

The Nigerian Fourth Republic, Federalism and Party Aggregation

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Abstract

The explanation for the number of effective parties in a political system is not primarily the institutional or ideological factors but rather the location of power in the federal system - centralized federalism builds up centralized national parties. Using Chhibber and Kollman's postulation, this paper argues that Nigeria's military-bequeathed centralized federalism is a significant factor leading to two dominant national parties, the PDP and the APC, and pushing other parties to emerge as a third force (the L.P.). The increased regional power in the First Republic encouraged forming regional ruling parties and minor parties with limited viability within the federating units. The force to aggregate at the centre became tremendous as power consistently shifted to the federal government. The miniaturization of the federating states enhanced the central government's power and political parties' appetite to control it. This heralded the birth of national parties or what can be referred to as dominant parties. As a means of capturing power at the centre, what emerged recently are 'umbrella' and 'bounded broom' parties representing groups and interests whose primary goal is to control the centre.

Keywords: Centralized federalism, federalism, party aggregation, national party, Nigeria

Introduction

Chhibber and Kollman (1998; 2004) suggest that attention needs to be paid to the consequences of political centralization on the level of party aggregation in the case of a federation. They argue that the explanation for the number of effective parties in a political system is not primarily the institutional or ideological factors but rather the location of power in the federal system. The more the voters perceive power at the national level, the more incentive for a niche party to emerge that will attract sufficient strength to be elected. A national party is defined here as the same parties competing in elections at the national and sub-national levels. According to Chhibber and Kollman (2004: 21), 'party aggregation depends on the national government's policies and role in relation to sub-national governments; in other words, the higher the degree of centralization, the fewer the opportunities for local parties to survive.' Thus, as power and control over resources move from local authorities to higher government levels, candidates and voters are incentivized to coordinate their actions across electoral districts (i.e., to form national parties) to capture the central government. Chhibber and Kollman's argument is not in contradiction to Duverger's (in Schlesinger and Schlesinger, 2006) opinion that the 'mechanical' factor - the 'under-representation' of the third party, and the 'psychological' factor - voters' realization that they waste their votes if they vote for a third party, reduces the number of parties. Instead, it added the point that electoral rules alone are not sufficient to explain variation in party systems in a federation: At a minimum, electoral rules interact with the degree of political and fiscal autonomy wielded by lower-level governments to shape party systems (Chhibber and Kollman, 2004:226). Using (Chhibber and Kollman's 2004) postulation, the paper argues that the Nigerian Fourth Republic's inherited centralized federalism influenced the aggregation of the current political parties, giving birth to a dominant party, PDP, two dominant national parties, the APC and the PDP and the third party, the L.P., (Labour Party).

Forces Pushing Nigeria's National Parties

Federal constitutions and the practice of federalism from different parts of the world reflect the pulls and pressure at a particular historical point (Egwim, 2020:19). Nigerian constitutional developments

illustrate the movement from 'more power to the centre' to 'more power to the periphery.' The national political parties' development keyed into these changes. Political parties like NPC (Northern People's Congress), A.G. (Action Group), and NCNC (National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon) in pre-independence and the First Republic period (1951-1966) were all regional-based parties. The increased regional power in the First Republic encouraged forming regional ruling parties and minor parties that were viable within the federating units. The regions by this period were autonomous units of the Nigerian federation exercising substantial powers and functions compared to the centre. When parties lost out at the centre, they remained relevant to the region. This was the case of Awolowo, whose Action group controlled the Western region. Aminu Kano's NEPU (Northern Elements Progressive Union) was viable within the Kano city politics in the northern region. The then-existing political parties saw the 1959 independence general elections as a fight over who controlled the centre. A series of alliances between parties culminated in grand coalitions that prompted a two-party competition at the national level, but the ethnic base of the parties made hegemonic tendencies impossible to find in the polls.

The first military regime in 1966 suspended the 1963 constitution and ruled the country for about 13 years. There was a civil war from July 6, 1967, until January 10, 1970. On May 27, 1967, Gowon created the structure of the twelve states from the previous four regions. The creation of states continued under military rule until 36 states out of the former four regions. The Military Heads of State created all the states except the Mid-Western region. Multiplication in the number of states, Military rule itself, the experience of war, and the increasing inflow of mineral oil revenue against the fairly distributed derivation-based agro-economy from the early 1970s facilitated the emergence of a highly centralized federal system in Nigeria. The force to aggregate at the centre became tremendous as power consistently shifted to the federal government through the prosecution of civil war, dominant oil economy, and military-guided constitutions. The shrinking in size of the federating states enhanced the central government's power and political parties' appetite to control it. This heralded the birth of the national parties or dominant political parties.

The civil war experience in Nigeria led to a centralized federal state mainly due to the increase in Federal power, coupled with the creation of miniaturized states that lacked the resources to challenge the national power and the significant increase in the revenues accruing to the Federal Government, particularly from petroleum. This has a history of pushing former and present parties into alliances with wilder interest aggregation to control the centre. To achieve this (capturing power at the centre), what emerged recently are 'umbrella' and 'bounded broom' parties - catch-all parties. Alliances and mergers of parties are mainly motivated by political calculations and the desire of ethnic groups, social/religious groups, and individuals to widen their support to control the centre. The acquisition of political power (being in control of the centre) is generally seen as the best guarantee against domination by other ethnic groups. It grants unhindered access to what Nigerians regard as a share of the so-called 'national cake'.

By the time of the 1964 and 1983 general elections conducted solely by Nigerians in the First and the Second Republics, the country's politics had become polarized into a competition between two opposing alliances. The pattern of electoral politics is one in which one party is trying to maintain dominance; on the other hand, the opposition tries to merge to challenge it, leading to national parties. The current national parties' logos are 'bounded broom' (PDP) and 'Umbrella' (APC), representing bounded/coverage of divergent groups, interests, and ideologies whose primary interest is to control the centre.

Old Attempts at National Parties

Attempts to merge to form a hegemonic party to control the centre has been part of Nigerian political history. Political parties tried to merge into a hegemonic party to control the centre in the First and the Second Republics (1960-1966 and 1979-1983), respectively. The opposition parties also united to challenge the ruling party, pushing toward a two-national party system that never lasted. The 1964

Federal elections were contested by a group of politicians who styled themselves as progressive (the United Progressive Grand Alliance UPGA - alliance between Action Group, NCNC; United Middle Belt Congress, and Northern Elements Progressive Union). Another group assumed to be conservatives was the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA), an alliance between the Northern People's Congress and the Nigerian National Democratic Party. The blocks collapsed with the demise of the First Republic in January 1966, making an insignificant impact on national party politics.

In the Second Republic (1979-1983), history repeated itself when the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) emerged as the ruling political party following the 1979 elections, thereby compelling self-styled progressive politicians to attempt to forge an alternative alliance - the PPA (Progressive Parties Alliance). The Nigeria Peoples Party, the Great Nigeria Peoples Party, and a faction of the Peoples Redemption Party allied in 1983 to contest the general election. Again, the alliance had minimal impact on national party politics as the Second Republic ended abruptly in 1983 when the Buhari military junta toppled it.

The Ibrahim Babangida military-guided aborted Third Republic, between 1989 and 1993, decreed two national parties, the NRC (National Republican Convention) and the SDP (Social Democratic Party), imposed by the military, politicians were to choose between the two parties or stay out of politics. Babangida annulled the June 12, 1993, presidential election, bringing the Third Republic to an abrupt end. For the first election in the Fourth Republic in 1998, the Alliance for Democracy, A.D. and the All Peoples Party, APP, entered into a political alliance that saw Chief Olu Falae of A.D. running together with Alhaji Umaru Shinkafi in the presidential election. It was a context between the PDP Olusegun Obasanjo/Atiku Abubakar and AD-APP. However, the coalition collapsed after the election as some elements in the APP accepted appointments in the central government controlled by the Peoples Democratic Party.

What emerged between 1999 and 2015 was one dominant national party. 'The simplest way to convert the number of parties into types of party systems is to equate them. One effective party indicates a dominant party system; two effective parties entail a two-party system, and three or more signal a multi-party system' (Bogaards 2004:188). The interest in the party system classification is not in the number of parties but in the 'patterned interaction between them' (Bogaards, 2004:177). For Magaloni and Kricheli (2010:124), there is no difference between single-party and dominant-party regimes. Both single-party and dominant-party regimes constitute what they refer to as one-party regimes. The difference is that single-party regimes proscribe opposition parties' participation in elections (e.g., China).

In contrast, dominant-party regimes permit the opposition to compete in multi-party elections that usually do not allow alternation of political power. La Palombara and Weiner (1966 in Carbone, 2007:2) devised a typology of party systems starting from the distinction between '*non-competitive party systems*' and '*competitive party systems*' classified depending on whether alternation in power took place or, on the contrary, evidence of party hegemony emerged. Coleman and Rosberg (1966:6 in Carbone, 2007) distinguished between systems controlled by parties displaying a '*revolutionary-centralizing*' tendency and those with a more '*pragmatic-pluralist*' attitude. Satori (in Carbone, 2007) defines a dominant party as 'a party winning a series of consecutive popular mandates - three at a minimum through genuine elections, opposition parties fail to modify voter preferences and unseat it.' Norris (2004:17) notes that a predominant one-party system occurs 'where a single party controls the executive and dominates legislature, facing a divided and ineffective opposition. In these regimes, the governing party participates in successive elections, but the results are so skewed in their favour that challengers have little or no chance of success. Governing party enjoy the legitimacy of elections over a long series of contests without facing the uncertainty of genuine contestation through the regular rotation of alternative parties in power and opposition.'

In 2011, there was a spirited attempt by the Congress for Progressive Change, CPC, and the Action Congress of Nigeria, ACN, to ally to fight the presidential election, which did not work. In the 2015 fight to control the overbearing federal government, “The A.D., the precursor of the ACN, and the APP, the precursor of the ANPP and the CPC, who came together in a loose alliance to produce a joint presidential ticket in the 1999 presidential election, merged with a faction of APGA in the new APC (All Progressive Congress) (Lukman, 2012 in Ogunlesi, 2013: para.20)”.

The difference from other attempts is that this was a merger, not a temporary alliance. Parties in alliances maintain their separate identities and structures. Political parties in mergers must collapse their structures and lose their identities. Okoi (2013: para.10) states that a merger is contextually and legally different from an alliance. 'A merger contemplates a marriage or a union. When two or more political parties merge, they become one. The merging parties lose their registration, identities and structures. They collapsed into one.' Electoral Act 2010 stipulates the process of merger thus:

Where the request for the proposed merger is approved, the Independent National Electoral Commission shall withdraw and cancel the certificates of registration of all the political parties opting for the merger and substitute a single certificate or registration in the name of the party resulting from the merger (Electoral Act 2010 sec.84 (5).

The formation of the APC transformed the system into two dominant national parties rather than one. It raised the possibility of genuine competition between the PDP and APC at the national level. The logic and rules of competition for national politics may now force the smaller parties, most of which exist in name only, into the waiting embrace of either of the big players. There is a real possibility of alternating power, further deepening the Nigerian democracy by expanding choice, increasing competition, and providing incentives for elected officials to perform.

The Neo-National Parties; The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)

The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) dominated Nigeria's politics and elections between 1999 and 2015 as one dominant national party. They replaced the military in Nigerian politics in 1999 after the handing over to a democratically elected government of President Olusegun Obasanjo. The PDP emerged as an offshoot of the G-34, a quasi-political group, which came to the scene in March 1998 with eminent Nigerians who intended to stop the late Gen. Sani Abacha's self-succession plot. 'The group enjoyed a massive following across the country. Many people who identified with their cause to stop Abacha regarded them as men of high principles (Egwim, 2020). The G-34 joined forces with 65 small associations to form what they hoped would become the leading political party in the country within 24 hours of the late Justice Ephraim Akpata's unveiling of the guideline for the formation of parties. Akpata was the first chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in the Fourth Republic. A former information minister, Prof. Jerry Gana, was named the party secretary. Other notable members included Dr Alex Ekwueme, the Second Republic vice president, Chief Solomon Daushep Lar, the late Chief Bola Ige, Alhaji Abubakar Rimi, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, Alhaji Adamu Ciroma, Alhaji Sule Lamindo, Chief Edwin Ume-Ezeoke, Dr Iyorcha Ayu, Obong Victor Attah, Chief Tony Anenih etc.

Shortly after the PDP was formed, it suffered a major setback. One of its principal pillars, the People's Consultative Forum (PCF), led by pan Yoruba organization, the Afenifere and its allies in the Southern Leadership Forum (SLF), broke away before the party was launched. Bola Ige, who headed the committee that drafted the PDP constitution, was among those who left with the PCF to form the All Peoples Party (APP), later renamed All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), with other allies. Although Ige contributed immensely to fashioning the party's Constitution, shortly before the APP was launched in Abuja, the SLF pulled out of the alliance over the alleged influx of 'Abacha politicians' into the party:

While the SLF aimed to give the Nigerian people a political party whose leadership comprises people of unquestionable integrity, the SLF suddenly and sadly found itself amid discredited people who have sneaked into the leadership of the proposed party Briggs (Guardian January 14, 2007:58 in Egwim, 2007),

Despite the SLF's withdrawal, the APP remained a force to reckon with as notable politicians such as Alhaji Mahmud Waziri (the first national chairman), Alhaji Umaru Shinkafi, Dr Olusola Saraki, Chief Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu, Alhaji Bashiri Tofa, Senator Arthur Nzeribe, and Dr Bode Olajumoke among others, stayed put. The party came second behind the PDP in subsequent elections in the country.

Twelve hours before the deadline for submission of forms to the INEC, the PCF/SLF leaders merged with the United Democratic Congress (UDC) led by the late Amb. Jolly Tanko Yusuf and Amb. Yusuf Mamman formed the A.D. (Alliance for Democracy); established in a hurry, the leaders dusted the PDP constitution, which they considered Ige's brainchild and submitted to the electoral commission as its own Constitution. From 1999 to 2015, the PDP consistently won the presidential, national assembly, and governorship elections, with more seats/votes than all the other parties combined. 'The mathematical possibility of having the leading opposition party defeat the ruling party (PDP) was close to nil' (Egwim, 2020). The top members of the opposition parties or their elected politicians defect to the ruling party to be competitive at the centre, which allocates much of the resources to establish the PDP as a dominant national party.

The Splitter Parties but no National Outlook

According to Lawson (1976:68), 'besides originating inside parliaments or outside in various groups and movements, parties also originate inside other parties' (splitting).

When those who have taken a particular side in a controversy that divides the populace along new lines believe that they have the resources to warrant forming an organization and seeking popular approval for placing at least one of their members in an official government position, then a new party will be formed (Lawson 1976:68),

Some splinter parties achieve semi-permanent status; others make their point (or fail to) and are reabsorbed by either the parent or another major party in the system'. What and how much one needs to form a party with a chance of success will depend upon the nature of the constitutional arrangements, the electoral system in force, the strength of pre-existing political loyalties, the need to employ the techniques of the mass media to win office, and host of other variables. A new party's foundation and electoral success can be attributed mainly to three factors: (1) the political project, which should address urgent problems by substantial sections of the electorate. (2) Its resources: members, money, management and mass media exposure and (3) the political opportunity structure: positions of other relevant parties and institutional socio-economic and cultural conditions. 'Alternatively, the proto-party could become a political pressure group, a political club or think-tank outside the party system, or even a faction within an established party' (Lucardie, 2000:175). Most new parties that emerged after the 1998/99 polls were splinters from PDP. They never became national parties, lacking the resources to do so.

By May 2001, some PDP party officers were suspended from office, including Emmanuel Ibeshi, former national publicity secretary, Gbenga Olawepo and (the late) Dr Harry Marshal, former National Vice Chairman (South). A court order reinstated the officers, but the Gemade leadership did not approve. Chairman Audu Ogbeh's regime attempted to reconcile these officers and members sent out of the party. The good intentions of Ogbeh through his policy of reconciliation and reintegration did not work out, as there was already entrenched interest that would not make the reintegration of the former

members possible. Only Tukur made it back to the party. Members of the PDP in the National Assembly, such as former House of Representatives Speaker Ghali Umar Na'Abba, were denied re-election tickets in 2003. Others were shut out during the party's membership revalidation.

When Chief Audu Ogbeh, who emerged as the party chairman with the support of Obasanjo, was forced to quit in the heat of the crisis, the perception of increasing presidential control began to gain substance. Ogbeh was replaced with a caretaker chairman, Dr Ahmadu Ali, a former military colleague of Obasanjo. Vice-President Atiku Abubakar led the opposition to scuttle Obasanjo's alleged third-term plan through the National Assembly. Consequently, Abubakar was sidelined, and some of the party's most influential members were rendered impotent or coerced into silence or compliance. With the PDP Governors, Abubakar was instrumental in Obasanjo's re-election in 2003. He had urged the governors to back him in the party primaries in 2002. In doing that, Abubakar expected power to shift to the north in 2007, with him being the primary beneficiary. Abubakar was forced to team up with the Action Congress (A.C.) when it became clear that Obasanjo would not support his ambition for alleged corruption and disloyalty to the PDP. The party suspended Abubakar for three months, long enough for the parties to have concluded fielding candidates for 2007 polls. He emerged as the presidential flag bearer of the Action Congress (A.C.). The move forced the PDP hierarchy to seek his office as vice president to be declared vacant. Some aides of the President went a step further to declare the office vacant, which the courts resolved in favour of the vice-president (Abubakar).

Uncomfortable with these scenarios, disaffected members left the PDP for opposition parties or formed new parties such as the Advanced Congress of Democrats (ACD), Movement for Restoration of Democracy and Justice (MRDJ), Action Congress (A.C.), etc. But, none made it to a national party until some merged into a new opposition, the All Progressive Congress (APC), which became the ruling party in 2015.

Courts Judgements and the Minor Parties

For the first elections in the Fourth Republic, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) recognized three political parties – the PDP - Peoples Democratic Party, the All Peoples Party (APP) and the Action for Democracy (A.D.). Following a Supreme Court judgment on *Balarabe Musa v INEC*, the conditionalities for political party registration were made open. The Supreme Court ruled that INEC imposing conditions unknown to the Constitution for party registration was illegal. This decision opened Nigeria's political space with unprecedented political parties. By April 2011, sixty-three (63) political parties were registered. Prominent among the new parties were the Congress for Political Change (CPC), the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), and the People's Progressive Alliance (PPA). In addition, many small parties took advantage of the liberalization of the political space to register unviable parties. This weakened political opposition and prevented the opposition from presenting a credible challenge to the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP). From 1999-2015, the PDP was in control of the governments of the federation and the majority of the states, leaving the opposition mainly of ACN, ANPP, CPC, APGA, and L.P. with the control of a few states. It appeared that some of the opposition political parties were established to access INEC's funding support or as fall back mechanism for political heavyweights who lose out in power struggles within their parties.

The National Assembly intervened through Section 78(6) of the 2010 Electoral Act, which gave INEC the power to de-register political parties that failed to win any executive and legislative seats in elections. In the 2011 elections, only ten parties won seats. They include the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), All Nigeria People Party (ANPP), Labour Party (L.P.), Progressive People Alliance (PPA), Peoples Party of Nigeria (PPN), All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), Accord Party (A.P.), Democratic People Party (DPP) and KOWA Party. On August 18, 2011, INEC de-registered seven parties that did not contest for any elected

office in the 2011 elections. Further de-registration exercises were carried out, reducing the number of parties from 63 to 25 and currently 18 (Ibrahim, 2013: para.2).

On Wednesday, February 6, 2013, four opposition parties agreed to form a new political party, the All Progressives Congress (APC). The politicians planned for a national party that would be strong enough to wrestle power through the ballot box from the then-ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), which prides itself as the largest political party in Africa. APC was a merger of four parties - the Congress for Progressive Change, CPC; the Action Congress of Nigeria, ACN; the All Nigeria Peoples Party, ANPP; and a faction of the All Progressives Grand Alliance, APGA. The Independent National Electoral (INEC) approved the APC as a political party on July 31, 2013, and withdrew the operating licenses of the three previous and merging parties (the ACN, CPC and ANPP).

The All Progressive Congress, APC

Nigerian party politics witnessed two dominant national parties during the build-up for the 2015 general elections and the subsequent elections. Two parties only have a reasonable chance of winning office in the national elections. Mimiko, a former Governor of Ondo State under the Labor Party, a minority party, observed in 2014 that the nation had always moved toward a national two-party system and that the current dispensation had thrown up the PDP and the APC. Minor parties are constrained to operate at the political process's fringe (Mimiko, 2014). A two-national dominant party system is a political system in which only two parties have a reasonable chance of winning office in the national elections. With the emergence of the APC on the Nigerian political scene on July 31, 2013, only four political parties - Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), Labour Party (L.P.) and the All Progressives Congress (APC) were in control of at least one state government out of the 36 states (APC 16 States, PDP 18, L.P. 1 and APGA 1). Though APC and PDP lost Anambra and Ondo state to APGA and Labour Party, respectively, the country moved to two solid political forces from the build-up toward the 2015 general election. Mimiko and Obi defected to the PDP. In his declaration speech tagged, '*The Imperative of a New, Broader Platforms*,' Mimiko identified his immediate target as helping the process of getting President Goodluck Jonathan re-elected in 2015:

With the 2015 INEC time-table which put Presidential and National Assembly elections on the same day, it has become obvious that the type of support we need to give President Jonathan without creating a conflict of interest is better canalized through the President's political party, the PDP (Mimiko, 2014:para.5);

Obi and Mimiko had intended to have greater political involvement and action in national politics without restrictions. The aggregational role of parties in the Nigerian federation was equally not new to Mimiko;

Moreover, the argument is unassailable that the dominant two-party system has always worked to enhance national unity and facilitated the process of nation-building, as all key players are invariably compelled to work within either of the two dominant parties without regard to religious, regional and ethnic specificities. Aligning with either of the two dominant political forces in the current dispensation is, therefore, in the circumstances, the correct democratic position to take at this historical juncture (Mimiko, 2014:para.8).

Obi had tendered his resignation as the chairman of the Board of Trustees (BOT) of APGA, a development signalling his eventual formal exit from the party to the PDP. The recognition of the merger of some opposition parties into the APC and the defection of five PDP governors and their supporters in the National Assembly to APC gave birth to the era of two dominant national parties.

Elections in Ekiti and Osun States in 2014 and subsequent ones until 2022 show that although as many as twenty or more political parties field candidates for the governorship or presidential elections, it is usually a race between the APC and the PDP candidates.

As the preparation for the 2023 general elections was ongoing, it seemed a three-horse race with the defection of Peter Obi from the PDP to the Labour Party (L.P.). It may be too early to call L.P. a national party as their strength seems to be only on their presidential candidate in an attempt to control the omnibus centre. Judging by the L.P. governorship candidate's performances, Comrade Roland Olugbenga Daramola in Ekiti state and Yussuf Lasun in the Osun state 2022 off-season guber polls:

Out of the total number of 804,450 votes cast, Lasun polled 2,729, trailing the candidate of the Action Democratic Party (ADP), Kehinde Atanda, who polled 10,104 votes; Akinade Ogunbiyi of Accord, who got 4,515 votes; and the winner, Ademola Adeleke of the PDP, who polled 403,371 votes to defeat incumbent Governor Gboyega Oyetola of the All Progressives Congress (APC), who scored 375,027 votes (Esele and Esan, 2022).

In Ekiti state, Daramola did not fare better. Some politicians and analysts doubt the capability of the L.P. as a third force, arguing that the party has no structure in terms of elected officials who will help it win elections. For the analysts, structure matters greatly; it is a code word for party representatives regarding governors, lawmakers, and local government chairpersons who help with voter mobilization in urban and rural areas. It could also mean the ability to influence or rig elections. According to Atiku (in Esele and Esan 2022): "This party (*L.P.*) does not have a governor and does not have members in the State Houses of Assembly. Politics in this country depends on structures you have at various levels. It is difficult for a miracle to happen simply because Obi is in the Labour Party".

This is as compared to the APC twenty-two (22) governors out of the thirty-six States (36), sixty-six (66) senators out of 109, two hundred and eleven (211) out of 360 Representatives (Esele, 2022). Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) thirteen (13) state governors and Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) one (1) in the period immediately after the 2019 general elections. L.P. had a single seat in the Senate and House of Representatives. While the APC and PDP seem to be in control of the 36 governors, National Assembly and State Houses of Assembly, as well as Local Governments between them, Peter Obi of L.P. emerged as a formidable force following a youth-based social media followership in a movement called *ObiDient* aiming to control the centre.

Labour Party the Third Force?

'Third Force' movements in Nigeria aim to establish political alternatives to the All Progressives Congress and Peoples Democratic Party. A third force is a political party or a people's movement that causes an electoral upset or displaces one of two dominant parties. As Nigeria moved from a one-dominant party to a dominant two-party system, the 'Third Force' is a political party or political movement aiming to break into the two dominant parties, in this case, the APC and PDP. According to Dakuku (2022), a third force is usually a protest movement: 'while a third force can be a "third party", it can also be a movement - a "third way", if you like.' Kolawole (2022) called it 'a citizens-led mass political movement.' 'It is the disruption of the status quo dominated by two political parties' (Utomi, 2022). Obioma Dan, a chieftain of the L.P, sees Obi's third force as a movement, not a party: "The most potent ground force propelling the hurricane-like movement (*ObiDient*) remains Obi's character, pedigree, records, achievements, and not necessarily his party (Obioma in Esele and Esan, 2022). Obioma argued that Obi, the Labour Party presidential candidate, gave meaning and followership to the L.P".

The "Third Force" is not necessarily the 'Third Party.' When the 'Third Forces' are reduced to a single effective party, they become the 'Third Party' as L.P. is proving to be at the national level, mainly

in the presidential election. The 'Third Forces' can consolidate into a 'Third Party;' it could also transit back to two dominant parties, replacing one of the existing major parties. Stone (1969) differentiated between 'third force' and 'third party.' 'If a 'third party' fail to win an election, it can become a 'third force'—wavering support to influence policies or even play a determinant role in election outcomes by 'emerging as a consequential force in the political arena and society (Gaskia, 2022).' Agitators for change under the two-dominant party system could achieve political power either as a 'Third Force' or a 'Third Party' or by remaining within the two-party system. The 'Third Force' transformation into a viable political machine gives birth to a 'third party.'

Over the years, many groups and political parties have claimed to be third force movements or parties: The Coalition for Nigeria Movement (CNM), championed by Former President Olusegun Obasanjo, launched in 2018, Save Nigeria Group (SNG), Nigeria Intervention Movement (NIN), National Consultative Front (NCF), Rescue Nigeria Project (RCP). Political parties include the Alliance for New Nigeria (ANN), African Action Congress (AAC), Young Progressives Party (YPP), etc. Historically, third forces either create a political storm and eventually disappear after elections or grow to become alternative forces that replace one of the big two political parties in a two-party system. 'In the 1850s, the Republicans as a 'third force' ended nearly three decades of competition between the Whigs and the Democrats in the U.S.' (Egwim, 2016:1).

The history of American politics, however, demonstrates that both third parties and "third forces" have occasionally been able to disrupt the dreary normalcy of the two-party system by doing one of two things: (1) Becoming a dominant force in itself. When the Republican Party was formed in 1854, it was a "third party", but within six years, it became one of the two major parties. (2) Becoming a cohesive force that shifts its political loyalty to a "balance of power," either as a "third force" or as a third party (Stone 1969:9).

Dakuku (2022) opines that 'the possible rearrangement of the political climate occasioned by the third force in Nigeria will eventually lead to the death of the third force or the end of one of the existing two parties, or a realignment of the structures of all existing parties.'

Conclusion

The explanation for the number of effective parties in a federal system is not primarily the institutional or ideological factors but rather the location of power and resources—centralized federalism builds up centralized national parties. Consequently, Nigeria's military bequeathed centralized federalism is a significant factor that led to two dominant national parties, the PDP and the APC, pushing other parties to emerge as a third force. The increased regional power in the First Republic encouraged forming regional ruling parties and minor parties with limited viability within the federating units. By this period, the regions were autonomous units of the Nigerian Federation exercising substantial powers and functions compared to the centre. Parties remained relevant to the region even when they lost out at the centre. This was the case of Awolowo, whose Action group controlled the Western region. Aminu Kano's NEPU was viable within the politics of Kano City in the northern region. The force to aggregate at the centre became tremendous as power consistently shifted to the federal government through the prosecution of civil war, dominant oil economy, and military-guided constitutions. The miniaturization of the federating states enhanced the central government's power and political parties' appetite to control it. This heralded the birth of the era of national parties or what can be referred to as dominant parties. As a means of capturing power at the centre, what emerged recently are 'umbrella' and 'bounded broom' parties representing groups and interests whose primary goal is to control the centre.

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