall limit ourselves to 3 factors that irretrievably brought an end to the two political parties created by the military. These factors were: the annulment of June 12 presidential election, the post election crises and Abacha's palace coup.

**The annulment of June 12 presidential election:** In the annals of political development in Nigeria, the annulment of June 12 presidential election would not be forgotten in the memories of all and sundry. Going by the facts available to us, this annulment had long been planned before the holding of the presidential election. We shall however, unravel these facts in sequence.

The first presidential primaries by the two political parties to select their flag bearers for the presidential election took place on August 1st, 1992. The attendant malpractices that besmeared the primaries led to their suspension and the need to introduce orderliness in which, each political party was to sanitize its membership list so as to produce a credible and authenticated register for the primaries. The National Electoral Commission (NEC) was to strictly monitor the primaries and generally to guide the parties. The cluster of states for the primaries was reduced from 6-3 and decree No 37 of 1992 was promulgated to govern the conduct of the primaries. In spite of the steps taken to nib malpractices at the bud at the resumption of the exercise, there were accusations and counter accusations of massive electoral malpractices. It was against this backdrop that the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) waded in and cancelled the primaries, dissolved the Executive Committees of the two political parties at all levels and disqualified all the 23 presidential aspirants from the process. In addition, the national electoral commission was directed to evolve a non-conventional hitch-free method of selecting presidential candidates. The Commission however, identified 8 options from which the government adopted option A4.

Under this option, the delegates at national party conventions were selected on the following basis (Momoh, 1997):

- Delegates elected for that purpose at their state congresses on the basis of 5 or 6 delegates per local government.
- All state legislators who are members of the party.
- All national legislators who are members of the party.
- All governors and deputy-governors of states in which the party formed the government.
- A maximum of 7 commissioners and 3 special assistants in states in which a party formed the government.
- All members of the state Executive Committees.

It was these presidential primaries based on option A4 that eventually led to the emergence of the two presidential candidates of Abiola and Tofa. The former being for Social Democratic Party while the latter was for the National Republican Convention.

Following the transition programme, the presidential election was slated for June 12, 1993 but 2 days before the election, a group known as the Association for Better Nigeria (ABN) petitioned the courts for an order to stop the presidential election. The ABN was a pressure group created after the presidential primaries by a military front group and was under the public leadership of Arthur Nzeribe. This association had been long involved in Babangida Must Stay campaign from March 1993. On June 9, 1993 many of Babangida's loyalists within the army met at Minna. Among those that met at Minna were Colonel AbdulMuminu Aminu, Commander of the National Guard; Colonel Abubakar Umar, Commandant, Army Armored Corps Centre and school, Bauchi; plus Colonel Chris Abutu Garba, Colonel John Madaki and Brigadier John Inienger. Their meeting was not unconnected with how to bring the presidential election to a naught.

On why the Association for Better Nigeria (ABN) had gone to court, the association stated that 25 m Nigerians did not want the election to hold and that these people wanted General Babangida to continue as the president for 4 more years. And in compliance with the demand of the ABN, Justice Bassey Ikpeke of Abuja High Court gave the verdict on June 11, 1993 that the presidential election should not be held. This threw Nigerians especially those who had been looking forward to the election in a state of confusion as the verdict came a day to the presidential election.

To clear the ambiguities surrounding the state of the presidential election, the National Electoral Commission

(NEC) Chairman, Professor Humphrey Nwosu announced that the election would be held as scheduled. Also, the Committee for Defense of Human Rights and the Civil Liberty Organisation filed urgent actions at the Lagos High Court following the verdict from Abuja High Court to stop the presidential election, that NEC be compelled to conduct the election as scheduled.

However, on June 12, 1993, the presidential election was held with a considerable level of turn out. In fact, it was alleged that 14 million votes were cast and that both local and foreign observers adjudged the election as the friest. By Sunday, June 13, the election results had started coming in officially through party agents and when the National Electoral Commission declared the election results in 12 states, Abiola led convincingly in 7 of them. In fact, the BBC announced the results from 27 of the 30 states, with Abiola as the winner. Infuriated by the counting and announcing the results, the Association for Better Nigeria headed for court again to stop the counting and subsequent announcement of the results. Acting in line with the action filed by the ABN, on June 15, the Chief Judge of the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja, Justice Dahiru Saleh ordered the National Electoral Commission to suspend the release of the election results which the NEC Chairman complied with on June 16 after he had been summoned to the presidency.

Usurping the role of the National Electoral Commission (NEC) Babangida came up on June 26 in a national broadcast to annul the June 12 presidential election. He claimed that the election had been massively rigged by the 2 candidates who had allegedly expended 2.1 billion naira. He also claimed that officials of the NEC were bribed. Annulling the election he said:

Lasting democracy is not a temporary show of excitement and manipulation by an over-articulate section of the elite and its captive audience... As an administration, we cannot afford to lead Nigeria into a 3rd Republic with epileptic convulsions in its democratic health.... Even before the presidential election and indeed at the party conventions, we had full knowledge of the back signals pertaining to the enormous breaches of rules and regulations of democratic elections.... The use of money was again the major source of undermining the electoral process... It is true that the presidential election was generally seen to be free, fair and peaceful. However, there was in fact a huge array of election malpractices virtually in all the states of the federation before the actual voting began... Our need is for peace, stability and continuity of policies in the interest of all people (Welch, 1995).

**The post election crises:** The post election crises took many dimensions. Thus immediately, the annulment of the presidential election was announced, the Campaign for Democracy (CD) took it upon itself to spearhead the campaign against the annulment. This was done through, issuing of handbills or posters urging one action or another to protest the annulment. The CD action yielded enough dividends as people in Lagos and environs obeyed the sit-at home calls and taking to the streets to protest. Lagos city looked like a ghost city. Offices, embassies, banks, shops and markets remained shut. The people stayed put in their houses, abandoning the streets to soldiers and police armed as for combat (Suberu, 1997). This was followed by the government harassment of members of Campaign for Democracy, the 14 social democratic party governors took to a legal tussle. In the suit filed at the Supreme Court, they challenged the Federal Military Government among other things for the cancellation of the June 12 election. The case was given a technical knock out by the federal Military Government who issued a decree that no court should entertain any suit concerning June 12 election.

The cancellation of the election resulted into a massive population movement. The flow was from North to South, from South to North and from South-West to South-East as the rumours of war were circulated throughout the country. Many Nigerians living outside their places of origin were fearful and worried. Despite the fact that both General Olusegun Obasanjo and Moshood Abiola's assurance that there would not be any war, anxieties mounted and population movements across the country continued.

An association known as the Association for Democracy and Good Government in Nigeria (ADGN) also got involved in the struggle and in its 3rd general assembly re-affirmed the validity of the June 12 election. It urged Nigerians to resist attempts to confuse issues pointing out that the conflict was not ethnic or religious. It called for the immediate termination of the tenure of Babangida's regime and urged all Nigerians to embark on a campaign of civil disobedience if the government failed to vacate power on August 27, 1993. In the midst of these multi-dimensional crises, the United States Transportation Department considering the insecurity of lives at the Murtala Muhammad Airport suspended the airline traffic between the United States and Lagos.

It was during this tumultuous mood that Babangida handed over power on August 26, 1993 to an Interim National Government headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan. The Interim National Government was seen as the most viable stop gap arrangement pending the time that a fresh presidential election would be held to complete

the transition programme. The tenure of the Interim National Government was to terminate on March 31, 1994 (Suberu, 1997).

Though, the Interim National Government (ING) was set at tackling most of the problems confronting the country, it did not enjoy much legitimacy from Nigerians as people could not distinguish between it and Babangida's government. It was in the wake of keeping Nigeria united that the country descended into another praetorianism again.

### **ABACHA's PALACE COUP**

Diamond (1995) had made it cogently clear that the descent of Nigeria to military did not merely mean the predominance of the military in politics or the prominence of force as an instrument in the struggle for power, but followed the way Samuel Huntington had used it, that is, the political institution capable of mediating, refining and moderating group political action (Welch, 1995).

Nigeria then faced with lots of uncertainties was tottering dangerously on the brink of disaster. It was obvious that the military had failed the nation by not giving democracy a chance. The politicians also were unable to put their crumbling political house together again after the June 12 election and its subsequent annulment. It was the cumulative effects of these factors that brought the military back to the centre stage of Nigerian politics.

General Sani Abacha who eventually took over from the head of the interim National Government as the new head of state made some changes in his maiden national broadcast.

The above 3 factors-the annulment of June 12 presidential election, the post election crises and the Abacha's palace coup-were the three principal factors that led to the death of the two party system. General Sani Abacha regrettably pointed out in another broadcast to the nation the inevitability of government's action to do away with the two party system.

**Re-emergence of the multi-party system:** In Nigeria's political system, history often repeats itself. In the area of party system, the gradual but a sure dead of the two-party system of the third republic inevitably led to the emergence of the multiparty system a situation reminiscent of what happened during Nigeria's First Republic. The guidelines for political party formation were made public on June 17, 1996 by the then NECON

Chairman, Chief S.K. Dagogo-Jack. This was a further impetus to partisan politics as the ban on party politics had been lifted in October 1994. Following the lifting of the ban and the release of NECON's guidelines, 25 political associations sprang up. All of these political associations paid half a million naira each as registration fee. Of these numbers, only 18 political associations returned their forms to NECON. These political associations were.

- All Nigerian Congress.
- United Nigerian Party.
- National Centre Party of Nigeria.
- People's Consensus Party.
- Progressive Party of Nigeria.
- People's Progressive Party.
- Nation Builders Congress.
- Grassroots Democratic Movement.
- United Nigeria Congress.
- Social Progressive Party.
- Labour Democratic Party.
- National Solidarity People's Alliance.
- Democratic Party of Nigeria.
- National Democratic Party.
- Committee for National Consensus.
- Solidarity Groups of Nigeria.
- National Democratic Congress.
- People's Redemption Party (Badejo, 1997).

The turn out of event was that these 18 political associations became burdensome for the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON). It was as a result of that that the verification exercise which was slated for between August 2nd and August 29th, 1996 for these political associations became suspended. A period of 3 weeks was thereafter given for these political associations to merge and then became reduced in number. The outcome was that only a very few of them merged leaving the political associations as 14 which were

- United Nigeria Congress Party.
- National Centre Party of Nigeria.
- National Democratic Labour Party.
- All Nigeria Congress.
- Social Progressive Party.
- Committee for National Consensus.
- Solidarity Groups of Nigeria.
- Democratic Party of Nigeria.
- National Solidarity People's Alliance.
- People's Progressive Party.



- Grassroots Democratic Movement.
- People's Redemption Party.
- People's Consensus Party.
- National Democratic Party (Badejo, 1997).

It was from the above 14 political associations that the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria considered and subsequently registered 5. The 5 political parties were: Grassroots Democratic Movement (GDM), United Nigerian Congress Party (UNCP), Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN), National Centre Party of Nigeria (NCPN) and Committee for National Consensus (CNC).

## CONCLUSION

From all indications, Nigeria's political milieu is not favourably disposed to a two party system as its history shows from the inception. With the exception of the short period that the military administration created two parties of National Republican Convention (NRC) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP), no other period has the country reverted to a two party system. For instance, the 4th Nigeria's republic is multi party indeed with 50 political parties (Appendix 1). So, it was the military that made the mistake of bringing the 2 party system into Nigeria's political system that also corrected itself by phasing it out.

### Appendix 1

Name of political parties	Acronym
Accord	ACCORD
Action Congress	AC
Action Alliance	AA
Advanced Congress of Democrats	ACD
African Democratic Congress	ADC
African Renaissance Party	ARP
All Nigeria Peoples Party	ANPP
All Peoples Liberation Party	APLP
All Progressives Grand Alliance	APGA
Alliance For Democracy	AD
Better Nigeria Progressive Party	BNPP
Citizens Popular Party	CPP
Community Party of Nigeria	CPN
Congress for Democratic Change	CDC
Democratic Alternative	DA
Democratic Peoples Alliance	DPA
Democratic Peoples Party	DPP
Fresh Democratic Party	FDP
Justice Party	JP
Labour Party	LP
Liberal Democratic Party	LDP
Masses Movement of Nigeria	MMN
Movement for Democracy and Justice	MDJ
Movement for the Restoration and Defence of Democracy	MRDD
National Action Council	NAC
National Advance Party	NAP
National Conscience Party	NCP
National Democratic Party	NDP
National Majority Democratic Party	NMDP
National Reformation Party	NRP
National Solidarity Democratic Party	NSDP
National Unity Party	NUP
New Democrats	ND
New Nigeria Peoples Party	NNPP
Nigeria Advance Party	NAP
Nigeria Elements Progressive Party	NEPU
Nigeria Peoples Party	NPC
Peoples Democratic Party	PDP
Peoples Mandate Party	PMP
Peoples Redemption Party	PRP
Peoples Salvation Party	PSP
Progressive Action Congress	PAC
Progressive Peoples Alliance	PPA
Republican Party of Nigeria	PPN
United Democratic Party	UDP
United Nigeria Peoples Party	UNPP
Action Peoples Congress	APC
Democratic Peoples Party	DPP
Green Party of Nigeria	GPN
Liberal Democratic Party of Nigeria	LDPN

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