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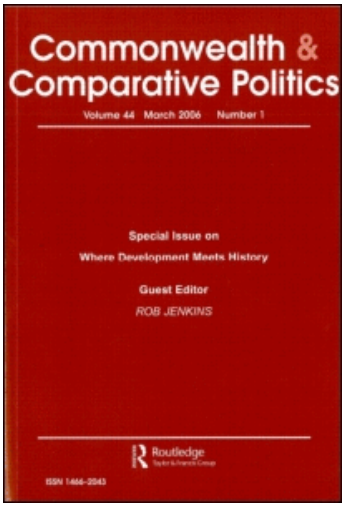

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Talking ethnic but hearing multi-ethnic: the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) in Nigeria and durable multi-ethnic parties in the midst of violence

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Talking ethnic but hearing multi-ethnic: the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) in Nigeria and durable multi-ethnic parties in the midst of violence

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The effect of ethnicity on party politics in Nigeria (1999–present) has been paradoxical. Policies designed to end ethnic outbidding and the ethnicisation of party politics have resulted in higher levels of ethnic violence. Policies pursued by the Nigerian framers to 'get the party system right' and engender broad, ethnically diverse parties were also expected to reduce the incentives for elites to encourage ethnic violence. They have not. The Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) succeeds as a multi-ethnic coalition on the basis of informal bargains and accommodations. The practice of 'zoning', which distributes the spoils of office according to an ethnic formula, produces incentives for local elites to embark upon ethnic violence or ethnic mobilisation as a way of advancing the interests of their local constituencies. The institutional framework of Nigerian democracy creates incentives for 'two-faced' elites – cooperative nationally, but ethnically antagonistic in their home districts.

Keywords: democracy; Nigeria; parties; ethnic conflict; institutional design

On 27 November 2008, Plateau State in Nigeria held elections for local government councils. Tensions were high, especially in the Jos North local government area (LGA), long a bastion for the opposition All Nigeria Peoples' Party (ANPP). Plateau State Governor General (rtd.) Jonah Jang is a member of the national ruling party, the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), and his supporters had fought hard in 2007–08 to secure the chairmanship of this council for the PDP (Agabese, 2008; Ishaq, 2008; Ostien, 2009).

Jos is one of the largest cities in Nigeria's 'Middle Belt', populated both by ethnic minorities (predominantly Christian) and members of Nigeria's largest

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ethnic group, the Hausa (predominantly Muslim). Since the democratic transition in 1999, it has become the site of repeated deadly ethnic riots. Riots in 2001 and 2004, described by various sources as religious, ethnic, or between 'settlers' and 'indigenous' populations, claimed at least 3000 lives (government estimates point to an even higher number). The violence has turned neighbour against neighbour and has made it a locus for spreading violence to other divided cities (Scacco, 2008). The competing parties are complicit in heightening the ethno-religious tensions in Jos (Higazi, 2008). The ANPP is a party of Northern Nigeria, supported by Muslim Hausas, and with little support outside that region (of which Jos is on the far southern edge). The PDP, despite being a broad, multi-ethnic party with a Muslim Hausa president, is perceived in Jos as the party of the indigenous Christian population.

When fighting broke out early in the morning of 28 November between ANPP and PDP supporters, few were surprised when the violence took on the character of religious riots and spread throughout the city (Human Rights Watch, 2008). The announcement during the crisis that the PDP had won all 17 LGA council chairmanships, including a victory in Jos North by PDP candidate Timothy Gyang Buba, accelerated the violence (Obateru, 2008). The final toll has at least 400 dead, more than 10,600 displaced (7600 Christians and 3000 Muslims), and 90 summary executions by Nigerian police, who were ordered to 'shoot on sight' by Governor Jang during the rioting (*Daily Champion*, 2008).

Less than a week later in Zamfara State, the Northern state best known for implementation of Islamic (*shari'a*) law in 1999, the Muslim Hausa governor, the cabinet, and most of the state's ANPP elite defected to the PDP. Governor Mahmud Aliyu Shinkafi was infamous in Nigerian political circles for attempting to pass a fatwa in 2002 condemning to death the journalist whose insensitive comments about the Prophet inadvertently started the 'Miss World' riots in November 2002 (Amalu & Olugbemiga, 2002). In this defection, the PDP gained yet another Muslim politician with a large political base in Northern Nigeria and one who has actively campaigned (and continues to promote himself) in Islamic terms.

The contradiction of the PDP as a Hausa-Muslim party in Zamfara, home to politicians who use attacks on Christians to curry favour with their constituencies, and a Christian party in Jos, doing the same with attacks on Muslims and Hausas, is striking. Equally striking is the integrity of the elite bargain that holds the PDP together in the face of these contradictions – despite perpetrating violence against Muslims in one area, prominent Muslims rush to join it in another. The PDP is based on the broadest, most durable multi-ethnic/religious coalition in Nigeria's history, despite the high saliency of ethnic identity (Eifert *et al.*, 2007). This coalition has survived (and grown) despite not only the highest levels of ethno-religious violence in Nigerian history, but also despite the fact

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that PDP candidates frequently run campaigns based on mobilising ethno-religious identity groups and that their supporters frequently participate in ethno-religious violence.

The PDP's ruling coalition crosses ethnic and religious lines to incorporate not only elites from the largest ethnic groups – the Hausa and Fulani (North), the Yoruba (West), and the Igbo (East) – but also those from minority groups that have long looked to the federal centre for autonomy and protection from dominance by their larger neighbours. Unlike previous multi-ethnic parties, the PDP has succeeded in incorporating a broad coalition of political elites, who share a dependence on their joint control of the federal and state governments for access to the oil-derived revenue streams that lubricate political affairs in Africa's most populous nation. As a national organisation, the PDP depends upon the continued cooperation of elites who share class and (sometimes) economic interests, but who in turn often rely on ethnic campaigning, mobilisation, and rhetoric for their support at home. Like the American congressmen in Fenno's (1978) *Home Style*, Nigerian politicians employ radically different strategies in their efforts to solicit the support of their elite colleagues and their constituents – two populations with very different expectations about what the rewards of the political process should look like.

The irony is that for most of Nigeria's independence history, every effort has been made by the successive generations of Nigerian 'framers' to create a system of stable political parties with cross-national appeal and to eliminate ethnicity as an axis of political competition. The scholarly literatures on the institutional design of electoral systems and constitutional design have often conflated the issues of creating incentives for elite cooperation and for eliminating ethnicity as a political resource, believing that the creation of cross-cutting, multi-ethnic parties would temper the use of ethnic identity as a political resource. Ethnic party competition often leads to ethnic violence (Wilkinson, 2004), but despite efforts to theoretically disentangle ethnic violence from the broader category of ethnic politics (Brubaker & Laitin, 1998; Laitin & Fearon, 2000), solutions to ethnic conflict in national politics are nonetheless often assumed also to be solutions for ethnic violence. Looking historically at how the PDP has functioned within the carefully designed electoral and federal institutions of the Nigerian Fourth Republic, this paper demonstrates that the informal bargains required for multi-ethnic party politics often mean that institutions designed to eliminate ethnic outbidding at the elite level fail to eliminate incentives for mass ethnic mobilisation. Thirty years of institutional reforms in Nigeria have produced the desired result at the elite level (cooperation in large, multi-ethnic parties) but have done little (and in many cases, have exacerbated) the problem of sectarian violence at the local level.

Despite institutional changes that require political parties to draw from and represent a truly national constituency, the PDP succeeds as a multi-ethnic

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coalition largely on the basis of informal bargains and accommodations. One mechanism in particular – facilitating open elite recruitment at the lower level through commitments to the distribution of party spoils (appointments, bureaucratic posts, financial incentives) – allows its leadership to meet their legal needs while attracting a diverse set of local elites into the fold. But the bargains elites strike under the PDP banner privilege those able to mobilise ethnic communities. The practice of informal 'zoning', which distributes the spoils of office and candidacy according to a territorially derived ethnic formula, produces incentives for local elites to embark upon ethnic violence (Ichino, 2008) or ethnic mobilisation as a way of advancing the interests of their local constituencies. Since ethnicity and locality serve as the core units of bargaining among national elites, entrance into the PDP and access to its resources requires a dependable ethnic base. The institutional framework of Nigerian democracy creates incentives for 'two-faced' elites – cooperative at the federal centre, but ethnically antagonistic at home. This highlights the weakness of projects that rely on purely institutional/constitutional fixes to the problems of deeply divided societies.

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What makes for a 'successful' multi-ethnic party?

How does a multi-ethnic coalition (MEC) party survive multiple electoral cycles amidst the extraordinarily high saliency of ethnic identity, and despite its own members' participation in ethno-religious campaigning (and violence)? One of the challenges in any political coalition is to find a way to share power – for the stronger members to commit to keeping their power-sharing bargains with weaker members. This is made more difficult if each partner's popular support is rooted in something like ethnic or religious identity, or if there are many political factions to be incorporated. If the dominant partner's home base is mobilised during elections by rallies filled with ethno-religious chauvinism against other coalition members, how can the weaker partners trust that they will be allotted their proper share? What if the constituents of coalition members are prone to assaulting each other during ethnic riots? How can coalition partners be sure popular ethnocentric pressure will not drive other members to renege on their agreements after the election is won?

Holding an MEC together in an environment of high ethnic saliency is difficult at best. Their tendency to succumb to 'ethnic outbidding' – for MECs to dissolve in the face of ethnic chauvinism resulting from uncertainty and the high stakes of political competition – is well-known (Rabushka & Shepsle, 1972). While a great deal of attention has recently been paid to how ethnic parties draw support from elites and masses (Chandra, 2004, 2005) and how political entrepreneurs choose which ethnic identities to direct their appeals at (Posner, 2004, 2005), the dilemmas faced by prospective members of

MEC parties in ethnically divided societies have garnered less attention. The success of MEC parties hinges on the answers to two questions: 1) Under what conditions will elites choose to join MEC coalition parties instead of forming their own ethnic parties, and 2) What determines the choices made by mass supporters to back a large MEC (in which their own people may be a small minority) instead of an ethnic party that more directly correlates with their own interests?

As Chandra (2004) has suggested, elites choosing to join ethnic parties are primarily concerned with whether or not the party can form a winning coalition (or serve as a kingmaker/strong post-election partner) and with the degree of openness in elite recruitment, which determines their opportunities for advancement. These general claims hold true for MEC parties. Open recruitment is essential for younger and less well-established elites, who accept a cost in independence and influence inside their own organisation by joining with more powerful political actors. Knowing that they may rise through the party ranks and be considered for positions that allow them to reward their own subordinates and clients makes such alliances desirable. The same is true for MEC parties. Guarantees to junior members that they will be suitably rewarded for their services to the larger organisation reduce their risk.

Equally, open recruitment policies offer potential advantages for party elites. The conditions for a winning coalition may change – electoral rules may be amended, districts redrawn, demographics may evolve, creating incentives for elites to mobilise ethnic support along new cleavages or in new terms (Posner, 2004, 2005). MEC parties that are centralised – where a particular elite cohort dominates the party's leadership – will be less likely to succeed than a party with competitive rules for recruitment and advancement. Ethnic parties that can incorporate new elites (from a new sub-ethnic unit, or a younger age cohort) will remain flexible and be able to adjust to changing circumstances.

At the mass level, the choice to support candidates making ethnic appeals is rooted in the desire to elect someone who will reliably provide benefits to the community and who can be held accountable for failing to do so. In 'patronage democracies', where access to the state is the primary means of upward mobility and there are severe information constraints, people look to co-ethnics as the most reliable partners in the quest for increased material well-being and status. People support co-ethnics running for office because they hope the improved status of one will improve the status of all through the establishment of patronage networks that give even the lowliest some connection to state resources. Ethnicity 'functions as a stable information cue for political choices in an environment of low political information' (Birnir, 2007) where voters are looking to make their ballot 'count' by voting in the candidate most likely to return material benefits to them. In this scenario, MEC parties

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nonetheless remain 'ethnic' parties – a group of ethnically constituted units each of which cooperates at the centre, but which retains its ethnic identity and serves the interests of an identifiable ethnic constituency (Horowitz, 1985: 291–292).

Crafting the parties (and the politics) we want: the pitfalls of institutional design

A successful MEC party in an ethnically polarised society will be able to succeed in both spheres – by opening elite recruitment to attract desirable local partners who provide the mass support necessary for electoral victory, and by providing the necessary resources for those local elites to fulfil the expectations of their constituencies. But creating trust and durable bargains among elites and ensuring constituents that the benefits of the federal government will flow back into their community are not necessarily products of the same processes or the results of the same institutional designs. Political parties and party systems are typically understood as products of the motives of politicians responding to institutions in order to overcome the problems faced by individual candidates (Aldrich, 1995). In diverse countries where ethnicity is the salient political cleavage, we expect fragmented cleavage systems to translate into fragmented party systems (Brambor *et al.*, 2007). In deeply-divided societies, the challenge lies in getting the many potential ethnic factions to cooperate. Both the literature on party formation and party systems and the constitutional design school rarely consider the possibility that solving the elite-level problems of MEC party formation may not also address the root causes of ethnic violence at the local level.

Research concerned with the influence of electoral rules on the type, size and number of parties suggests a relatively simple set of rules (Duverger, 1954; Cox, 1997) that influence party fractionalisation based on electoral system (proportional/plurality) and district magnitude. But these studies often neglect to speak to the basic truth of why most deeply-divided countries embark upon efforts to modify their electoral institutions – to reduce the politicisation of ethnic identity and ethnic violence. Institutionalising a stable party system or specific multi-ethnic parties is a goal because it lends predictability and legitimacy to party rule, because it provides incentives for rule-bound behaviour (Mainwaring & Scully, 1995), and because it may provide better representation by incorporating diverse interests from civil society into the formal political sphere. Parties that become institutionalised along particularist lines, or that are internally cohesive but lack incentives to follow the rules (Randall & Svasand, 2002), are not usually what institutional framers intended.

Studies of constitutional design are more sensitive of the need to address existing problems of ethnic conflict. The major theories, consociationalism

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(Lijphart, 1977) and centripetalism (Horowitz, 1985, 1991; Reilly, 2001), take approaches to addressing destabilising ethnic divisions that are in some ways radically different. Consociationalism focuses on the importance of 'grand coalition' governing, proportional representation (PR), a strong minority veto and guarantees for minority rights – seeking to ensure a guaranteed level of representation for all constituent (ethnic) groups in society. The centripetal approach seeks 'not to replicate existing ethnic divisions in the legislature, but rather to utilize electoral systems which encourage cooperation and accommodation between rival groups' (Reilly, 2001: 21). The centripalists promote a variety of 'vote pooling' schemes designed to create incentives for party or ethnic elites to make broader appeals or to cooperate prior to the election with other factions in order to draw support on a preferential ballot (Horowitz, 1991). Consociationalism favours post-electoral coalitions based on pre-defined constituencies (ethnic or otherwise), whereas centripetalism encourages pre-election coalitions or moderate appeals for cross-ethnic preferential voting during the campaign.

The other avenue of institutional design is territorial. Consociational strategies focus on autonomy for ethnic territorial units (Lijphart, 1996: 260), while centripetal theory endorses the use of territorial boundaries to cross-cut existing cleavages and to provide political entrepreneurs with an incentive to take up mass mobilisation along many different lines of identity (Chandra, 2005). The goal is to force elites to reach across as many social lines of cleavage as possible in pursuit of a winning coalition. Territorial solutions to ethnic conflict form the backbone of Nigerian institutional design.

While the two may appear quite different, two important similarities between the consociational and centripetal approaches are their emphasis on formal institutions (electoral or otherwise) as the solution for ethnic conflict, and their conflation of solutions for ethnic conflict in politics with solutions for ethnic violence.[1] Both focus on forming broad, multi-ethnic elite coalitions as a way of controlling runaway ethnic competition. But institutions designed to foster broader coalitions and less ethnic outbidding do not necessarily affect the incentives of local elites, who need to generate local support to become and to remain as desirable members of multi-ethnic coalitions (Wilkinson, 2004).

Consociationalism is a theory of elite cooperation, and consociational institutions emphasise sharing political resources in predicable ways. It is no longer surprising that such policies tend, where the distribution of political power is or can be interpreted as based on ethnic headcounts, to produce elites that remain cooperative while the fires of ethnic sentiment will continue to be stoked in local communities. But the centripetal strategies, including all forms of preferential voting, are meant to change the ways in which both elites and voters act, notwithstanding that the strategic advantages lay at the level of elite coordination, rather than in direct benefits to masses (Reilly, 2001: 88).[2] In any

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case, the practicalities of holding multi-ethnic coalitions together are not dictated by either model of cooperation.[3] Both consociationalism and centripetalism provide incentives for elites to work together, and indicate a framework in which they may in fact do so, but enforcement mechanisms are often less than fully specified. Parties or ethnic constituencies have to strike informal power-sharing arrangements within the formal guidelines in order to ensure their coalitions, pre- or post-electoral, will not collapse.

The demands placed upon potential party elites by electoral rules that affect the size and composition of a prospective winning coalition do not themselves dictate the strategies elites will employ to meet those terms. In the case of the PDP, the Nigerian framers adopted neither purely consociational nor purely centripetal institutions. By mandating neither PR nor preferential voting, but rather by creating rules that dictated the scope of a necessary coalition, Nigerian institutional design left it up to the elites themselves to find a way to guarantee the cross-ethnic bargains they would need to enter into. Without a direct enforcement mechanism penalising defectors from these bargains, the PDP has held itself together with an elaborate but largely informal system of guarantees as to the precise terms of power-sharing. 'Zoning', the practice of selecting candidates and rewarding elites based on a known set of territorial or identity-based criteria, is not unique to Nigeria or the PDP. Zoning, when combined with open elite recruitment by the PDP's federal and state branches, suggests to political entrepreneurs that the party is committed to providing political rewards commensurate with their contribution to its success. But it also results in the continuing pervasiveness of ethnic talk and ethnic mobilisation at the grassroots levels, as local politicians seek to form a base that will make them appealing to the PDP leadership.

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Institutional design in Nigeria since the civil war

There has always been a tension in Nigerian politics between the desire of the framers of Nigeria's several constitutions to eliminate ethnic competition over politics and the strategies they have employed to level the playing field between Nigeria's various ethnic and religious groups (Kirk-Greene, 1997: 36–47). Since the collapse of the Nigerian First Republic (1960–66) in ethnic outbidding, coups, bloodshed, and the Biafran Civil War (1967–70), eliminating the ethnic bases for political competition and establishing a stable party system based on coalitions that cross sectarian lines has been the prime objective for Nigerian state-builders. The strategies these framers have pursued in periodical constitutional deliberations since the mid-1970s (Horowitz, 1979; Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1987) have not hewn to either consociational or centripetal orthodoxy. Depending on one's evaluation of the success of these projects, they

have either taken instead a middle path, incorporating aspects of both in an effort to meet the specific needs of an enormously large and ethnically diverse nation, or they have veered schizophrenically from one to the other, pursuing policies at odds with each other in an attempt to engineer a stable, non-violent political system. The contradictions in the Nigerian efforts to lay the groundwork for stable and wide multi-ethnic political coalitions have led the most successful of these parties to rely on informal mechanisms of cooperation and commitment to hold their parties together.

The first course of reforms (territorial) focused on eliminating root causes of ethnic competition, through modifying both the size and shape of constituencies (from three regions in 1960 to 36 states in 1996). State creation was meant to create cross-cutting cleavages through sub-division of the large ethnic 'regions' of the First Republic (one for each of the three largest ethnic groups), and by creating electoral rules that force political parties to mobilise broad, multi-ethnic coalitions. The second course enshrines cultural differences (ethnicity, religion, and state of origin) as the basis for the distribution of political and public goods. By demanding that ministerial appointments reflect the 'federal character' of Nigeria's ethno-religious diversity in the 1978 constitution, the framers placed an expansive distributionist philosophy into the Nigerian political lexicon. College admissions, ambassadorial posts, civil service jobs, and public works projects are all distributed among the several states based on an expanding notion of the 'federal character', thereby enshrining local identities (upon the basis of which claims can be made against the federal and state governments) as the key basis for political mobilisation. The other aspect of the federal character crafted rules for political mobilisation meant to force parties to recruit beyond their home region. The 1978 constitution mandated that presidential candidates must garner at least 25 per cent of the vote in two-thirds of the states in order to win an election. Political parties were required by electoral law to represent national constituencies, by establishing offices in every state and headquartering at the capital, and by demonstrating to the Federal Electoral Commission that they represented a truly cross-ethnic and regional base.

In the Second Republic (1979–83), these reforms were only partially successful. Perhaps the biggest factor in the failure of a stable MEC party was that from the beginning, the ruling party, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), sought to undermine its commitment to the electoral rules through legal and extralegal means. Having failed to win 25 per cent of the vote in the constitutionally mandated 13 of 19 states, the NPN and its presidential candidate, Shehu Shagari, won a contentious Supreme Court decision declaring that two-thirds of 19 was legally 12 and two-thirds of the states (one-sixth of the vote in two-thirds of the 13th state being sufficient). From this point on, cooperation between the NPN, which had won merely 33.8 per cent of the

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total vote in the presidential election, and the other major parties was limited and marred by treachery on all sides. To build up its base in anticipation of additional legal challenges, the 1983 elections were heavily rigged by the NPN, but also by their opponents, and democracy collapsed. In the absence of more informal cooperation, the NPN failed to emerge as an MEC with a large enough reach to govern legitimately, fighting among its majority and minority ethnic stakeholders pulled the party apart, and the military intervened, tabling democracy until 1999.

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The PDP and ethno-religious conflict (1999–present)

The PDP was founded during the tail-end of military rule in 1998, emerging out of the G-34, a national coalition of former politicians, ex-military officers, and others. It was an organisation based on top-down integration of national elites, rather than, as was the case with previous large parties, a regional elite seeking to incorporate other regional elites into a national framework after the fact. Like other successful Nigerian parties, the PDP has been rooted less in a commitment to ideology than in a commitment to 'incorporating diverse regional and parochial interests', with special attention to the efficient disbursement of federal funds to the state and local governments within the established political networks (Enemuo, 1999: 4). Most of the institutional parameters established in 1978 were carried down to 1999, although the number of states increased from 19 to 36. The PDP dominated the initial local government elections in December 1998, besting the two main opposition parties, the All Peoples' Party (APP) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD), which had narrower elite constituencies (based in the North-West and South-West, respectively).

The PDP's campaign in 1999 played to the popular notions of the federal character and the zoning of power, which had transcended their original intent as mechanisms for an elite peace pact and had become a rallying cry for local politicians and ordinary voters. Based on a formula that broke down the country into six ethnic or cultural 'zones', each of which was to be assigned a share of the high federal offices (Sklar *et al.*, 2006), the PDP courted minorities, especially in the so-called 'Middle Belt', that area of the old Northern region (containing Jos) not historically part of Hausaland, and the Niger Delta (the 'South–South' zone), where a low-level insurgency begun in the mid-1990s presented a security threat (Watts, 2004).

Zoning works as an informal expansion of the federal character principle into the mechanics of coalition building by political parties. It functions as a commitment by party leaders to distribute the highest ranking positions in government and in the party according to geographical zones that represent ethnic realities. The PDP 'zones' political goods at the national, state, and local levels.

The national 'zoning' project divides the states into six zones, each based putatively on their shared socio-cultural heritage (Figure 1). At the state and local levels, geographical areas are assigned zonal status on roughly (there is some inconsistency in practice) the same grounds – shared ethnic (sub-ethnic), religious, or linguistic heritage, or based on ostensibly 'pre-colonial' borders. In this sense, zoning goes substantially beyond the constitutional requirements to appoint at least one federal minister from each state, impacting candidacy nominations for federal office, and focused specifically on distributing the opportunity to pursue the highest (and most lucrative) offices – state governors, leadership positions in state and federal legislatures, party chairmanships, and the presidency and vice-presidency (Table 1).

Owing to the results of the aborted 1992 elections (the 'Third Republic'), in which a Yoruba Muslim, M.K.O. Abiola, won the elections before they were annulled and the transition was halted, the PDP chose to 'zone' the first presidential election to the South. Abiola died in prison under suspicious circumstances, and was seen by many Yorubas as a martyr and the victim of a plot by the military establishment to keep power in the hands of Northerners. The PDP's success in living up to its promise of a Christian, Southerner president played an important role in legitimating its adherence to federal character

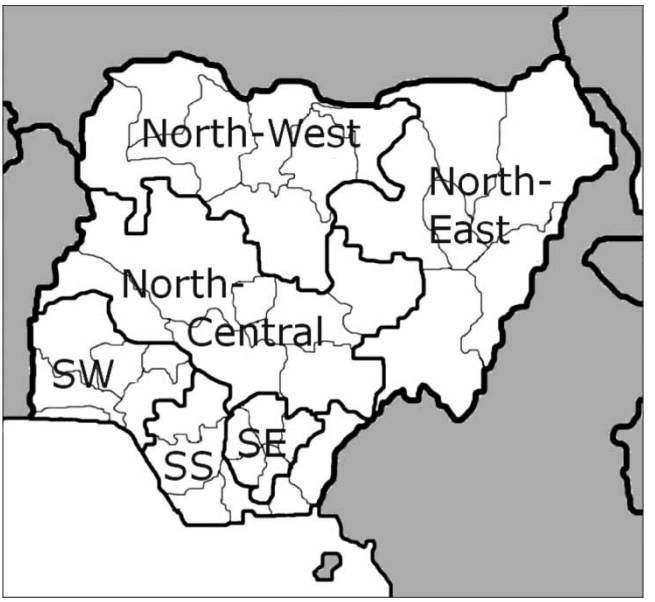

Figure 1. Nigeria's six geopolitical zones.
Note: This is a substantially modified version of a map from Sklar *et al.* (2006: 103).

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Table 1. Major federal offices, by ethnic group (1999–2008).

Zone (states)	Predominant identity groupings	Major federal offices held (1999–2009)
North-West (Sokoto, Zamfara, Kebbi, Katsina, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano)	Hausa, Fulani (Muslim)	Presidency (2007–present); Speaker (1999–2000*, 2000–03, 2003–07)
North-East (Bauchi, Gombe, Yobe, Borno, Adamawa, Tabara)	Kanuri, Hausa (Muslim)	Vice-Presidency (1999–2007)
North-Central (Niger, F.T.C. [Abuja], Nassarawa, Kogi, Kwara, Benue)	Tiv, Nupe, Jukun	Senate Pres. (2007–present)
South-West (Oyo, Ogun, Lagos, Osun, Ekiti, Ondo)	Yoruba (Muslim/ Christian)	Presidency (1999–2007); Speaker (2007*, 2007–present)
South-East (Anambra, Imo, Egunu, Ebonyi, Abia)	Igbo (Christian)	Senate Pres. (1999*,1999–2000*, 2000–03, 2003–05*, 2005–07)
South-South (Cross-River, Edo, Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa-Ibom)	Urhobo, Ibibio, Ijaw, Edo, Itsekiri (Christian)	Vice-Presidency (2007–present)

*Indicates officeholder was impeached.

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principles, which structured much of the public debate around electing a new president.

How the PDP succeeds as a multi-ethnic coalition party

As Laitin and Fearon (1996) note, inter-ethnic cooperation is the norm in most political situations. Ethnic leaders evolve institutional mechanisms to encourage their co-ethnics to abide by the terms of implicit agreements between groups, and as many anthropological studies on Nigeria have noted, most multi-cultural communities depend on just this balance of informal cross-ethnic pacts and in-group policing (Cohen, 1969; Salamone, 1996). Most of the constitutional reforms enacted since the fall of the First Republic have been designed to address problems of cooperation and commitment between elites, without consideration of how they would affect demands made from the bottom up. The PDP's success has hinged on their response to these institutional conditions. But the PDP's success has come at the price of increased ethnic mobilisation and violence, as local elites seek to transform their political resources into a seat at the PDP table.

Open elite recruitment and zoning

Commitment to power-sharing bargains among the ethnic elites of the PDP requires both informal flexibility and strong institutional guarantees that entering into a coalition will actually result in the expected payoff. MEC parties need to be free to add additional coalition partners as necessary to respond to changing political circumstances. Equally important are guarantees that entrance into the coalition can and will translate into political advancement and a predictable share of power. A minor elite is unlikely to be assuaged by the knowledge that mid-level bureaucratic posts will be made available for their state, but that they are unable to advance within the party far enough to be considered eligible for a share. The PDP has succeeded in opening up elite recruitment and committing to the zoning of both high and low offices far more widely than any previous Nigerian party. This mitigates the danger the PDP faces both from high-profile defections and from widespread violence, but does little to address the underlying structures that promote ethnic and electoral violence.

Nigerian federalism is touted as a success story in the scholarly literature, but it must be re-evaluated in light of the last 10 years of increasing ethnic violence. As Hale (2004) and Horowitz (1985: 602–628) note, the break-up of the regional system has prevented the sort of state collapse that triggered the Biafran War in 1967. The coalition of Northern elites that were able to turn less than 30 per cent of the national vote into a controlling stake of federal power in the First Republic under the asymmetrical federalism arrangement they won during independence negotiations (Sklar, 1963: 125–140) was struck a blow when the Northern region was divided into six states. State creation has largely directed conflict towards the localities and the state governments and away from the federal government, which was the intention (Horowitz, 1985: 604–605). But conflict at the lower levels has spiralled increasingly out of control in the Fourth Republic, and the state governments are ill-equipped to stop it (lacking state security or police forces, for example).

Creating more states, or ensuring a wide distribution of resources through the federal character principle, has helped to make the task of opening up elite recruitment easier for the PDP. It has also opened a Pandora's box of local demands for the 'democratic dividend' of political and economic goods (Bratton & Lewis, 2007) that even ordinary citizens recognise is more likely to arrive if a new LGA is created, or if a co-ethnic governor funnels money for new projects back to his own 'zone' within the multi-ethnic state (Daloz, 2005: 164). This has been most evident not at the level of states themselves (although the break-up of the large regional blocs of the First Republic has empowered minority groups that became majorities in the state houses of heterogeneous areas and allowed them to become key players in federal politics), but at the local level, where much of the PDP's recruitment efforts take place.

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Nothing has facilitated the PDP's ability to incorporate diverse ethnic elites into the party structure more than the rise in (fiscal and political) importance of the LGA councils and the local government chairmanships. More so than demands for new states, demands for LGA creation drive political violence in multi-ethnic areas, where tensions between communities living in close proximity but with wildly different levels of access to state resources often lead to violent outbreaks. Filling these councils and chairpersonships has also led to the intrusion of state government, especially governors, into local politics. The federal character principle operates at the level of state appointments, so controlling LGAs gives the state ruling party a leg up in advancing its own people within the state administration, and in meeting the distributional requirements for gubernatorial voting.

Parallel to the rules for presidential elections, it is necessary to draw 25 per cent of the vote in two-thirds of the LGAs to win a governorship. Originally intended as non-partisan posts in the 1978 constitution, local government council elections are now dominated by the major parties, and success and failure in local government elections often determines the ability of a minority party (including the PDP in states it does not control) to compete for state-wide office. The percentage of federal revenue paid directly to the LGAs has doubled since the Second Republic, from 10 to 20 per cent of the total – 722 billion Naira in 2008 (Suberu, 2001: 54),[4] and it is no surprise that the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission accused 31 of the 36 sitting governors of 'tampering' with local government council funds between 1999 and 2006.

Despite constitutional restrictions on the creation of LGAs by the states, more than 500 new units were created or put forward by the states as of 2003. It is rumoured that support for Obasanjo's third-term amendment by some South-East legislators was tied to promises that proposed LGAs in their states would be approved by the federal government, turning them, in the words of one author, into merely another 'form of patronage' at the state's disposal (Eberlein, 2006: 576). As Ukiwo (2006) has shown, demands for new LGAs in many of the most ethnically diverse (and oil-producing) states has driven ethnic violence, as local communities fight for control over the financial autonomy that comes with a direct pipeline of federal money. In many cases, long-standing disagreements over who 'owns' a particular area are inflamed and turn violent, as they have in Bendel, Jos, Warri, and Delta states. The demands of the oil-producing states have focused on a combination of demands for additional states for smaller minorities and for the distribution of federal oil revenues according to 'derivation' principles, under which states that contribute disproportionately to the federal revenue stream receive a larger share of federal funding, 13 per cent of revenue is now so distributed, but demands of 25 per cent or more are common from PDP politicians in the Delta.

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Ichino (2008) argues that the significance of local government politicians for the parties is that they are willing to compete with each other for state-level patronage. Parties incorporate local elites though 'tournaments', in which local elites invest their own resources in mobilising support for the party (or, in some instances, relying on violence to drive down support across the board), thereby demonstrating their own viability as candidates for advancement. But some parties are more successful than others at drawing local elites into their efforts to win larger elections (Miles, 1988). What Ichino (2008) does not discuss is the process of recruitment, nor does she suggest why the PDP has been so much more successful than other parties, even in areas where we might expect to find ethnic antagonism towards the faces of the national PDP leadership.

The PDP, like other Fourth Republic parties, has relied on the 'godfathers', prominent and wealthy individuals with strong patron–client networks who facilitate the election of their associates to high office (Omobowale & Olutayo, 2007), and other well-connected community figures for recruiting local elites. These figures are known quantities in their communities, whose relationships to larger, more national power brokers (or such like) are matters of public knowledge. Some are old figures with traditional titles and connections to older generations of politicians. Ex-senator and governor Jim Nwobodo of Enugu State derived his influence from the sponsorship of his political career by Igbo nationalist and First Republic head of state Nnamidi Azikiwe, while Chris Uba in Anambra State was a mere 34 years old when he used his personal wealth and presidential connections to get Chris Ngige elected governor.

Additionally, the PDP has been wracked by intra-party violence, most notably in the South-East zone, where the party has been dependent on the efforts of so-called political 'godfathers' to manage intra-party competition and shape electoral outcomes. From the saga of Governor Chris Ngige in Anambra State, who was abducted by security forces loyal to his sponsor Chris Uba (brother of Obasanjo special advisor Andy Uba) in 2003 and forced to resign (Smith, 2007), to the British legal entanglements of Governors Diepreye Alamieyeseigha (Baylesa) and Joshua Dariye (Plateau), both of whom were arrested for money-laundering overseas and subsequently impeached (in 2005 and 2006, respectively), the PDP has repeatedly had its dirty laundry aired publicly. The case of Mr. Dariye is instructive. He was originally removed from office by Obasanjo in 2004 after a state of emergency, resulting from Dariye's inability to end religious and ethnic violence in his state, but also helping to foster long-term notions that the PDP represented Christian interests in Plateau State (Higazi, 2008). The association of PDP governors with vigilante groups like the Bakassi Boys in Abia, Imo and Anambra State also served to link the party with apparatuses of violence over which they had little control (Harnischfeger, 2003, Smith, 2004: 441–445).

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Patron–client networks and the political coalitions between ethnic elites are not stable in Fourth Republic Nigeria. As Daloz (2005: 158–159) notes, the size of most ethno-political organisations is quite small, and the alignment of any group with a larger political force (be it a party or a powerful patron) is subject to rapid change based on competitiveness and context. The dominance of the PDP through the first round of voting in 1999 gave these associations a reason to pitch in their lot with the winners – to persuade the PDP, as it were, that it is worth their time and interest to be incorporated. Ethnic mobilisation at the lower levels allows these less powerful elites to send a signal that they are worth being incorporated into the larger bargain. And the PDP's attention, through patrons, to campaigning for a new LGA or providing resources to the local government council pays dividends for the national party. Where the PDP has lost ground – in the South-East – there have been the highest levels of intra-party violence and competition, as local coalitions have broken down and re-formed while 'godfathers' have risen and fallen. In the absence of stable resource provision from PDP politicians in this area, commitment to the national party from the lower level elites has dropped.

The other key mechanism available to the PDP leadership to demonstrate commitment to its local and minority elite membership is zoning and the federal character principle (Table 1). Although rivalries of the 'big men' are easily ignited and often destabilising, the widespread extent of federal character and zoning demands have forced the PDP to accommodate them from the bottom up. In general, while Ichino (2008: 106) is right to view elections in Nigeria as often taking the form of 'tournaments', she overemphasises the degree to which local elites are in competition with one another for the spoils of patronage and offices.

The PDP succeeds in attracting local elites by publicly announcing the zoning rules and procedures in advance – reducing the uncertainty of choosing to participate in the PDP.[5] Necessarily, some contributors are rewarded in greater measure than others. But the PDP's transparent zoning procedures at the state and national level (Diamond & Suberu, 2002: 419–422) – far more transparent and systematic that either their Second Republic predecessors or their competition – help to instil confidence among potential PDP local elites that a minimum contribution will be rewarded, if not to every individual, then in a predictable way to every locality and ethnic group. Zoning adds a level of predictability in outcome for local elites when choosing which party to back. Defections from the PDP have tended to be at the highest level, where the competition for the truly desirable posts is fierce, and have often resulted from zoning decisions themselves, rendering a portion of the ambitious elites ineligible – a factor beyond their control (LeVan *et al.*, 2003: 42).

Equally important has been the PDP's commitment to zoning at the national level. While zoning has created headaches and embarrassment at times –

turnover of several of the 'high' offices, speaker and deputy speaker of the National Assembly, Senate president, and Party chairperson has been frequent – the leadership's commitment to it has not wavered. When, in late 2007, the speaker of the federal House of Representatives, Patricia Etteh, resigned amidst a cloud of scandal, it was not a high-ranking or senior politician who filled the slot. Rather, as the position had been 'zoned' to the South-East with Etteh's ascension, the PDP leadership considered only other representatives from the same zone. They settled on a 37-year-old junior legislator, Dimeji Bankole, whose primary qualification was to have been born in the right area. In 2000, efforts to impeach Chuba Okadigbo, the sitting Senate president, came to the same conclusion. The position had been zoned to the South-East, and Igbo senators successfully appealed to the pan-Igbo organisation, *Ohaneze*, to ensure his replacement would also be an Igbo (LeVan, 2007: 243). Obasanjo's efforts to amend the constitution to permit himself a third term failed not because of elites' deep respect for the rule of law, but because, as the press made quite clear, it would have violated commitments on the PDP's part to zone the presidency back to the North in 2007. So strongly ingrained is the political legitimacy of zoning that all three major parties ran Northerners for the 2007 presidential elections, despite strong constituencies in the Southern states that might have supported alternative candidates, and despite the fact that neither rotational zoning nor the six 'zones' have any legal standing, constitutional or otherwise (Sklar *et al.*, 2006).

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Ethnic talk

The PDP's success is a product not only of its distributional prowess, but also of the party's ability to compartmentalise the ethnic actions of local elites on behalf of the party. Something not explored by previous authors considering recent Nigerian elections or the PDP has been the degree to which the local elites who form the bedrock of mass PDP support depend on ethnic 'talk'. Ethnic (and religious) campaigning is nothing new in Nigeria – Igbo National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) supporters calling NPC politicians 'Arab' stooges in 1964 (Diamond, 1988: 192), the NPC suggesting that Muslims failing to support their party approached apostasy (Dudley, 1968: 143), and the NPN's Islamic invocations during the 1983 campaign (Miles, 1988) – but ethnic campaigning has always been a destabilising force for prospective ruling parties.

The nature of political campaigns and conflicts in Nigeria means that ethnic talk – speech that classifies particular conflicts in ethnic terms, and suggests the crucial political importance of ethnic solidarity – makes up a great deal of the repertoire of many politicians. Both the Southern and Northern branches of the PDP draw effectively on religious symbolism – in the South, it is intertwined with godfatherism and the presence of militia and vigilante groups that

legitimate their actions (and implicitly, the actions of their patrons) in terms of local religious institutions meant to provide security and protection (Gore & Pratten, 2003). In the North, they rely on religious imagery pioneered by the NPC politicians relating to the conversion of opposition leaders, and moral stances against social bugaboos like prostitution and alcohol that result from 'Christian' intrusions into the moral order of the North (Ostien, 2007). Most prominently during the *shari'a* implementation crisis from 1999 to 2005, PDP leaders found themselves in radically different camps as religion was used by both Christian and Muslim PDP politicians to energise the masses to stand up in defence of their faiths – sadly resulting in substantial bloodshed across the country.

One effective mechanism employed by PDP politicians to provide cover for ethnic and religious talk were the prominent ethnic and cultural defence organisations that served as non-partisan vehicles for chauvinism that might have otherwise strained intra-party relations to breaking point. *Afenifere* in Yorubaland, *Ohanaeze* in the South-East, and the *Arewa* Consultative Forum in the North were the largest and most mainstream of these organisations, while ethnic organisations like the *O'odua* Peoples' Congress in the South-West, which also sponsored ethnic militias, received less direct support from politicians. By serving as platforms for PDP politicians to differentiate between support for ethnic politics by the political leadership *qua* party members and the political leadership *qua* ethnic leaders, organisations like these provide 'cover' for politicians who 'talk' ethnically. Where this shield is weakest – where its politicians become most obviously tied up in the business of ethnic organisations and militias (the South-East) – the PDP has suffered electoral setbacks (Akinyele, 2001: 639). By walling off most (but not all) ethnic 'talk' from the PDP itself, it is far easier for the larger ethnic factions in the PDP – most importantly the Muslim Hausas – to demonstrate to minority partners that the coalition is not merely a ploy for them to assert their dominance.

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Conclusions: MECs, ethnic violence, and democracy

The PDP's reliance on rotational zoning and rewarding local elites through the federal character principle tends to create demands – for zoning state offices to certain ethnic groups, for more LGAs to be created in a certain state, or for an Igbo presidency – that the PDP is hardly capable of meeting. Part of the problem is that the top-down control that allows the largest patrons and national political figures to reward their clients and extend the scope of the PDP's elite bargain is profoundly undemocratic. But the other part of the problem is that the PDP's primary means of holding its coalition together and recruiting new members encourages ethnic mobilisation at the grassroots – at a level where

existing strains on ethnic and religious relations, rooted in historic inequalities, are ready to become hot ethnic conflicts with little prompting.

A good example of this is the political violence in Plateau State in 2002 – violence that presaged the riots with which this paper began. In Yelwa, the site of several religious riots since 1999, competition over the zonal 'ownership' of the local government chairmanship in June 2002 among diverse PDP supporters helped to sharpen political distinctions based on religion, which were already salient due to chieftaincy disputes in the area. In efforts to win over the PDP leadership, aspiring local elites found it good business to turn the elections into a religious headcount – an easy way to demonstrate their prospective worth to the party in stark terms.

While the violence at that time was limited to fights between two lines waiting to cast their ballots, neither the state nor the national leadership of the PDP stepped in to halt the localised conflict that would crystallise later into full-scale religious rioting. As Adam Higazi (2008: 115–121) noted several years later, intra-party violence has almost always met with inaction in Plateau State. While he argues that the lack of intervention resulted from either a lack of interest or from tacit support for it, it is clear from the narrative that any leader who had intervened with a definitive solution would have likely cost the PDP the support of one community or the other. As in the case in Jos North six years later, PDP politicians walk a very fine line between expanding their coalitions and solidifying support from their base. In the absence of external pressure, sectarian violence is often let to play itself out because intervention will inevitably cost that politician support.

Ethnic and religious violence has increased dramatically since democratisation, but the underlying dynamics do not resemble the ethnic 'nationalism[s] that emerge[d] from the crucible of democratization' in Eastern Europe and elsewhere (Snyder, 2000: 36). Few if any of Nigeria's states are financially viable, and even those factions demanding 'ethnofederalism' (most notably members of the Yoruba elite in the South-West) are not willing to forgo their share of the oil revenue derived from six states in the South-East. Outside of militant groups in the Delta region, the language of ethnicity is employed by political elites not to mobilise the population against the state as it exists or even against other ethnic groups directly. Rather, it is deployed by political entrepreneurs as a means of making claims on the federal government or the PDP for greater federal resources.

By exerting ethnic control or ownership over particular territories (and through the manipulation of local understandings of citizenship that make one a citizen of one's ethnic homeland, rather than where one domiciles, conducts business, and owns property), political elites use ethnicity and religious identity to claim privileges from the state, rather than against it. Ethnic mobilisation is rarely harnessed to any purpose other than that of demands for additional political representation (and thus financial reward). The PDP, like

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its competitors, has little reason to intervene decisively against the corruption, violence, or ethnic chauvinism of its 'representatives' in the states, especially those with substantial strategic importance for the PDP's electoral ambitions. The PDP tolerates ethnic militias and the economic relationships of its legislators in the Delta region with the rebel groups (Eberlein, 2006: 584), for example, because opposition control of these areas would pose a risk for the status quo on federal revenue sharing, on which the government's ability to meet its distributional requirements rests. Violence against minorities (Hausas in Lagos and Ogun States, Igbos in Kano) is not politically destabilising for the PDP coalition because the benefits of political mobilisation resulting from the violence are not outweighed by the need to incorporate these local minorities into the party, as their ethnic affiliation makes them constituents not of where they live and experience violence, but of their 'homeland' – where elites who 'represent' them are recruited into the PDP on their own terms, and are 'zoned' a share of the federal resources for their trouble.

The outcome is that the PDP's 'success' story has not translated into success for Nigerian democracy. It is ironic that the long-term institutional reforms begun in the 1970s to eliminate ethnic political competition and stabilise the party system have eliminated the smaller 'danger' of ethnic parties coming to power without national support, but have helped to escalate sectarian violence. Efforts to 'design' their way out of ethnic outbidding and violence and into a stable and peaceful party system based on MEC parties have served Nigerian elites better than those they represent, who absorb the bulk of the violence that results from the incentives of aspiring ethnic elites, and are often unsatisfied with the quality of democracy in ethnically dominated political systems (Dowd & Driessen, 2008). The PDP can be all things to all people because of its flexibility and adaptability in responding to electoral and territorial rules – because its leaders are adept at rewarding all ethnic communities with a share of federal largesse. The PDP holds its multi-ethnic coalition together by providing reasonable terms for elite cooperation, but without providing the local elites who make up the backbone of the party with a reason to mobilise along cleavages that cut across ethnic divisions in their own backyards. The PDP's control over individual constituencies via the recruitment of 'godfathers' and other ethnically-minded political entrepreneurs amounts to, as other authors have suggested, a 'garrison democracy', in which democratic institutions are maintained but subverted through the locally dominant party's control of the voting process and the purse strings of political resources (Figueroa & Sives, 2002; Omotola, 2009).

In comparative perspective, the story of the PDP in Nigeria offers an important corrective to many of the lessons drawn from research on institutional design and ethnic parties. In 'patronage democracies', like Nigeria, where wealth is primarily distributed according to political ties rooted in ethnic

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clientelist networks, solving problems of cross-ethnic cooperation at the level of party formation is a fundamentally different process from addressing the underlying causes of ethnic violence. As the Nigerian case suggests, careful attention to 'getting the party system right', with rules that provide incentives for MECs to form, may not change the underlying calculus of mobilisational demands along ethnic lines within constituencies. Research based on India especially, which has played a disproportionately large role in recent discussions of ethnic parties (see Chandra, 2004, 2005), has perhaps overstated the ease with which cross-cutting cleavages are activated by MECs, or even the desirability to many MECs of so doing. Catch-all institutional designs that both create incentives for cross-ethnic elite cooperation (centripetal) and ensure the distribution of political resources along identity group lines (consociational) do little to remove incentives for ethnic politics if elites can find some way (formal or informal) to secure their pan-ethnic bargains. Coalitions built on elite incorporation, rather than on mass support, offer little hope for effective government action to end ethnic violence. For those concerned with crafting democratic institutions in ethnically divided societies, Nigeria suggests that a greater focus on the micro-dynamics of political mobilisation in individual constituencies is a necessary next step in addressing the durability of ethnic politics.

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Notes

1. Horowitz's *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (2001), for instance, never takes up the issue of a connection between ethnic riots and institutions designed to reduce ethnic conflict in government. I am inclined to believe that this is less a result of some sharp ontological difference between ethnic violence –caused, as they may be, by the machinations of elites (Brass, 1997) – and ethnic conflict in politics, but rather because it seems obvious to Horowitz and others that measures designed to address ethnic outbidding and competition will also work indirectly to reduce ethnic violence.
2. Advantages for voters are less clear. Minorities are more likely to get a candidate that is not openly hostile. But if preferential voting succeeds in moderating ethnic messages without modifying the networks through which citizens receive the payoffs of government (clientelist networks, rather than standardised public good provision), they have actually lost a means of identifying the best possible candidate in a low-information environment (ethnicity).

3. For an exception that provides some sense of the specific dynamics of cross-ethnic cooperation within MEC parties (see Bogaards, 2003: 65).
4. Roughly US$6 billion. Statistics obtained from the Federal Ministry of Finance, http://www.fmf.gov.ng/downloads/faacsummary2008.pdf (accessed 6 April 2009).
5. Other parties have increasingly adopted a similar strategy, but have fewer resources to award.

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