

Proliferation as a Manifestation of Ideological Deficiency: An Assessment of Political Parties in Nigeria

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Abstract

In terms of party politics, Nigeria offers an interesting case study following the rate at which parties evolve on its political scene since independence in 1960. This study examined the relationship between the proliferation of political parties and the absence of ideological inclinations in Nigeria. Data was obtained from secondary sources comprising-books, journals, periodicals, magazines, newspapers, the internet, etc. The Textual Case Study Approach was employed as the mode of analysis while leveraging on the theory of Dialectical Materialism (Marx, 1859) as the theoretical framework. Results showed that the rate of party proliferation in Nigeria was orchestrated by ideological bankruptcy. The paper therefore, suggested that parties should be forced to identify with a particular ideological stance to qualify for registration.

Keywords: *Proliferation, Ideology, Political party, Bankruptcy, Registration.*

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Background to the Study

Democracy and democratic societies are unthinkable in the absence of political parties. It is in this light that many scholars view political parties as “makers” of democracy. Thus,

apart from performing functions which are government-related like making government accountable and exercising control over government administration; and electorate-related functions such as political representation, expression of people's demand through interest articulation and aggregation as well as structuring of electoral choices, they also provide linkage-related functions, playing an intermediary and mediatory role between the government and the electorate (Moore, 2002; Lapalombara and Anderson, 2001; Simon, 1962).

In this vein, Saliu and Omotola (2006) believe that, “the level of political institutionalization of political parties and their institutional strengths are directly correlated to their ability to discharge their ascribed responsibilities, and by extension, the strengths of democracy”. It is believed that, “when well institutionalized, political parties can serve as a set of mediation institutions through differences in ideas, interests and perception of political problems which at a given time can be managed” (Olagunju, 2000; Omotola, 2005a). When however, the reverse is the case, the democracy project and the general system stand the risk of perversion and eventual breakdown. It needs be underscored that the issue of political ideology is one that constitutes the very hub around which the success or failure of political parties revolve. Ideology is so crucial that it is argued that:

Ideology, being the durable convictions held in common by party members in respect to the most desirable form, institutions, spirit and course of action of the state, determines the natural attitude of a party towards every public questions (Iyare, 2004:81)

On the basis of the foregoing statement, it may be easy to agree with the conclusion by Nnoli (2003:177-82) that:

Ideology is a very crucial aspect of politics, not only by serving as a cognitive structure for looking at society, generally and providing a prescriptive formula, that is, a guide to individual action and judgment, but also as a powerful instrument of conflict management, self-identification, popular mobilization and legitimization.

It may, therefore, be correct to assert that the first and most important vehicle of a political party under an ideal situation, should be its ideological stance. It has been observed that, “although political party had turned to be useful for a variety of tasks that require control or communication, it was first invented for more limited and self-serving purposes” (Shively, 1997:2000). This observation aptly captures the Nigerian reality. Such reality becomes clearer to younger Nigerians on recalling the role of the Clifford Constitution which on inception precisely on 24 June, 1923, introduced the elective principle which stimulated the formation of political parties in the country. Ever since, such parties have increased in size and numbers particularly with the return to multi-party democracy in 1999 following the transition,

inauguration and which was successfully completed by General Abdulsalam Abubakar. Initially, three political parties were on ground – Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the All Peoples Party (APP) and later, All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), and the Alliance for Democracy (AD) were registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). “By December 2002, the number of registered parties rose to thirty (30) while additional three (3) were registered in January/February 2006” (Sambine, 2005; Onu and Momoh, 2005). Currently, in a report published by the Punch Newspapers, the Chief Technical Adviser to the INEC Chairman, Bolade Eyinla, representing the commission, made a statement during his address at the event titled, “The Dynamics of Managing Political Parties Professionally”, said, “there are 68 political parties registered and over 100 political associations seeking registration, which means that the number might increase before the 2019 elections”.

Statement of the Research Problem

Nigeria operates a multi-party system. This system has the potentials of enhancing democracy in any given society. This is just a one-sided view as it is also known that such a system could also be counter-production where all other factors have not been given due considerations as the INEC chief had lamented. The commission through its spokesman, has already given the hint that such a development could cause logistical problems including the production of ballot papers, monitoring the congresses, conventions and primaries of all parties contesting over 1,000 elective positions each across the country. The party chief also revealed that if 68 parties participated in the elections, it could also mean that a total of 68 party agents would be at each polling unit which could cause the elections to be rowdy. Thus, since party proliferation could hold out adverse implications for a developing country like Nigeria, it is necessary to find out ways of circumventing the challenge. This raises the issue of whether the proliferation of political parties in Nigeria would have arisen if parties wove their political agenda and modus operandi around manifestos that are ideologically based. Hence, this study seeks to evaluate the extent to which the proliferation of political parties in Nigeria are related to ideological deficiency on the part of these parties.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to evaluate the relationship between the proliferation of political parties and the lack of ideology among the Nigerian political parties. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- (1) Ascertain effect of ideological deficiency on the number of political party formations in Nigeria.
- (2) Examine the influence of the lack of ideology on the activities of political parties in Nigeria.

Research Questions

Two research questions will be addressed in this study. These include:

1. What is the effect of ideological deficiency on the number of political parties in Nigeria?
2. To what extent does the lack of ideology influence the activities of political parties in Nigeria?

Literature Review

Conceptual Clarification

Political Party: A political party may be defined as an organized and presumably durable association, either of individuals or of distinguishable groups of individuals, which endeavors to place its members in governmental offices for the purpose of bringing about the adoption of favoured political policies or programs. One feature that distinguishes political parties from all other associations is the substantial interest in public affairs and their effort to secure the election or appointment of their own personnel to the public positions through which the policies of government are prescribed for implementation. Ukpabi (2010) believes that, “a political party is defined as an organized group of people with at least roughly similar political aims and opinions that seek to influence public policy by getting its candidates elected to public office”. According to Schumpeter (1961:27a), “the first and foremost aim of each political party is to prevail over others in order to get into power or stay in it”. In the views of Agbaje (199) “a political party is a set of leaders who try to organize and control the legislative and executive branches of government”.

Party Proliferation: The British and World English dictionary defines proliferation as “a rapid increase in the number or amount of something” it cites examples of cell proliferation, nuclear proliferation, proliferation of sources of finance, etc. Thus, party proliferation is associated with a rapid increase in number of political parties. Indian democracy provides a good example. This is a country where the first twenty years of its democratic life came to be viewed as a state dominated by a single party. The Congress Party remained the nation's most electorally successful party at both the state and national levels. Its stature as the face of the freedom movement, its relatively well-developed organizational structure, and the pre-eminence of its leadership resulted in the dominance of the party. During an initial twenty-year phase, the Congress Party's control over national and state governments was not strongly challenged. The party actively utilized the strategy of co-opting different movements.

By 1967, the aforementioned factors began to fade away and for the first time, the congress lost elections to opposition parties across many states. This triggered the split into new political parties in India. Chhibber and Kollman (2004) argue that, “the powers granted to the state in the Indian Federal System resulted in both higher levels of party competition over resources at the sub-national or state level and the appearance of new regional parties”. Chandra (2004) has proposed that, “the lack of internal democracy in the political parties of India blocks the progress of ambitious politicians, resulting in their exit from the political. They either join other political parties or form their own political parties.

Democracy: Kekic (2007) asserts that “there is no consensus on how to measure democracy; definitions of democracy are contested and there is an ongoing debate on the subject matter”.

However, Sodaro (2004), posits that,

The essential idea of democracy is that the people have the right to determine who governs them. In most cases they elect the principal governing officials and hold them accountable for their actions. Democracies also impose legal limits on the government's authority by guaranteeing certain rights and freedoms to their citizens.

In addition, Sodaro (2004) introduced further conceptual aspects of the “four faces of democracy” as, popular sovereignty, rights and liberties, democratic values, and economic democracy. Butilmann (2008) identifies the following key concepts of democracy as: “equality; freedom; and control”. Interestingly, for purposes of modern politics and referencing, the so-called “Gettysburg Address” of the U.S. President Abraham Lincoln (November 19, 1863) coined democracy as a “government of the people, by the people, for the people”.

Party ideology / Ideological deficiency: An ideology is a collection of normative beliefs and values an individual or group hold for other than purely epistemic reasons. The term is especially used to describe a system of ideas and ideals which forms the basis of economic or political theory and policy (Oxford Dictionary). In political science, it is used to refer to political belief systems. “Ideology in political parties has frequently been depicted in negative terms, portrayed as 'outdate’” (Blair, 1996b), dogmatic and concerned with the 'past'. Whilst originally coined by Antonie Destut de Tracy to connote science of ideas (1817), the concept has mutated, producing alternative meanings from Marxist notions of false consciousness (Engels and Marx, 1995). Following Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony, ideological actors strive to achieve moral, intellectual and political leadership through the expansion through the expansion of a discourse that partially fixes meaning around nodal points. Hegemony involves more than a passive conscious and more than legitimate actions. It involves the expansion of a particular discourse of norms, values, views and perceptions through persuasive re-descriptions of the world. In this sense, an ideological actor attempts to exert (for example over a public audience) by articulating and entrenching certain perspectives of the world. “When conceived in this way, ideologies' ultimate aim is to obtain the status of a discourse whereby a set of ideas become so entrenched that contestation dissolves, creating total dominance of one perspective” (Mounffe, 2000).

Empirical Review

This study reviews past and current works on the subject matter by researchers in a tabular form as follows:

Table 1: Past and Current Works by Researchers on Party Proliferation

| Surname of Researcher(s) Title of study and time frame of study | Geographical content covered and scope | Data sources & analytical tools | Findings/recommendations/conclusions |
|---|---|--|---|
| Badejo and Obah-Akpowoghaha (2015) The impact of Cross-carpeting and multiplicity of political parties in Nigerian democratic process | Nigeria: Cross-carpeting and multiplicity of political parties decampment | Primary data was employed in the study while data analysis was by basic statistical tools. | The findings include: Nigerian politicians lack democratic values, credentials and the political system is awash with professional politicians and “entrepreneurs who lack modern political ideology and issue-driven politics. |
| Nwangwu&Ononogbu (2014). The pursuit of material interest and proliferation of political parties in Nigeria, 1999-2013 | Nigeria: The key variables of the study include- material interest, political parties, proliferation and ideology. | The study made use of secondary data. It also employed the Marxist Political Economy Paradigm for the analysis | Some of its findings include: that the burgeoning of political parties has not translated to competitive political constestation; democratic development, poverty reduction. |
| Olanrewaju& Shola (2015). Political Parties and poverty of ideology in Nigeria | Nigeria Political parties and ideological poverty. The key variables in the study are political parties and political ideology. | Secondary data was employed in the study while content analysis was the mode of analysis | It found that most parties that broke up did not do so as a result of ideological differences. It concluded that the parties are not in competition with each other as they are not driven by any ideological disposition. |

Theoretical Framework

Marx's (1859) Preface on Dialectical Materialism

This study leverages on the Cohen's account of Marxism on its approach to political economy. The account is very closely based on Marx's 1959 'preface' which states as follows in part:

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which corresponds to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces.

The sum total of these relations of production constitute the economic structure of society, the real basis on which arises a legal and political superstructure, and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life processes in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.

Marxism is a method of socio economic analysis which originated from the works of 19th century German Philosophers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

Research Methodology

This study is a qualitative research in which data obtained from secondary materials are analyzed using the Textual Case Study Approach in conjunction with the basic tenets of the principle of dialectical materialism by Marx (1959),--- Preface on Dialectical Materialism. In this vein, the two research questions are analyzed in the order of:

Research Question One (1): What is the effect of ideological deficiency on the number of political parties in Nigeria?

A study by Shola (2009) argues that,

despite all pretences to the contrary through their manifestoes, as much of the superficial classifications as the “left” and “right”, “progressive” and “conservative”, Nigerian parties seem to be benefit of clear ideological commitments: This conclusion is predicated upon the relegation of politics of issues to the background across the various republics, and in its place, the ascendancy of identity and money politics.

Bratton and Van de Walle (1992; 1997); Sorensen (1993) observed that,

although the decade of 1990s witnessed the massive spread of what Huntington (1991) referred to as the “third wave” of democratization of Africa, including Nigeria, leading to an unprecedented resurgence of multiparty politics, there is no controversy about the fact that the mere adoption of party pluralism will not automatically advance the case of democracy without the institutionalization of certain institutional parameters to promote and sustain due process in theory and practice.

In an incisive piece on “Political Party Convention”, David and Strickler (1996), argued that, 'ideology functions as planks’, that is, single issue statements within the platform, the exact ideological orientation of which is often used as a bargaining chip in seeking party unity. This makes ideology as the very first instrument upon which the political party is built. It is for this reason that Nnoli (2003) concluded that,

ideology is a very crucial aspect of politics, not only by serving as a cognitive structure for looking at society generally and providing a prescriptive formula, that is, a guide to individual action and judgment, but also as a powerful instrument of conflict management, self-identification, popular mobilization and legitimization.

The absence of ideology due to the shallowness of democratic roots in developing countries like Nigeria, have given opportunity for other forces of identify to occupy its position. It is therefore, common to observe the strong influence of forces like ethnicity and religion on Nigerian political parties. Other factors which have relegated ideology to the background include; the rising magnitude of political vagrancy on the basis of selfish and parochial interests, the high level of party indiscipline, absence/weakness of party cohesion and internal democracy, and the high mortality and turnover of party leadership.

Research Question Two (2): To what extent does the lack of ideology affect the activities of political parties in Nigeria?

A study Adekeye (2017), on party primaries, candidate selection and intra-party conflict in Nigeria found that while institutional structures have been enacted to avert conflicts within

the party, non-adherence to the dictates of such structures have birthed a wide range of internal conflicts within the party, thus resulting to cases of defection, fractionalization, proliferation of political parties, unconstitutional change of party leaders and most importantly, the defeat of the PDP in 2015 general elections. The implication is that the defeat of the Peoples' Democratic Party in the 2015 General elections was as a result of indiscipline and unwholesome activities of the members of the party. Although this may not be peculiar to the party, it constitutes a good example of the performance and internal crisis which typify the functionality of political parties in Nigeria. Most of the issues were because of the lack of ideology which Marx (1859) in his "Preface on Dialectical Materialism" explained that selfish individual interests determine the behavior of such individuals in the party. Thus, ideological poverty precipitated the defeat of the PDP and the poor showing of political parties in the 2015 general elections. This is to state that indiscipline and lack of coherence, proper management and poor organization which are all subsumed in the lack of ideological inclination, led to the eventual crisis and defeat of the Peoples' Democratic Party in the 2015 general elections.

From whatever perspective one may be looking at it, the reality of political life across political systems, developed or developing is the fact of multiple political options from which inevitably, choices must be made. At such critical crossroads, ideology provides a ready guide for appropriate action. This is why it makes sense to highlight the statement by a former information minister and PDP stalwart, Professor Jerry Gana. In his seeming self indictment, he observed that,

in terms of cohesion and firm ideological leaning, there is a problem but PDP will be transformed, PDP will be strong, strengthened ideologically, more organized; PDP will be in power for 30 years (quoted in Iyare, 2014)

This is a clear attestation to ideological deficiency of the PDP as a political party and also points to the weakening of the party due to such deficiency.

Findings

This investigation led to a number of findings which include:

1. The Peoples' Democratic Party in Nigeria lost the 2015 general elections as a result of ideological deficiency. This deficiency made the party unable to rise to the level of discipline that would have stemmed the state of defections and other crises experienced by the party.
2. It was the lack of ideology that precipitated and made it too difficult to manage the numerous challenges that faced the party just before the elections.
3. The decade of 1990s witnessed the massive spread of what Huntington (1991) referred to as the "third wave" of democratization across Africa including Nigeria. Such "third wave" phenomenon led to the adoption of party pluralism.
4. "The third wave" phrase has been widely used by scholars to outline the significance of the global trend that has seen more than 60 countries throughout Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa undergo some of democratic transitions since Portugal's "Carnation Revolution" in 1974. This trend is of particular significance to developing

nations like Nigeria where dictatorial regimes are fast giving way to popularly elected democracies which characterize modern democracy. Thus, in Nigeria, military regimes have become unpopular as transition currently follows from one civilian regime to the other.

5. Party pluralism does not automatically advance the course of democracy without the institutionalization of certain institutional parameters to promote and sustain due process in theory and practice.
6. Ideology should constitute the first instrument upon which the political party is built: its absence makes the political party very unstable as is the case in Nigeria.

Conclusion

In discussing the effect of ideology on party proliferation in Nigeria, this paper found a relevant and strong support in the argument by David and Strickler (1996) that, “ideology functions as planks”. This underscores the fact that “ideology” is the basis for the conceptualization of political parties as a vital instrument of democracy. In this descriptive qualitative assessment of the significance of ideology in the proliferation of political parties in Nigeria, very interesting revelations were unearthed to the effect that political parties in Nigeria are rocked by ideological poverty which constitutes the root of all political crises, governance and the overall performance of democracy in this country. It is also revealing to observe that the lack of political ideology in Nigeria is the root cause of defections, indiscipline, the pursuit of individual selfish interests, and even the defeat of the ruling party at the last 2015 general elections. Thus, ideology determines to a great extent, the performance, achievements successes, and failures of political parties and the entire democracy in any society. It stands to reason, therefore, that the measure of democracy attained by any nation is best ascertained vis-à-vis the level of maturity exhibited by its political parties.

Suggestions

Going by the findings in this study, the following suggestions are hereby made:

1. Nigerian political parties should go back to the drawing boards and begin to align with clear-cut ideologies to ensure meaningful and purposeful identity and politicking.
2. Electoral bodies in Nigeria must ensure that parties can easily be identified with specific ideologies before registration.
3. The experiences of the ruling Peoples' Democratic Party during the 2015 general elections should serve as a lesson for political parties; thus underscoring the strong positive relation between ideology and achievements (Political Parties).

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