

THE PURSUIT OF MATERIAL INTEREST AND PROLIFERATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN NIGERIA, 1999–2013

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ABSTRACT: *Ideology constitutes a roadmap for the operations of viable political parties in a democratic society. It is the most outstanding yardstick for differentiating amongst political parties in a multi-party democracy. The enthronement of civilian rule in May 1999 heralded the proliferation of political parties which are either ideologically sterile or indistinguishable in Nigeria. This tendency is often associated with the urge to widen the political space for democratic opportunities and development. Nonetheless, this paper argued that the multiplication of such parties in Nigeria is essentially driven by insatiable pursuit of private material interest of their members. Thus, anchoring analysis within the paradigmatic orientation of the Marxist Political Economy, the paper examined the role of private material interest on the proliferation of non-ideology-based political parties in the country. Amongst other things, the paper recommended that the formation of parties and political contestations should be defined purely by political ideology.*

KEYWORDS: Political Parties, Political Ideology, Material Interest, Marxist Political Economy

INTRODUCTION

The third wave of democratization for political reform that spread across Africa and other less developed economies of the world between the late 1980s and mid-1990s culminated in the restoration of electoral pluralism in most countries of the continent. This development partly heralded the enthronement of multi-party democracy in Nigeria on May 29, 1999. Correspondingly, the political arena became proliferated with political parties which are largely characterized by ideological sterility or homogeneity. Today, Nigeria has well over fifty of such political parties dully registered. This tendency presupposes the opening up of the political space for democratic opportunities and development. Contrary to this well established conclusion, this paper argues that the proliferation of ideologically vacuous political parties is motivated essentially by unbridled pursuit of private material interest.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union with its attendant socialist (communist) movements in 1989 is often misconstrued as the end of history or more aptly the end of ideology. Consequently, ideology as an essential ingredient of viable political parties and the fundamental basis for socio-political mobilization has been de-emphasized. For instance, Usman (2013:48) posits that an ideologically-driven movement is not relevant to Nigerians because globally the ideological parties that pundits long for are no longer tenable in our present uni-polar...world. Arguing further, she notes that:

when those class-based political parties existed decades ago, the bipolar world had two superpowers representing rival systems of political and economic organisation–

the American-led capitalist West and the Soviet-led socialist East. Countries and their constituent political parties, academics and civil society organisations strongly defined themselves on the basis of either of such doctrines... Presently, the exigencies of the global environment and Nigeria's present realities have rendered such ideological movements...untenable. First, the global dominance of capitalism as the preferred system of economic organisation, means most of the world's countries have adopted some variant of capitalism— whether the America's free market capitalism, China's state-led capitalism or Nigeria's crony capitalism. Secondly, any movement that employs the rhetoric of a "proletariat revolution", promising the usurpation of the "bourgeois hegemony" to appeal to the Nigerian masses...will find itself left in the cold, dry winds of the harmattan.

However, it is pertinent to note that ideology is not exclusively limited to the major *-isms* of the world. Even political parties on the same locus in the ideological spectrum may have different programmes and policies of achieving basically the same socio-economic objective as it is the case with the Conservative and Liberal Parties in the United Kingdom. By the same token, the strategic goals of the Republicans and Democrats in the United States (US) are fundamentally the same on several issues of national interest as both are right-wing political parties. But, their policy approaches are often different. Thus, under the capitalist (market economy) system, political parties have clearly defined ideological dispositions as in most countries of the world. If the Democrats or Republicans in the US come to power for instance, one can almost predict their general orientation towards the role of government on taxation, public investment, social spending, welfare, individual versus collective responsibility, etc. Thus, when a country has determined *a priori*, the course of its development, parties can share similar ideological orientations; it is the strategies for fulfilling these that will differentiate the various parties from each other.

Political parties do not grow in an ideological vacuum. A party that is bereft of consistent ideological predisposition is analogous to an individual who does not believe in anything. Political parties in Nigeria since 1999 have functioned purely as platforms to grab power, and not as agents of national socio-economic transformation. They are a patchwork of unholy alliances, hurriedly put together to grab power and ease the military junta out. According to Dr. Bamanga Tukur, the then national chairman of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), as cited in Soludo (2013:64), the PDP is an amalgam of diverse groups united only by one purpose— to grab power— but has not yet fused into a functional political party for development. This is the same story for other parties. Thus, Soludo opines rather jocularly that:

if you take five governors of either PDP or ACN and lock them in a room, bring them out one by one to address a live TV programme on what their respective party's manifesto and cardinal programmes are, as well as HOW their party intends to fund/implement such programmes, you would have the comic relief of the decade (Soludo, 2013:64).

Essentially, it is because the ideology of development counts for nothing in Nigerian politics since 1999 that the vacuum so created is now filled with ethno-religious identities. Instead of mobilising the people around issues of development on horizontal basis, the elite are busy manipulating the people vertically using regional, ethnic and religious prejudices. Thus, the parties are characterized by programmatic barrenness which invariably inhibits their development. However, it is pertinent to note that the prominence of ethno-religious

considerations rather than clear and well-articulated ideologies as forces of identity and socio-political mobilization are not exclusive to Nigeria's politics. Mainstream Western European political parties are also drifting closer to these social categories. For instance, the Social Democrats and Christian Democrats in Germany are increasingly based on ethnicity and religion (Basque, Catalan, Corsican; Protestant, Catholic). While this tendency in advanced democracies, particularly the examples highlighted above, may be unhealthy, the real identities of the parties are well-known. They are never concealed to deceive anybody. This is not the case with Nigeria's political parties. The problem here is that parties pretend to be what they are not, thereby creating some form of electoral and democratic confusion in society (Omotola, 2010:142). This problem is most acute in terms of structuring the voter's choice, but could not have been different in the face of political uncertainty.

In Nigeria, for instance, an ideologically inclined political party is one that is concerned with **how** to address the issues that pertain to the security and welfare of the people. The strategic approaches of such parties are different one to another on **how** to address critical national questions such as fiscal federalism, revenue generation and allocation, state creation, citizenship question (indigene/settler dichotomy), national security (mitigation of kidnapping, militancy and terrorism), state police, environmental protection, economic diversification, (creation of a sustainable new Nigerian economy without oil over a specified period of time), industrialization, electricity generation, distribution and transmission, fiscal policy, poverty eradication, job creation, access to quality education and efficient healthcare services, affordable housing policy, foreign policy, etc. These are veritable ideological issues which constitute the basis of political mobilization in saner societies rather than primordial identities like ethnicity and religion. Unfortunately in Nigeria, manifestoes are still limited to 'what' will be done, and not 'how' the party intends to implement its programmes (Okoosi-Simbine, 2005:22).

Although political parties in Nigeria have their manifestoes from which their ideological leanings could be gleaned, such manifestoes have often proved to be insufficient in reality on several grounds. For one, there are usually few differences in the manifestoes of most political parties, thereby making it difficult to differentiate amongst them ideologically. This is particularly the case with parties since the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999. Similarly, the form and character of political contestations in Nigeria, usually informed by the nature and character of the state, gives little or no consideration to ideological dispositions. Instead, forces of primordial identities assume prominence. Consequently, it is not surprising that when one party captures power, it tends to govern on the basis of the whims of the power holder, not so much by party manifestoes. Invariably, this would lead to the enthronement of personality cult as was the case in the PDP, especially between 2003 and 2007 when President Olusegun Obasanjo elevated himself to the status of a demi-god.

As noted earlier, the proliferation of political parties in Nigeria since the return to civil rule in 1999 presupposes the opening up of the political space for democratic opportunities and development. However, the opportunities associated with such openings are yet to be positively exploited for the political development of the country. This tendency is not unconnected to the prevailing poverty of ideology which has become an unfortunate but inseparable characterization of Nigeria's political system. This is in turn implicated in the vexatious and ignominious pattern of political vagrancy in Nigeria's party politics. While political vagrancy is not inherently bad, it becomes a liability when the shift is not based on sound ethical and philosophical considerations. In such situation, it confuses political

followership, constricts development, if not completely destabilizes the political process (Okoosi-Simbine as quoted in Omotola, 2010:142). In the same vein, it has led to the proliferation of weak and unviable parties, party indiscipline, lack of internal democracy, absence of party cohesion, high mortality and turnover of party leadership and deficiency of political development in the country.

This paper, therefore, argues that the *raison d'être* for the proliferation of ideologically empty political parties in Nigeria can be hinged on the insatiable quest for private material interest by the politicians. Thus, the fundamental objective of the paper is to establish the role of this interest in the proliferation of non-ideology-based political parties in Nigeria. The paper is divided into the following: introduction, theoretical perspective, ideological contradiction of Nigerian political parties in historical perspective, the role of private material interest in the proliferation of non-ideology-based political parties in Nigeria and conclusion.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

In analyzing the role of private material interest on the proliferation of ideologically vacuous political parties in Nigeria, the paper employs the Marxist Political Economy paradigm. This paradigmatic orientation arises as a counterpoise to the dominant bourgeois political economy which was expounded and popularized by Adam Smith and David Ricardo in the 18th century. This paradigmatic prism is propounded in Marx (1984), Marx (1967) and Marx (1977) but extrapolated and expanded in Ake (1981), Nikitin (1983), Ihovbere (1985), Akpuru-Aja (1998), amongst others.

The political economy approach is essentially based on dialectical materialism. As propounded by Karl Marx, the theory of dialectical materialism places primacy on material or economic conditions of society. It is premised on the belief that man is principally motivated by economic needs. Labour is the essence of material existence, hence, economic activity is man's primary concern. According to Akpuru-Aja (1998:16), the thrust of this perspective is that the understanding of a society's politics and culture depends primarily on the understanding of its economic structure as defined by the relations between employers of labour and the working class in the process of production. To Marx, every political system corresponds to and reflects its kind of economic structure. Thus, in his *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx (1984) places premium on the sub-structural component of the economy (otherwise called the base or foundation) which plays a determinant role on its super-structural counterparts like politics, ideology and culture of society. Accordingly, he asserts that:

neither legal relations nor political forms could be comprehended whether by themselves or on the basis of a so-called general development of the human mind, but that on the contrary, they originate in the material conditions of life...in the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, 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 general process of social, political and intellectual life (Marx, 1984:20-21).

Thus, from the substructure, one easily understands the nature of internal relations, how a society organizes, manages and reproduces itself, the causes of tension, conflicts or contradictions in any given society as well as the direction of social change. Marx holds that the primary cause of tension and other social dislocation in a society is economic factor. He first employed the political economy approach for analyzing and justifying the root causes of conflicts and contradictions in human societies. Corroborating the above argument, Akpuru-Aja (1998:17) asserts that if one understands the economic structure of a society, the relations between the people in production process, it is easier to understand the nature of politics, culture, national security, socio-psychological consciousness, ideological inclinations, etc.

In relation to the study, it is noteworthy that the inordinate struggle to win and control state power and use same for personal economic advantage or self-aggrandizement of the politicians account for the uninhibited multiplication of ideologically barren political parties in Nigeria, especially since the return to civil rule in 1999. This unpalatable development which has generated undue political instability in the country is expressly traceable to the prevailing socio-economic conditions particularly poverty. In other words, the scenario is not unexpected in a country where over 68% of the population live below the international poverty line of US\$1.25 per day, total adult literacy rate is 61%, while access to water is next to nil and people die from preventable diseases (cf. World Bank, 2010; http://www.unicef.org/infocountry/nigeria_statistics). Public morality has remained an issue of sheer pedagogical exercise rather than of positive action. In a situation of abject poverty and deficit of clear moral values, it becomes easier for politicians to form political parties that are bereft of any clear ideological commitments. The myriads of political parties in the country have not strengthened our democracy but in effect, they have weakened the real opposition party that could bring countervailing balance and transparency in the governance of the country. Thus, the mushrooming of parties that are bereft of clear ideological orientation has enthroned a regime of money-bag-politics and ethno-religious identities as the fundamental basis of political mobilization of the electorate during elections. In the absence of clear-cut developmental ideology, parties are formed or merged purely for personal material gains. In the prevailing poverty of ideology, these parties thrive in whipping up ethno-religious sentiments as strategies to mobilize support during electioneering.

The present generation of political parties puts little or no premium on ideological orientation. Very few, if any, concern themselves with ideals and values. The general concern is narrow personal and primordial interests. Politics is seen as the surest and quickest route to personal wealth. Pragmatism is treasured over idealism and shrewd calculations of personal material profits and losses over the stimulation of ideology and rewards to society. Few political actors are prepared to risk isolation and exclusion from the patronage of a winning party. The subordination of ideological principles to individual material goals has leeched negative values into the body-politick. A highly amoral and opportunistic social order in which end is glorified above means, and unearned wealth above labour now reigns. The nation has degenerated to a society of mercenaries and diamond-diggers. The negative values of the wider civil society mirror the astronomical rise of electoral irregularities, switches of party allegiances, corruption and cynical disregard for rule of law in the polity while democracy has degenerated into plutocracy and kleptocracy (Chukwumerije, 2009).

Ideological Contradiction of Nigeria's Political Parties in Historical Perspective

Political ideology is an indispensable element of politics. It serves as a major instrument of power, especially in the determination of the mode of acquisition, use and consolidation of state power. It is indeed the political life-line for the animation of politics. It acts as a map for the practice and interpretation of politics because of its capacity to guide, support, restrain and rationalize political action. In other words, it is a great mobilizing energy for galvanizing mass political action. It is so pervasive in politics that there can be no meaningful political action without it. As a systematized and interconnected set of ideas about the socio-economic and political organization of society, ideology contains ideals, ends and purposes that society should pursue. Accordingly, Nnoli (2003:178) notes that:

ideology usually consists of a philosophy that explains the nature of humanity, an economic program that suggests the appropriate mode of production and distribution, and the appropriate political structure for the pursuit, through the relevant economic program, of the ideals of humanity.

The role of political parties in the existence, survival and consolidation of democracy in modern societies cannot be over-stressed. As 'makers' of democracy, political parties have been so romanticized that some scholars have claimed that neither democracy nor democratic societies are thinkable without them (Omotola, 2009:613). Sadly, this all-important institution of democracy is increasingly becoming synonymous with ideological sterility in Nigeria. Although political party had turned to be useful as one of the desiderata for democratic consolidation, it was first invented for more limited and self-serving purposes. This observation aptly captures the Nigerian reality. At its inception on 24th June 1923 following the introduction of elective principle by the Clifford Constitution, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) had very limited and self-serving objectives— buying legitimacy for the colonial government through very limited franchise that was restricted to Lagos and Calabar. Accordingly, Richard Sklar in his *Nigerian Political Parties* demonstrates articulately how the emergence of political associations such as the People's Union was only in response to the prevailing realities of colonial administration (Sklar, 1963). Little wonder, the activities of NNDP were restricted to contesting elections into the Lagos City Council.

Historically, Nigerian political parties are not entirely associated with ideological emptiness. Political historians and analysts significantly agree that what separates most of the First and Second Republic political parties from their present-day counterparts is that the former strove to pattern their politicking along unambiguous ideological lines. Under the colonial regime, they were essentially driven by a commitment to the nationalist struggle against colonialism, though in varying degrees of intensity. In the First Republic, politics and political parties were largely developmental. The regional governments and the political parties that controlled them were concerned mostly about wealth creation because that was the only way they could derive their revenue and survive. For instance, the ideology of the Action Group (AG) under Chief Obafemi Awolowo could be clearly gleaned from the premium it attached to education. This perhaps explains the high literacy rate the regions under the party had enjoyed hitherto. Similarly, the National Convention of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe was commonly associated with welfarism. Most importantly, the Mallam Aminu Kano-led Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) was unequivocally committed to the total emancipation of the downtrodden otherwise known as the "talakawas" in local parlance.

Similarly, the five political parties during the Second Republic— National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), Nigerian Peoples' Party (NPP), Great Nigerian Peoples' Party (GNPP), and People's Redemption Party (PRP)— had distinct ideologies and manifestoes. Most people knew the four cardinal programmes of the UPN. Once elected into office, every UPN-state implemented the free education and free medical care programme of the party. Even the NPN (widely believed to be a conservative party) had its key programmes summarised on its logo (a house, with two corns by the side (agriculture), and a crown (governance). The NPN-controlled Federal Government launched its green revolution, a national housing programme, and insisted that it would offer good governance. Similarly, the NPP's neo-welfarist ideology/manifesto was symbolised in its logo (the people). Each party also had its core intellectual ideologues and powerhouses. For instance, Dr. Chuba Okadigbo published a book on "The Mission of NPN". Chief Ebenezer Babatope and associates led the UPN's scientific socialism; while Chief Chris Offodile was the brain-box of PRP's democratic humanism, etc. (Soludo, 2013:64). In a corroborative sense, some scholars have argued that the NPP and GNPP appeared to be liberal in ideology with a strong belief in mixed economy; the NPN conservative with emphasis on free market system and respect for traditional institutions. The PRP, a leftist and most radical party had a populist, anti-neo-colonial agenda and advocates social revolution and income redistribution; and the UPN, the most disciplined, socialist/welfarist in orientation was based on the philosophy of free education and health care delivery (see, Ujo, 2000; and Osaghae, 1998 as cited in Omotola, 2009:623-624). Each political party contested the elections with a clear manifesto which was its contract with the people, and once elected, it sought to implement it to the letter. Every state controlled by a political party implemented the party's programmes to the letter. Nigerian political enthusiasts relished in the intellectual debates on the alternatives offered by different parties. Regular campus symposia involving high-ranking members of different political parties explaining and defending their party manifestoes were also held.

Nonetheless, the ideological ambiguity and contradiction of these political parties can be gleaned from the pattern of alignment between/among them. For example, the resolve of the two ideologically incompatible parties— NPC and NCNC— to enter into an alliance that formed the government during the First Republic attests to this. While the former was a right-wing party, the latter was more inclined to the left. Scholars have generally pointed out that the alliance was a "marriage of inconvenience", and would have been better between the AG and NCNC. Similarly, the NEPU was associated with ideological contradictions when it was compelled by survival necessity to align with the NPC-controlled Central Government in the First Republic. Because these alliances were not informed by a commitment to a belief system and principles underpinned by party ideology, they crumbled, sooner than expected, like a pack of cards. Later, the December 1964 Federal Parliamentary electioneering which spilled over into 1965 witnessed an alliance between the NCNC and AG, in conjunction with two minority northern allies, NEPU and the Joseph Tarka-led United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) to form the United Progressives Grand Alliance (UPGA). The NPC, on the other divide, mobilized the Akintola-led Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) and opposition political parties controlling ethnic minorities in the Mid-Western and Eastern Regions to form the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA). The UPGA presented itself as an alternative to northern and, more specifically, the Hausa-Fulani domination of the federal government. Sadly, the formation of UPGA as a strategic alliance was not motivated by genuine ideological orientation but purely to wrest power from the hegemonic NPC.

The aborted Third Republic witnessed a new experiment in party formation, when for the first time in the history of party politics in Nigeria, the government created and imposed two political parties on the political system. Ordinarily, the existence of two parties should represent two different ideological camps, as has been the case between the Labour and Conservative Parties in Britain and Democrats and Republican Parties in the USA. This was not the case with respect to the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC) in Nigeria. Although, while one was a little to the left and the other a little to the right, nothing much differentiates the parties, at least not in ideological dispositions (see, Jinadu, 1995; Oyediran & Agbaje, 1991; Adejumo, 1997). Accordingly, Yaqub notes *inter alia*:

the way incompatibility had been manifested in the two parties ... was not fundamentally due to serious ideological divisions (in any case, the manifestoes of the parties, despite phrase-mongering of "a little to the left", and "a little to the right", did not articulate much programme differences), but to assert, that even if we are to borrow Babangida's words, the "old lines of cleavages and primordial loyalties" once again simply asserted themselves (Yaqub, 2002:128).

Unfortunately, the quality of political discourse has further deteriorated since the previous republics. The return to civilian rule in 1999 heralded the proliferation of weak, unviable and regional political parties that are not ideologically driven. Given the obvious poverty of ideology that characterized the first three political parties— the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the All Peoples' Party (APP) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD)— of the Fourth Republic, it is not surprising that almost all the other parties that sprang up or broke away from them did not do so because of ideological disagreements. It was also not based on well-articulated alternative views of governance for sustainable democracy and development as a viable basis of popular mobilization to wrest power from the incumbent party. Rather, they were products of adversarial elite behaviour taken to the points of irreconcilability. Thus, these parties have no ideological stance on major national questions other than the transformation and manipulation of forces of identity particularly ethnicity and religion (cf. Okoosi-Simbine, 2005). The implication is that the so-called political parties are not in competition with one another. They are in factions; these factions are more in competition within themselves than with another party (Omoruyi as quoted in Omotola, 2009:626).

Lastly, this section shall be concluded with a brief analysis of the recently registered All Progressives Congress (APC). The APC, which was registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) on July 31, 2013 (by subsequently withdrawing the operating licenses of the merging parties), emerged from the ashes of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the All Nigerian Peoples' Party (ANPP), the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) and a faction of the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA). The collapse of these regional political parties into the APC is a reminiscence or reincarnation of the pattern of alliance during the 1999 Presidential Election. Nigeria went into the election with three political parties namely PDP, APP and AD. While the PDP maintained a semblance of mass party, the AD and APP had the colouration of caucus parties. In the Presidential Election, the APP and AD went into alliance to present a candidate, Chief Olu Falae, against the PDP which presented Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. While the APP transmuted into ANPP in search of national outlook, the AD changed into AC and later ACN. The CPC represents a faction that pulled out of the ANPP led by Muhammadu Buhari. Apart from Governor Rochas

Okorochoa's faction of APGA, the APC is but a reincarnation of the 1999 alliance between the defunct APP and AD.

From the ideological predisposition of the defunct political parties, it is noteworthy that the APC is an assemblage of political strange bedfellows. Accordingly, Nwodo (2013) observes that:

within its motley crew of political operatives, the APC has some truly uninspiring tendencies. The ANPP, for example, is a party that has historically used Islamo-populism to win votes in the North and revels in smearing the PDP as a Christian and therefore "anti-Islamic" party. A frequently unremarked point is that the terrorist group, Boko Haram emerged in ANPP-controlled states and can be justifiably labelled a mutant outgrowth of the party's Islamo-populist stance. The ACN...embodies a strain of ethno-nativism particular to the Southwest (although it is admittedly far less insular than the old AD). The CPC is essentially a personality cult built around Muhammadu Buhari while the APGA represents a brand of Igbo populist irredentism (Thisday, August 09, 2013).

The only pronounced ideological stance of the APC is that it prides itself as a progressive party. Progressivism relates to governments that take greater burdens off the citizens. The government bears more costs in promoting the welfare of citizens for better standards of living. Such government is usually construed as socialist in the common parlance. Presently, virtually every governor implements populist policies relating to free education, free primary healthcare, reduction of maternal and infant mortality, poverty alleviation through skill acquisition, youth and women empowerment, private sector participation, gender-based affirmative action, and a host of others. The APC which purportedly arises to liberate Nigerians from the stranglehold of PDP has had government in states controlled by their governors demolish houses without alternative arrangements to resettle the people. Apparently, they stand for liberty but enforce demolition of houses without compensation (Thisday, August 09, 2013). Furthermore, virtually all state governors construct or rehabilitate roads. For instance, in Akwa Ibom State controlled by PDP, several new roads have been constructed; same in Lagos State controlled by the APC. In Lagos, however, the expansion of Lekki/Epe Expressway culminated into the erection of toll gates where tolls are collected from road users, but in Akwa Ibom new roads were constructed and no toll collected. In the same vein, the cost of tertiary education in states that are controlled by the APC is not cheaper than those controlled by other political parties. A case in point is the Lagos State University where the school fees are far above one hundred thousand naira. Arising from the above instances, therefore, the progressive claim of the APC is a mere exercise in political sloganeering and thus pales into insignificance.

The Role of Private Material Interest in the Proliferation of Non-Ideology-Based Political Parties in Nigeria

In understanding what private interest denotes, it is important to begin with the understanding of the meaning of public or national interest. This will help us in conceptualizing private interest. Simply put, public interest refers to the common well-being or general welfare. It covers the whole range of subjects from sovereignty, unity and security of state to communal amity, economic stability and the standard of decency and morality (Mbah, 2014:682). This is central to policy debates, politics, democracy and the nature of government itself. In other words, public interests include factors such as ensuring the efficient and effective running of

public services and an interest in ensuring the administration of justice. In this sense, the public is a group of non-specific persons (Nigerians outside the government). They are persons that share an interest as they consider themselves as potential members of a non-specific group, abstracting from their particular position and private interest. This is related to J.J. Rousseau's concept of the General Will.

Thus, the contrasting view of public interest is private interest. In other words, it is plausible to argue that what is not public interest is private interest and private interest is motivated by a narrow and parochial concept of self-interest: wealth, fame and power. If there is conflict between public and private interests amongst government decision-makers, the public interest suffers. A country where public interest is dominant, both leaders and the citizenry work towards achieving the public interest which is their common objective. But when leaders pursue private interest, resources earmarked for public interest are diverted to private use (Mbah, 2014:682).

The pursuit of private material interest by many Nigerian politicians is largely implicated in the wanton multiplication of ideologically vacuous political parties in Nigeria, especially since 1999. The prevalence of this tendency in the body-politick was accentuated by the extant legal provisions. For instance, the conditions stipulated in the 1999 Constitution for the registration of political parties make it easier for more parties to spring up. Particularly, Section 222(6) of the Constitution states that the headquarters of all political parties must be situated in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. However, not many of the parties can boast of a functional secretariat in the FCT (after registration) as most of them have gradually fizzled out, while others merely exist in the register of the electoral commission. By the same token, prior to the expunction of Section 91 of the 2006 Electoral Act which made provision for political parties to receive annual grants from INEC, there was an unlimited formation of personal, family, regional, and of course, largely unviable and ideologically ambiguous parties. Section 91 (1) states that: Notwithstanding the provisions of this Act, the National Assembly may make an annual grant to the Commission for distribution to the registered political parties to assist them in their operation. Sub-section (2) of the Act further states that the Commission shall distribute such grants as follows: (a) 10% of the grant shall be shared equally among all the registered political parties; (b) the remaining 90% of the grant shall be shared among the registered political parties in proportion to the number of seats won by each party in the National Assembly. Following this unsolicited magnanimity from the government, coupled with the landmark Supreme Court ruling of 2002 in the case between Ganiyu Fawehinmi's National Conscience Party (NCP) and INEC, the doors were thus flung open for all manner of groups to spring up, seeking registration as political parties.

It is noteworthy that the main aim of this provision was to give equal opportunities and a level-playing field to all the registered political parties to participate in elections and for the parties to run their affairs. Nonetheless, this ideal intent of the Act has generated some unintended consequences, especially the surge in fringe and amorphous political parties. With most of the parties receiving annual grants of N6 million from INEC for the running of their party affairs, the *raison d'état* for their formation is easily discernible. According to the financial records of INEC, about N4.2billion was disbursed by the Commission to the various political parties between 1999 and 2009 (Agina, 2010). Consequently, infightings and intrigues amongst members of these parties for positions and offices so as to become the one controlling the subventions manifested in virtually all the parties. Nigerians witnessed the

emergence of mostly inconsequential parties that existed only for the purpose of sharing the largesse.

At the inception of this democratic dispensation in 1999, the registered political parties were PDP, APP and AD. By 2002, three more parties namely the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), the United Nigeria Peoples Party (UNPP) and the National Democratic Party (NDP) were registered by INEC, thereby bringing the total number of parties to six. But, a visit to INEC's website prior to the de-registration of some political parties as guaranteed by Section 78 (7) (ii) of the Electoral Act 2010, as amended, and the collapse of the ACN, ANPP and CPC into APC, showed that the total number of parties were 63. However, there are presently 25 political parties in INEC's register (<http://www.inecnigeria.org>, 14/02/2014).

During the April 2011 General Election, out of the 63 registered political parties, only 18 fielded presidential candidates and 23 fielded governorship candidates across the states of the federation. In all, 30 parties participated in the elections, while others did not field candidates at all. After the polls, only 10 parties won at least a seat as required by the provision of the Electoral Act 2010 as amended. They are the People's Democratic Party (PDP), Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), All Nigeria Peoples' Party (ANPP), Labour Party (LP), Progressive Peoples' Alliance (PPA), Peoples Party of Nigeria (PPN), All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), Accord (A), and Democratic Peoples' Party (DPP) (Avwode, 2012).

As a corollary, political parties are formed to offer alternative governance to the people. Hence, viable opposition parties are often referred to as government-in-the-waiting. However, prior to the 2011 General Elections, over forty of the registered political parties with less electoral value went to the Aso Villa to adopt President Goodluck Jonathan as their standard bearer (Okaforadi, 2013). Political parties do not exist for the sole purpose of endorsing and adopting candidates of other political parties as is presently the case. By so doing, it makes nonsense of the fundamental reason why political parties exist. This tendency heralded the practice of registering multifarious ideologically deficient political parties with the hope of negotiating with the incumbent political party at the presidential election. These weak parties which are appendages of the ruling PDP have become veritable instruments for the extension and consolidation of the perennial but unhealthy domination of the latter over the genuine opposition parties. Therefore, it follows that any political party that cannot participate in elections is not properly so called and thus, a mockery of democracy. At best it is a pressure group engaging in protest actions and advancing the private material interest of their leaders.

Furthermore, the role of private material interest in the proliferation of ideologically deficient political parties in Nigeria since 1999 has been partly accentuated by the resource curse argument. The purveyors of this school of thought argue that the existence of political parties as mere platforms for power-grabbing is driven by the easy money from oil which has created a culture of helpless dependence on manna from the Delta, and the consequent political economy based on sharing and consumption rather than baking the cake or wealth creation. Under such a system, production-oriented politics is an anathema. Accordingly, Soludo (2013:64) asserts that there are very few (if any) countries in the world where more than 50 per cent of government revenue comes from such natural resource rents as oil and the political parties and national politics are 'developmental' in terms of ideology and plans.

Significance of the Study

This study has both theoretical and practical significance to students and scholars with research interest in stasiology as well as public administrators and policy makers. At the theoretical level, the justification for the study lies in its ability to substantially fill a gap in the extant literature by contributing to the production and reproduction of knowledge in this area. Contrary to the widespread conclusion that the proliferation of parties, especially since 1999, is the effect of the urge to broaden the political space for democratic opportunities and development, the study holds that these parties are formed to advance the self-aggrandizement agenda of their principal founders.

On the other hand, the practical significance of the study rests in its ability to constitute a guide to policy-makers and administrators charged with the onerous responsibility of formulating and/or implementing policies aimed at strengthening our fledgling democracy. Similarly, the practical justification hinges on its capacity to re-orientate and re-awaken the consciousness of the key stakeholders like INEC, political parties, electorates and the general public to the fact that the formation of ideology-driven political parties remains a *sine qua non* for the full crystallization of our nascent democracy.

CONCLUSION

This paper analyzed the unenviable role of private material interest in the proliferation of non-ideology-based political parties in Nigeria. Contrary to the widespread argument that the multiplicity of parties, especially since 1999, is the effect of the urge to broaden the political space for democratic opportunities and development, findings reveal that these parties are formed to advance the self-aggrandizement agenda of their principal founders. Because the ideology of development counts for nothing in Nigerian politics since 1999, the ideological vacuum so created is now filled with primordial identities like ethnicity, regionalism, religion as well as money-bag-politics as instruments of political mobilization. Rather than mobilizing people around issues of development on horizontal basis, the elite are busy manipulating the people vertically using regional, ethnic and religious prejudices. Thus, the parties are characterized by programmatic barrenness which invariably inhibits their comprehensive development and democratic consolidation. Using the Marxist Political Economy Paradigm, the paper found that the burgeoning of political parties has not translated into competitive political contestation, democratic development and amelioration of poverty, ignorance and diseases in the country since 1999. Thus, the quest for the institutionalization of democracy has remained a wild goose chase.

Against this background, therefore, the paper recommends that the founding of political parties as well as political contestation should be based on unmistakable ideological orientation. In quality of governance, Chapter Two of the 1999 Constitution offers a rich mine of ideas to an ideologically inclined party. Such parties have the tendency of providing answers to the vexatious problems of one dominant party system, political vagrancy, party indiscipline, political instability, policy/programme discontinuity, etc. Invariably, this would help achieve internal cohesion and facilitate the championing of the course of democracy and democratization. Secondly, INEC should remain steadfast in exhuming the relevant sections of the Electoral Acts and the 1999 Constitution (as amended) in the regulation of political parties. This is because democracy without regulation breeds anarchy. In the same vein, party proliferation without control measures breeds one party system, which could be worse than military dictatorship. The argument that it is undemocratic to regulate the number of parties is

not too healthy, especially in the face of the growing need to moderate and mitigate their negative impact on the democratic process.

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