

FEATURE ARTICLE

POLITICAL PARTIES AND THEIR ROLE IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

G. ONYEKWERE NWANKWO*

INTRODUCTION:

Attempts have been made by various writers to define political parties. In *Modern Political Parties* (1956), Sigmund Neumann defines political party as "the articulate organization of society's active political agents, those who are concerned with the control of governmental power and who compete for popular support with another group or groups holding divergent views. As such, it is the great intermediary which links social forces and ideologies to official governmental institutions and relates them to political action within the larger political community."¹ The above definition is related to that of Nelson W. Polsby and Aaron Wildavsky who see political parties as "organizations devoted to maintaining or increasing their own opportunities to exercise political power primarily through sponsoring candidates for public office."² And by "political power", they mean the ability to make decisions or to influence decision-making by governments.

Inasmuch as the above definitions reflect two of the major characteristics of political parties in terms of their being organized for the purpose of gaining access to the exercise of political power, they do not distinguish between political parties and other political

*Lecturer, Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

organizations which, like political parties, do organize and mobilize their supporters either to capture public office or to influence the activities of those already in office. In the United States, for example, the major political parties do not monopolize the contesting of elections even though their prominence in the electoral process cannot be questioned.

In the U.S., too, the electoral politics of interest groups have ranged from encouraging or discouraging candidates, and contributing to campaign funds, to getting their members to the polls to support candidates of their choice. Interest groups, like student organizations that attempted to elect peace candidates in the 1970 American congressional election differ from political parties mainly in size and influence. They took part in the elections, propagated ideologies and attempted to influence and organize office holders.

Similar participation in the electoral politics by interest groups is not uncommon in the Nigerian experience. During our first civilian regime, religious organizations and town "improvement" or "patriotic" unions fielded their own candidates for election into the Regional Houses of Assembly (in some cases successfully) against the official candidates of some of the major political parties. And presently, too, despite the constitutional provision that "no association other than a political party shall canvass for votes for any candidate at any election or contribute to the funds of any political party or to the election of any candidate at an election,"³ affluent members of various communities, home town-based social clubs, youth and women organizations as well as the town unions and age-grade associations can sponsor candidates of their choice for nomination by parties which they perceive as likely to win most of the votes of people in their various constituencies.

It may be pertinent to suggest that the authors of our present constitution might not have taken the above facts into consideration when they defined political party as "any association whose activities include canvassing for votes in support of a candidate for election to the office of President, Vice President, Governor, Deputy Governor or membership of a legislative house or of a local government council."⁴ The problem with this notion of political party is that it did not distinguish between the political parties such as those officially registered by the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) and other organizations such as those mentioned above, and whose political activities are, in reality, close to those meant for political parties by the present constitution. The crucial question is: What are the differences between a political party and other political organizations?

In the light of what we have discussed so far, it may be pertinent to say that the differences between parties and other political

organizations are often slender. However, in *Party Politics in America* (1968), Frank J. Sorauf says correctly that parties are different from other political organizations in terms of the following five criteria:

1. The extent to which they pursue their organizing through the contesting of elections.
2. The extensiveness and inclusiveness of their organization and clientele.
3. Their sole concentration on political avenues for achieving their goals.
4. Their demonstrated stability and long life.
5. Their strength as cues and reference symbols in the decision-making of individual citizens.⁵

And he goes on to say that no one of these characteristics alone sets the political party apart from other political organizations, but when they are taken together and the matter of degree is considered, they do set the major political parties apart from other types of political organizations.⁶

One of the major functions of political parties is the linking of the people with governmental institutions, policies and processes through a system of political recruitment, and education. Political parties, too, penetrate the masses with their ideologies and present them with alternative programmes of governmental action.

Campaigning by political parties and their candidates, as well as decision-making by the electorate as to who to vote for or not are sometimes said to be "rational" where political campaigns are structured in such a way that the candidates and parties are able to offer meaningful choices (in terms of alternative policies) to the voters. Under this model, the assumption is that the voters will listen attentively to all sides of the questions which are being debated by parties and candidates, will gather as much information as possible on candidates and issues, weigh and evaluate the evidence presented to them during the campaign, and then make a rational choice on the basis of what they have seen or heard.⁷

This model of rational campaigning by parties and their candidates and rational decision-making by the electorate is the basis of electoral reforms that reflect the multi-party system. Advocates of the multi-party system rightly believe that it will enhance the growth of democratic principles within the political system. But the problem with our perception of the multi-party system as the hallmark of democracy is that the concept of rationality on which this belief is anchored is hardly reflective of the reality of political life in most democracies that are based on the multi-party system. Rational decision-making involves the consideration of all of the possible alternatives before making a choice. Party bureaucracies do not possess the necessary expertise and information for the con-

sideration of all alternative policy options. And in the Nigerian case the number of political parties has been limited by the need to fulfill certain constitutional requirements before parties are officially recognized and registered. The result is that only few options can be presented by the existing six registered political parties. In our situation, therefore, what we have is "bounded" rationality as far as campaigning by political parties and decision making by the electorate are concerned.

Advocates of the one-party system tend to place priority on the need to make party systems vehicles of social transformation at the expense of stability of the system and its maintenance of democratic values. The one-party system is often perceived as an instrument for a radical re-ordering of the existing political, social and economic life, especially where the existing state of affairs does not meet the needs of rapidly modernizing societies.⁸ This is because of the tendency of people to see the one-party system as an answer to the problems of conflict and possibly, instability that are characteristics of the multi-party system. Under the one-party system, elections become contests between individuals who belong to the same political party; and not between different political parties. The result is that conflicts may be reduced and all efforts directed towards social, political and economic development.

The problem with this model of the electoral system is that totalitarian regimes have often said its rationale to liquidate opposition parties without serious commitment to social transformation. And more importantly, the apparent absence of other opposition parties in the one-party system may not necessarily imply the elimination of inter-party conflicts within the political systems. Instead, the conflicting views represented in the ideologies and programs of banned opposition parties may be forced to assume clandestine forms which may find expression either in various forms of anti-government activities or in serious intra-party conflicts within the only party that is legally permitted to operate.

This paper intends to examine critically the role of the present political parties in Nigeria in the electoral process with a view of finding out the extent to which they are fulfilling their constitutional functions. What are their functional problems in the above context? What are their environmental constraints? And what suggestions can contribute to the improvement of the performance of Nigerian political parties in the electoral system? Attempts will be made to answer these related questions.

PARTIES AND THE (1979) NIGERIAN CONSTITUTION

The first official attempt to define political parties and their

functions in Nigeria was made in the Federal Constitution of 1979. Neither the pre-independence constitutions nor the 1983 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria attempted to assign any constitutional role to political parties. Also, when the military intervened in our politics in 1966, their first regime imposed a ban on political parties and all ethnic and cultural organizations with political undertones. The ban remained operative for 12 years until September 1978 when the last of the military regimes removed the ban on political parties and party politics in order to pave the way for the return of civilian rule in 1979.

A number of factors are responsible for the above variations in the official attitudes of different regimes in Nigeria to political parties and their activities. First, the interests of the British colonial administration in Nigeria and those of the emerging political parties were in conflict. Whereas the former was interested in perpetuating the colonial regime, the latter were interested in the early end to colonial rule in the country. Consequently, the Constitutions of 1946, and 1951 were promulgated by the colonial government without consultation with existing political parties.⁹

The above constitutions did not deal with the role of political parties in the country. Even though the colonial governments invited the recommendations of political parties through their all-party conferences in the subsequent constitutions of 1954 and 1957, this concession was mainly a result of persistent nationalist agitation for internal self-rule and eventual political independence. This tradition of using the decisions reached by all-party conferences as the basis of major constitutional revisions persisted and even influenced the provisions of the 1963 Constitution. Along with this was also the persistence of the tradition of not including the definition and functions of political parties in the pre-1966 Constitutions. As a result, the place of parties in the political system was taken for granted, and their role and functions remained conventional rather than constitutional in form.

Second, the military administrators in Nigeria viewed the activities of political parties in the country as dysfunctional to the working of the political system. This poor image of political parties grew out of the widespread opinion that intra- and inter-party conflicts, along with corruption and ethnicity were responsible for the demise of the post-independence civilian regime. For the above reasons, the military imposed a ban on political parties and ethnic organizations. And even when the new military administration became more serious with the idea of returning the country to civilian rule, it was still concerned about this disillusion with party politics in the past. Thus it expressed interest in an alternative form of civilian government if the Constitution Drafting Committee could "discover some means by which government can be

formed without the involvement of political parties."¹⁰

The 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria incorporated the definition and functions of political parties, and regulated the activities of parties with the view of making them congruent with the fundamental political and social objectives of the constitution.

The objectives are reflected mainly in the following sections of the 1979 Constitution:

14. (1) The Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be a State based on the principles of democracy and social justice.
14. (2) (a) Sovereignty belongs to the people of Nigeria from whom government through this Constitution derives all its powers and authority.
14. (3) 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 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 in any of its agencies.
17. (1) The State social order is founded on ideals of Freedom, Equality and Justice.
17. (2) (a) In furtherance of the social order — every citizen shall have equality of rights, obligations and opportunities before the law.

Some of the major elements of the objectives set out in the constitution are: democracy, social justice, national integration, and human rights of citizens.

The 1979 Constitution recognizes political parties as the principal avenue of competition for political power. As Section 201 of the Constitution says, "no association other than a political party shall canvass for votes of any candidate at any election or contribute to the funds of any political party or to the election expenses of any candidate at an election." The Constitution, goes on to define political parties in the manner that has been stated in the early part of the present study. In addition, it sets up the criteria under which political parties must function so that the nation can achieve its social, political and other objectives.

Some of these criteria are contained in Section 202 of the Constitution which states, among other things, that no association by whatever name called shall function as a political party, unless —

- (i) the names and addresses of its national officers are registered with the Federal Electoral Commission;
- (ii) the membership of the association is open to every citi-

- zen of Nigeria irrespective of his place of origin, sex, religion or ethnic grouping;
- (iii) the name of the association, its emblem or motto does not contain any ethnic or religious connotation or give the appearance that the activities of the association are confined to a part only of the geographical area of Nigeria.

The criteria are also contained in other Sections of the Constitution. For example, Section 203(1) requires that the constitution and rules of a political party shall provide — (a) for the periodical election on a democratic basis of the principal officers and members of the executive committee or other governing body of the political party; and (b) ensure that the members of the executive committee or other governing body of the party reflect the federal character of Nigeria. Section 204 states that “the program as well as the aims and objects of a political party shall conform with the provisions of Chapter II of the Constitution” (which sets out the broad political, social, and economic objectives of the nation). Section 205(1) states that “every political party shall, at such times and in such manner as the Federal Electoral Commission may require, submit to the Federal Electoral Commission and publish its assets and liabilities.” Finally, Section 207 requires that “No association shall retain, organize, train or equip any person or group of persons for the purpose of enabling them to be employed for the use or display of physical force or coercion in promoting any political objective or interest or in such a manner as to arouse reasonable apprehension that they are organized and trained or equipped for that purpose.”

Inasmuch as the above constitutional requirements affect the role of political parties in the electoral process, the organization and conduct of elections in the country is the constitutional responsibility of the Federal Electoral Commission. As we look at the role of the political parties in the electoral process, we will examine the performance of the present political parties in terms of whether they comply with the constitutional requirements or not, as well as whether the general political and social objectives of the nation are realizable in the context of the present constitutional arrangements as they affect the activities of parties as well as the electoral process.

ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

The electoral process in Nigeria can be conceived of as having four major dimensions. One is the Registration of voters by the Federal Electoral Commission. The second is the nomination of

candidates by political parties for the purpose of contesting elections. The third dimension has to do with campaigning and campaign strategies that parties direct toward mass electorates. The fourth dimension is that of voting behavior which of course provides and decides the ultimate outcome of the elections. This paper will focus mainly on the first three dimensions, since the last dimension (voting behavior) depends very much on, the earlier ones.

PARTIES, FEDECO, AND REGISTRATION OF VOTERS

The registration of voters and maintenance of other voters list in the country is the constitutional responsibility of the present Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) which also has the function of conducting the presidential, gubernatorial, senatorial, national and state assemblies' elections. The above functions are contained in the 1979 Constitution which says, "the registration of voters and the conduct of elections shall be subject to the direction and supervision of the Federal Electoral Commission."¹¹ But the idea of an electoral commission that is vested with these kinds of function is not new in the country. The Nigerian Constitutional Conference of 1957 provided for an Electoral Commission that should be responsible for:

- (i) the supervision and direction of the preparation of the Federal Electoral Register and for the conduct of all elections to the House of Representatives, in accordance with the regulations made by the Governor General.
- (ii) The periodic review of constituency boundaries after each census has been published.¹²

As far as the FEDECO and its registration and electoral functions are concerned, the 1979 Constitution re-echoed the provisions of both the Federal Electoral Commission decree of 1977 and Section 52 of the 1963 Constitution which states that "the registration of voters and conduct of elections shall be subject to the direction and supervision of the electoral commission of the Federation."¹³ What is new, however, is the expansion of powers of the FEDECO to include the registration of political parties and the determination of their eligibility to sponsor candidates for elections into any legislative body as well as the annual examination and auditing of the funds and accounts of political parties.¹⁴

The performance of the FEDECO in the registration of voters exercise can be measured in terms of the ability of the organization to do the following:

- (1) ensure that all eligible voters are registered;
- (2) make sure that no eligible voter registers more than once;

- (3) prevent the registration of non-eligible voters such as aliens and people under the age of 18;
- (4) update the last voters list in such a way that newly qualified voters are included.

In pursuit of the above objectives, the role of the FEDECO and those of the political parties may be either complementary or conflicting in several ways. Where there are genuine efforts on the part of political parties to persuade the eligible voters among their potential supporters to participate fully in the registration exercise, their role, in this direction, remains complementary to the efforts of the FEDECO. On the other hand, the role of FEDECO and those of political parties will be conflicting in cases where political parties and/or their official candidates either encourage their supporters to register many times or influence the part-time field staff of the FEDECO to register non-eligible alien voters as well as people under the age of 18. The additional votes cast in favor of political parties that indulge in these malpractices, no doubt, enhance the election fortunes of the sponsors.

As a result of these malpractices, the data generated by the FEDECO during the registration of voters exercise may remain unreliable, and even unacceptable as a basis of conducting democratic elections. A close look at the figure obtained at the 1978 registration of voters exercise may confirm the above view. In almost all the States, the number of people registered was out of proportion to the following: (1) the estimated total population of the States based on the 1963 Census; (2) the estimated total number of non-eligible voters made up of people under the age of 18 in each State (See Table I below).

Table I

Eligible voters registering during 1978 registration exercise and population (based on 1963 Census).

State	Total No. Registered	Population
Anambra	2,601,548	3,571,072
Bauchi	2,084,057	2,193,674
Bendel	2,376,410	2,460,962
Benue	1,563,413	2,427,017
Borno	2,753,400	2,990,526
Cross River	2,442,227	3,478,131
Gongola	2,284,500	2,605,263
Imo	3,465,198	3,653,125
Kaduna	3,420,839	4,098,306
Kano	5,174,447	5,774,840
Kwara	1,085,165	2,309,228
Lagos	1,811,973	1,443,568
Niger	1,040,753	1,194,508
Ogun	1,63,004	1,550,966
Ondo	2,442,714	2,727,675
Oyo	4,520,120	5,158,884
Plateau	1,618,378	2,026,657
Rivers	1,409,472	1,719,925
Sokoto	3,756,139	4,538,787

Sources: Nigerian Chronicle, April 1978, p. 3; Nigeria Year Book

Sources: Nigerian Chronicle, April 1978, p. 3; Nigeria Year Book 1982 (A publication of Times Newspapers).

In order to make the registration of voters exercise more effective, the FEDECO should review regularly its methods of registration as well as the organization of its personnel for the above purpose. During the 1978 registration of voters, the FEDECO adopted the method of house-to-house registration of people. In the current registration exercise, the FEDECO adopted the system of registering voters at approved registration centres. The reason for the change is probably to minimize the amount of work involved in house-to-house system of registration. But the present system has created more problems than anticipated. First, most people in the rural communities were not sufficiently informed about the change. Consequently, there was confusion as to where and when to register. Second, many people have come to regard elections and the registration exercise as the "business" of politicians who do not normally fulfill their election promises to their constituencies. To this category of people, it does not make a difference whether one votes at elections or not. The result is that such people have not been anxious to take the trouble of registering at the registration centres. Some communities such as those in the Cross River State, are said to have initially boycotted the 1982 registration because of what they regarded as the indifference of the State government to the problems of their social and economic development.

Third, in its allocation of registration centres to various communities, the FEDECO made the mistake of allocating to each centre a maximum number of voters. In many cases, the number of eligible voters to be registered exceeded the quota for the registration centres. The fact that the FEDECO had no immediate answer to such problems led to the widespread suspicion that the FEDECO was being influenced by one or more political parties. The total absence of registration booths at many centers, and general lack of registration materials in many States added much to the suspicion.

To be able to cope with the problems associated with the maintenance of a reliable voter's list, the FEDECO should do the following:

- (1) Maintain an adequate number of its own core staff with their own permanent offices throughout the senatorial districts in the Federation.
- (2) Maintain regular training programs for its staff.
- (3) Establish a research division which will recommend changes in work procedure in order that FEDECO will cope with changes in its task environment.
- (4) De-emphasize the excessive use of local government personnel (who are already faced with many management problems) in the registration exercises as well as the supervision of elections.

- (5) De-emphasize the excessive use of seconded and/or part-time staff whose loyalty to the FEDECO remains a big question.

POLITICAL PARTIES AND NOMINATION OF CANDIDATES

As we have noted earlier, only political parties are permitted to present candidates for the purpose of contesting elections under the present constitution. Out of the nineteen political associations that applied for registration before the 1979 elections only five were considered by the FEDECO as having met the constitutional requirements for registration as political parties. These were the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN); the National Party of Nigeria (NPN); the Nigerian People's Party (NPP); the Great Nigeria People's Party (GNPP); and the People's Redemption Party (PRP). In 1982, one more political association, the Nigerian Advance Party (NAP) was registered as a political party.

Even though a serious attempt has been made by the authors of the present constitution to regulate the structure and activities of political parties in such a way that they are expected to meet the socio-economic objectives of the Nigerian nation, the constitution is surprisingly silent on how parties should nominate their candidates for election. This omission is serious when it is considered in the context of the crucial role which the nomination of candidates plays in the electoral process. For the parties, the candidate with whom they go into the election campaign determines to a great extent their ultimate chances for victory. And for the political system and its major objective of ensuring that democracy thrives, the degree of people's participation in choosing their representatives depends, to a large extent, on the nature of primary elections. Since the number of political parties is restricted and individuals are barred from presenting candidates for election contests in the Nigerian context, the way the registered parties go about nominating their candidates determines not only the outcome of the elections but also the quality of the democratic system.

The present political parties in the country have adopted the primaries as a means of selecting their candidates for election contests. But the Constitution has not established any set of criteria by which parties can conduct the primary elections so that they will be more democratic than they are presently. As they have been correctly observed, "the primaries have been successful in some States, while they proved to be a facade of democracy in others where the party machine used the big stick to whip followers behind a man of their choice."¹⁵ By definition, the primary is a special election in which the party electorate chooses candidates to run

for public office under the party label.¹⁶ Primary elections could be classified as indirect where candidates are nominated by the selected officials or members of their own party of delegates chosen from local party organizations as in the case of most party conventions. But primaries could be direct in situations where the electorate are given the chance to cast their votes directly to nominate the candidates of the party with which they affiliate. The notion of the direct primary is based correctly on the belief that in a democracy, the greatest possible number of party members ought to take part in the nomination of the party's candidates.

The present pattern of indirect primaries by which some political parties in the country return their incumbents unopposed without reference to their party electorate does not augur well for our democratic system. In essence, it contradicts the democratic and other social values that represent the primary objectives of our present constitution. Under the above system, it is possible for affluent but unpopular candidates to buy their way through the party nomination process since they do not have to deal with too many voters. For political parties, the present pattern of primary elections in which top party officials play the dominant role tends to destroy the unity and cohesiveness of parties as political organizations. This is more so especially when it is widely perceived within the party membership that intra-party regulations for the conduct of primary elections are geared towards the protection of the interests of incumbent aspirants. This is evident in a published resolution of the Association of Chairmen and Secretaries of the 59 L.G.A. Chapters of the N.P.P. Imo State which, among other things, states:

We, the entire Chairmen and Secretaries of the 59 L.G.A. Chapters of the N.P.P. Imo State who are custodians of the grassroots, reject the resolution No. NPP/NS/OUT/GFN/ dated 5th November 1982 on the nomination of candidates for 1983 General Elections in its entirety and its imports, implications, connotations, and ramifications for the following reasons: . . .

The decision that the non-incumbent aspirants should first resign their positions before nomination is vindictive and unjust and even more so when it is stated that such unsuccessful aspirants should be disqualified from such appointments or any other patronage until after 1983 General Elections. While these non-incumbent aspirants are thus completely emasculated, the incumbents continue to remain in their positions using their enormous resources to an unfair advantage. If resignation is a pre-condition then justice and fair play demand that incumbents should resign all their elective positions as well . . .

As people who control the grassroots in Imo State we know that 70%

of the incumbents are unacceptable to the electorate and it will be political suicide for our great Party to impose candidates on the electorate.

17

...

In Imo State, too, complaints against official party regulations may yet come from numerous aspirants who may be disqualified in the nomination contest because of their inability to pay the required non-refundable deposits of N2,000; N3,000; and N5,000 for the purpose of processing their application papers for nomination against the State Assembly, 29 House of Representatives, and Senate elections respectively.¹⁸ Again, this regulation may give undue advantage to unpopular but rich aspirants in the sense that they are more likely to meet the financial requirement of the party Nomination process.

The unpopularity of the dominant role of party bureaucracies in the nomination process is not peculiar to the N.P.O. In Lagos, a dissident group known as the Socialist Unity Party of Nigeria (SUPN) are reportedly threatening the UPN leader with Court action for "imposing all UPN governors on the people for a second term of office."¹⁹ And in Kwara State, the UPN gubernatorial primary election is being disputed in court.

The political parties are not likely to evolve a system of democratic primaries in the near future. Instead, party bureaucracies are likely to increase their control of primary elections in the name of party discipline. In the face of numerous intra-party protests in the UPN against the parties' method of nominating candidates, the party has come up with a more stringent code of conduct which demands that party members shall be prohibited from using any institution outside the party to seek redress or in an intra-party dispute or issue until he has failed to obtain satisfaction from the highest party organ recognized by the Constitution of the party."²⁰ In the same manner, the NPN is restraining its incumbent governor who lost in its gubernatorial nomination contest in the Cross River State from taking the party to court for alleged irregularities during the nomination process.²¹ And in Benue State, some NPN leaders have been protesting against the party election panel's handling of the governorship's nomination primaries.²²

In order to make primary elections more democratic in Nigeria, a constitutional amendment is suggested. The Constitutional amendment should give the FEDECO the powers to adopt the direct primary as a uniform system of conducting primary elections for all political parties in the country. To this effect, the FEDECO should coordinate with political party bureaucracies in preparing their primary election ballots which should contain the list of all aspirants and their elective offices. At the primary, election voters are given only the primary ballot of their parties or parties they have sym-

pathy for so that they will choose among their fellow partisans who seek nomination.

ROLE OF PARTIES IN CAMPAIGN AND ELECTIONS

Election campaigns by political parties can be conveniently grouped into two types according to their size and scope. The first category of campaigns are the small campaign teams built around candidates, their strong supporters, and, in some cases their campaign managers. The second category comprises the large campaign teams organized by party bureaucracies on a State or nation-wide basis. The first category of campaigns are supposed to be directed towards the entire electorate in the country. Our emphasis will be placed on the last category. Election campaigns are aimed at winning new political support or consolidating old support that are usually expressed in terms of the number of votes won in general elections. They are also likely to be instrumental in creating, reinforcing, and perhaps even changing attitudes about issues and problems, even if such a change in attitude does not affect the candidate's chances of winning.²³

This is to say that campaigns may have both short-range and long-range effects on the attitudes of the electorates.

A meaningful discussion of election campaigns by political parties may center on campaign strategies and tactics in addition to the impact of these campaigns on the electorate and the political system. The methods adopted by parties in most of the post independence campaigns of the 1960's consisted of the extensive use of the mass media, mass rallies, use of coercion in terms of the employment of party thugs, appeal to ethnic and communal sentiments and emphasis on personalities rather than issues, and above all the rigging of elections. These methods helped to accentuate inter-party, ethnic and regional conflicts. The total effect of these tactics on the electorate was their loss of faith on the electoral system as a legitimate means of changing governments or prolonging the life of existing ones. It may be pertinent to say that the election boycotts, rejection of election results, the first military coup and crises that followed have some of their roots in these election malpractices. The negative impact of the campaigns of the 1960's on the political system was the basis of the rationale to regulate some of the activities of political parties under the present constitution.

But the 1979 Constitution does not seem to have offered adequate safeguards against reckless campaign strategies of political parties. Perhaps what contributed to the successful outcome of the 1979 elections was not necessarily the improvement of party campaign strategies, but a conscious effort on the part of the new

political parties to ensure a successful transition to civilian rule.

Even though the NPN has recently launched its current party campaign at Gboko on the basis of major issues in connection with the party's ability to sustain peace, unity and stability coupled with its honesty to the electorate in terms of the parties commitment to the provision of social amenities (such as food, shelter, qualitative education and water),²⁴ a close look at the campaign activities of political parties in most of their recent conventions indicates that parties are fast returning to some of their pre-war methods. As an impartial observer said, "speeches and pronouncements at these conventions aroused serious anxiety about the survival of democracy in Nigeria after the 1983 elections. Each party appears to be preparing for a war, with threats to rig the election or cause trouble if they are stopped from winning"²⁵

Despite President Shehu Shagari's recent appeal to all political parties "to conduct their affairs without rancour and with probity, enjoining their fellowship to be law abiding, restrained in speech and accommodating in thought and action,"²⁶ this is not likely to be so. This is based on the recent activities of political parties to the contrary; for example the burnings and/or attempted burnings of radio stations and certain communication media (probably by party agents). It is suggested that what may help refine the campaign strategies of political parties in the country is a system of mass political education in which politicians and their party agents will be told of the political implications of campaign malpractices. With the assistance of existing higher educational institutions and the mass media, the FEDECO may be able to cope with the above task.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSTRAINTS

In a too-determined search for the role of parties alone in the electoral system, there is a danger of overlooking the many forces in their socio-political environment which may influence the performance of political parties in the above area. This paper intends to indicate some of these environmental forces for the purpose of further investigation by interested researchers. Most of these forces are institutional, cultural, social and even psychological in nature. Altogether, and in varying degrees, they may limit the ability of political parties to play a more effective role in the electoral process. These factors can be summarized as follows:

(1) Creation of 19 States: The creation of 19 States in the country has mounted to the decentralization of Nigerian Federalism. And the creation of more States may yet lead to further decentralization. Party organizations have been structured in line with the Fe-

deral set-up in terms of their establishment of State branches. The decentralization of party organizations in the country has contributed to the problems of factionalism, indiscipline, and intra-party conflicts among political parties. As a result, the directives from the National Executive Committees of parties can be effectively challenged by State party organizations. The extent to which this affects the electoral activities of political parties may require further investigation.

(2) **Political Culture:** The term refers to the all-enveloping network of the political norms, values, and expectations of people within a given political community. In other words, it has much to do with what people feel the political system is; what it should be; and their place in it. Most people in Nigeria feel that party politics is a dirty game which should not be undertaken by any decent or honest person. Consequently, most party candidates are perceived by their electorates as dishonest, greedy and selfish individuals who deceive the electorate by making promises that they never intend to fulfill. On the other hand, most politicians perceive politics not in terms of their commitment to particular party ideologies and programmes for the purpose of bringing about any meaningful change in the Society. Instead, they tend to see politics as an avenue for realizing their dreams for money and important political appointments. The persistence of these views may result in low turn-out by the electorate during registration and voting exercises.

(3) **Varying degrees of Literacy and Educational Attainments:** It is likely that voters who cannot read or write may find it difficult to make up their minds on parties and candidates on the basis of party positions on national issues as covered by the mass media. On the other hand, the more the electorate is educationally advanced, the more likely it is to correctly assess candidates and parties during election campaigns. It has been often suggested that party members who are lower in educational attainment are more loyal to the party bureaucracy than those who are more advanced educationally. It is yet to be proved whether this makes sense in accounting for the difference in voting behaviors between urban and predominantly rural electorates.

(4) **Ethnic Politics:** As we noted earlier, ethnic politics refers to situations in which ethnicity is an important consideration in the decisions made by voters and politicians. Ethnic voting is an aspect of ethnic politics. It is manifested in the tendency for members of a particular ethnic group to support one party or the other, and in the tendency for some members of an ethnic group to cross party

lines to vote for a fellow ethnic.²⁷ To be sure, this was the case with the major parties of the post independence civilian governments. It may be necessary to find out the extent to which ethnic politics and voting obtains in our present multi-party system as well as the nature of their impact on party nominations and campaign strategies.

CONCLUSION

The first part of this paper is a reflection on the meaning of political party and the distinction between political parties and other political organizations. In this part, too, the paper draws our attention to the problem of using the ambiguous definition of political parties as reference point in stating their role and requirements under the 1979 Constitution of Nigeria. In addition, the model of rational campaigning by parties and rational decision-making by the electorate is discussed and accepted as sound basis for operating the multi-party system, despite the problem imposed on it in Nigeria by constitutional constraints.

The paper explains why the place of political parties in the Nigerian political system remained conventional until it was officially incorporated in the 1979 Constitution. But it suggests that the constitutional regulation of the party activities has not so far succeeded in making them congruent with the main political and social objectives of the nation. For example, the method of candidate nominations in the recent primary elections in the country as well as the election campaign strategies that are characterized by arson, political thuggery, threats of rigging and use of force are all indicative of the possible demise of democracy, peace and political stability in the country. Because of the persistence of these election malpractices, the paper suggests, as a remedy, a constitutional amendment that will involve the introduction of the direct primary election that will also be conducted and supervised by FEDECO as a uniform system of candidate nomination by political parties. Also suggested as a remedy is the introduction of a system of political education for the benefit of the electorate, parties and their candidates and the political system. Finally, some environmental constraints on the ability of political parties to play more meaningful role in the electoral process are indicated and presented as areas that need further investigation.

NOTES

1. Sigmund, Neumann, ed., *Modern Political Parties*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1956; p. 396.

2. Nelson W. Polsby and Aaron Wildavsky, *Presidential Elections: Strategies of American Electoral Politics*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964, p. 22.
3. The Constitution of The Federal Republic of Nigeria 1979, Section 201.
4. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1979, Section 209.
5. Frank J. Sorauf, *Party Politics in America* (Fourth Edition). Boston, Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1980, p. 17.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Lewis A. Froman, Jr., "A Realistic Approach to Campaign Strategies and Tactics" in M. Kent Jernings and L. Harmon Zeigler (eds.), *The Electoral Process*. Engelwood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1966, p. 1.
8. See S. G. Ikoku, "Party Politics in the New Nigeria" in *Nigeria in Transition: A Critical Examination of the Main Political, Economic and Social Aspects of Nigerian Society*. Kaduna: (Report of the Seminar on Nigeria in Transition), September 11-13, 1979.
9. Richard L. Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963, p. 18.
10. Report of the Constitution Drafting Committee Containing the Draft Constitution, Vol. I. Lagos: Federal Ministry of Information, 1976, p. xlii.
11. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1979, Section 72.
12. Report by the Nigerian Constitutional Conference held in London in May and June 1957. Lagos: Federal Government Printer, 1957, p. 13.
13. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1963, Section 52(2). Lagos: Federal Ministry of Information, Printing Division, 1963.
14. Federal Military Government of Nigeria, *Federal Electoral Commission Decree*, 1977 Section 3(1) quoted in Oyeleye Oyediran, ed., *The Nigerian 1979 Elections*. Lagos, Ibadan: Macmillan Nigeria Publishers Ltd., 1981, p. 20.
15. *West Africa*, 3 January 1983, p. 4.
16. Frank J. Sorauf, *Party Politics in America*. Boston, Toronto: Little, Brown

and Company, 1968, p. 202.

17. *Nigerian Statesman*, November 17, 1982.
18. Nigerian Peoples Party, Imo State Branch, Final Directives on the Nomination of Candidates for the 1983 General Elections. (Unpublished Document) p. 2.
19. *West Africa*, 3 January 1983, p. 22.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
21. *Daily Times*, 18 November 1982; *Nigerian Statesman*, 12 November 1982.
22. *Daily Times*, 20 October 1982.
23. M. Kent Jennings and L. Harmon Zeigler, *The Electoral Process*, p. 3.
24. *Daily Times*, 25 January 1983.
25. *West Africa*, 3 January 1983, p. 22.
26. Published text of President Shehu Shagari's last New Year Day Address, *Daily Times*, 7 January, 1983.
27. M. Kent Jennings and L. Harmon Zeigler, (eds.), *The Electoral Process*, p. 42.