

## DEARTH OF POLITICAL IDEOLOGY VIS-À-VIS POLITICAL PARTIES IN NIGERIA: A PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATION

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### **Abstract**

Multi-party system is indispensable to democratic governance it provides alternatives when change in governance is desired. However, the choice of alternative political parties is based on the assessment of the prospects of the parties presented as manifestos. But when the political manifestoes of parties do not show any significant differences or lacks ideological underlying the exercise of the power of choice of alternatives is rendered ineffective. This paper is a philosophical appraisal of ideology as the underlying of political manifesto and underscores that absence of clear-cut ideology is the bane of political parties in Nigeria. It recommends a well planned formation of at most three political parties with distinct ideologies, as the panacea to Nigeria's political parties' imbroglia.

**Key words:** Political Manifesto, Ideology and Political Parties

### **Prelude**

The random formation of political parties in Nigeria is casting shadow over the belief that the beauty of democratic governance lies in the existence of multiparty system which gives the people the choice of alternative party to replace non-functional parties. Right from the pre-independence formation of parties in Nigeria, the problem of loosely formed political parties has continued. The parties are formed without specific basis, vision or mission.

In Nigeria it is difficult to tell the number of political parties in existence because by the time you finish researching and are still writing the report one or two new political parties have been added. Similarly, one cannot say the party someone belongs or the party that rules a particular state because members as well as the governors easily defect to another party or form a new one with his loyalists.

In the same vein, a close look at the manifestoes of political parties in Nigeria which ought to be blue prints guiding the parties' course of action shows that there is no significant difference among them. This implies that the parties have no distinct missions and authentic course of actions. And if the manifestoes of two parties are the same, why are they two parties? The work suspects that manifestoes of political parties in Nigeria are not based on ideologies and seeks to show that the implications of this include difficulty in choice of political parties, multiplication of political parties, easy decamping and most importantly non-commitment of members to the acclaimed vision of their party as specified in the manifesto.

Political philosophers ought to express disgust over the numerous political parties existing in Nigeria today. The Independent Electoral Commission, in-charge of elections in Nigeria,

indicates the participation of twenty-six political parties in the recently concluded 2015 general elections. This does not mean there are no other parties even after the merger that resulted in All Progressive Congress. Although this is an improvement, as the 2011 General Elections witnessed the participation of about sixty-three political parties, one still wonders why such multiplicity of political parties in one country? What informs the formation of these parties – differences in political ideologies or something else? Yet the problem of the number of political parties is outweighed by the way people defect from one party to another. This shows that members of parties in Nigeria do not share the ideology of their party otherwise decamping to another party could have been much more difficult than what obtains. Perhaps these parties have no ideology otherwise, members of one party should have at least undergone a serious ideological conversion before defecting to another.

The fear that Nigerian political parties might not be based on ideologies is heightened by the apparent lack of commitment of the ruling class to their party's manifesto once elected. Worst still, a number of manifestoes of political parties in Nigeria do not indicate any significant difference. This brings one to the main problem. Do Nigerian politicians know that political parties are based on ideologies? In other words, are ideologies the bases of manifestoes of Nigerian political parties? If political manifesto is ideology what implications does it portend to Nigerian politics?

This study is undertaken to demonstrate that political manifesto flows from political ideology; to determine whether or not manifestos of political parties in Nigeria are based on ideologies and draw the implications of political manifesto as ideology to Nigerian politics.

The importance of this study is to foster understanding of, and perhaps provide solutions to, the problem of political parties in Nigeria especially as they relate to absence of ideology. The masses are confused in making choice of political parties. This study will show them how to choose political parties based on ideology. In addition, the problem of number of political parties will be solved if the submission of this study that political manifesto should be based on ideology is adhered to. Once political manifestoes are based on ideologies, the number of political parties in the country will be drastically reduced as parties with common ideology will merge and the ideologically baseless one scraped out. The after math of the limitation of number of political parties will be easier choice of political parties to join. On another note, the demonstration that political manifesto ought to have ideological base will jolt politicians into the search for the ideology of their political parties. This will make them to be more committed to the realization of their manifesto.

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

Political manifesto has been variously defined. It is generally taken to be a written statement in which a political party says what its aims and policies are. A similar definition holds manifesto to be usually printed statement of principles and policies made by a leader or a group, especially political party, before an election. Abonyi (2005:421) takes manifesto to be stepped down ideology, which constitutes the big and long-term programme of party. *World Net* simplified the definition as a public declaration of intentions as issued by a political party or government. In this write-up, manifesto is to be understood as a statement of principle and policies made by

political party, which make it different from others and appealing to the people as better alternative.

The link between manifesto and ideology demands investigation of what ideology is all about. The explication of the concept of ideology is not easy to come by. This follows the fact that there are many approaches to the definitions of the term. There are many social, political, religious and economic ideologies. Hence, one's definition is largely dependent on one's perspective. In this text, ideology is approached from the political viewpoint. Etymologically, ideology is derived from the French word "ideologies". It was coined by Antoine Destutt de Tracy in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to mean a science of ideas (Head, 1985:32).

Similarly *Wikimedia Foundation Organization* (2007) defines ideology as a comprehensive vision, as a way of looking at things or set of ideas proposed by the dominant class of a society to all members of this society. It is the basic beliefs which a people or a person has about the origin, nature and end of the universe, life, existence, whether the ideas are explicitly stated or implied in actions (Nwala, 1985:2). For Blackburn (1996) it is "any wide ranging system of beliefs, way of thought and categories that provide the foundation of programmes of political and social actions" (:185).

From the Marxist viewpoint, ideology is a systematized and interconnected set of ideas about the social economics and political organization of society as a whole. But more specifically BBC English Dictionary (1992) defines ideology as "a set of beliefs, especially the political beliefs on which people, parties, or countries base their action" (:574). For the purpose of this work, political ideology is defined as a political beliefs system which forms the foundation of party's vision and mission, explains and justifies a preferred existing or proposed political order in a society. It refers to "that set of economic cum political beliefs strongly held by members of a political party... (Ihugba, 2014).

It was Karl Marx who in his *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848) demonstrated, for the first time in modern political history, that the manifesto of a political party should be based on a well-defined and coherent ideology. Marx articulates the ideological basis on which the Communist Party was formed and from which the party drew motivation. And this doctrine is based on three points bound up with particular historic phases in the development of production; that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat; and that the dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to that abolition of all classes and to a classless society. From this view he develops his theory of dialectical materialism, which is the process of history as it moves toward a communist, classless society.

Marx holds that class struggle is the spirit of history. He identifies five epochs in history; and in each epoch a form of class struggle exists which eventually paves way for another epoch. The five epochs are the primitive communal; slave; feudal; Capitalist and socialist-communist epochs. The first four epochs are evil, according to Marx, because the minority of the higher class heavily exploits the majority of the lower class. The fifth epoch would mark the end of the economic exploitation of the masses as they would rise against all the exploitative mechanism and create a classless society where everyone has equal access to the product of labour. This is the basic ideology of communism. Since the communist party was formed on this platform, Marx in writing the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* pays great attention to communist ideology and elaborates various means of ensuring that the ideology is visible in all the aspect of

the party's activities. Communist ideology became a kind of belief system, which set the hearts of the members aflame to live and act in the spirit of the ideology to demonstrate that the manifesto was an X-ray of the communist ideology.

Commenting on Marx's contribution to the development of ideology Abonyi (2005) writes.

Karl Marx could be said to have laid the foundation of what could be regarded as a more innovative notion from which one strand of definition of ideology has developed. He opined that in societies torn apart into class divisions, ideas might play a crucial role in articulating or aggregating the conflicting interests of the different social classes. Ideas, he suggested, may also shape the ways in which individuals perceive society and their position within it, and to this extent affect both the content and direction of social change (:415).

From Marx, founders of political parties in modern societies have taken it as a sine qua non to base the parties on particular ideology. These ideologies are what decode into manifestos of their various parties. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Karl Marx in his *The Communist Manifesto* demonstrated that manifesto of political party is fallout of the party's ideology, much has been said regarding political ideology and manifesto, as well as how the latter ought to derive from the former. For Akena et al (2005), political ideology is a belief system. This system explains and justifies a preferred political order as well as its manifesto in a society and offers a strategy through processes, institutional arrangement and programmes for its attainment. They describe it as the "verbal image of a good society and an ideal proposition about how to achieve such a society" (:155). Political ideologies, they argue, are formulated to be coherent containing practical ideas about the establishment of such a good society, maintaining an existing one by effecting changes or reforms. Political ideologies are fundamentally geared towards achieving belief and following or to achieve particular effects through actions.

Writing on the functions of ideologies, Akena et al (2005) maintain that ideologies are often accepted by persons who by their very dispositions are ideologically oriented; thus making ideologies to reinforce and motivate individuals to act in a given direction. This direction that political ideologies move individuals is political manifestos. In summary, they hold that ideology serves as sacred objects, the abstract doctrines symbolized in objects and signs, which serve as rallying points and collective representation for those who endorse the ideology. Anyaehie (2007:163) corroborates this as he maintains that ideology provides standards for establishing what should be regarded as desirable and provides the ground for accepting or rejecting particular norms.

To be derived from the position of Akena et al is that manifesto is ideology made manifest and thus is a system of belief, which ought to be coherent, and has the power to captivate and motivate those who share the idea.

In a similar vein, Abonyi (2005) underscores the importance of ideology in politics. He submits that ideology is "one major instrument for exercise of state power. It not only plays a crucial role in the emergence and consolidation of a state, but is considered to be very useful in the exercise of its power." (:418). He goes further to point out that during the struggle for control of state power between or among social groups; the basic objective of an ideology is to generate as much force as possible for use to control any opposition group. And once power is captured, ideology functions to play down the use of force in running the affairs of society and replaces the former

with persuasion as ruling people who have internalized particular ideological principles becomes much easier. Furthermore; he maintains that in democratic societies, the function of ideology to reduce the use of force in the body-polities of society is achieved through political socialization which involves training individuals to understand, or to appreciate the ideology as the inevitable truth and a logical way of life. The aim of this education is to inculcate in the individuals the spirit of the ideology for their internalization. Abonyi opines that the critical role of political ideology is better appreciated by the intense nature of activities, which erupt when rival ideologies clash in a political struggle for supremacy. He cites as an example the defunct cold war between the defunct USSR and USA over the propagation of socialism and capitalism respectively. The choice of the camp to belong then was determined by the preference of a particular ideology.

In a nutshell, it is the opinion of Abonyi that ideology enhances the political appeal of a political party. A coherently articulated ideology is an important attribute of a political party; it differentiates one party from another. Otherwise, all parties would look alike with no proof of superiority from any. An ideology constitutes the big and long-term programme of the party; it needs to be stepped down to a manifesto during elections (:420-1). This is why Enemu (1999:78) observes that ideology promotes group or organizational cohesion and solidarity because it is a shared belief system and sustains that “Ideology often contains statements of fact and assertions that are normative. It also often includes strategies for actualizing its vision of reality (:93).

Certainly, political manifesto of any political party ought to be a step-down of its ideology and that political ideology ought to be actually what differentiates one political party from another. The apparent lack of this ideal in Nigerian politics, where there exists no significant difference among the multi-parties in the country (Ajiboye, 2014), is what motivated this research.

### **POLITICAL MANIFESTO AS IDEOLOGY**

The fundamental pre occupation of any political party in any democratic setting is to secure control over the government of the state. This makes the securing control of the government a sine qua non in the definition of a political party. Sequel to this, Heywood (1997) defines a political party as “a group of people that is organized for the purpose of winning government by electoral or other means” in more elaborate manner, Appadorai (1974) discusses a political party as:

A more or less organized group of citizens, who act together as a political unit, have distinctive aims and opinions on the leading political questions of controversy in the state, and who, by acting together as a political unit, seek to obtain control of government. It is based on two fundamentals of human nature: men differ in their opinions, and are gregarious; they try to achieve by combination what they cannot achieve individually. Religious and communal loyalties, and attachments to dynasty of leader, also help party to develop.

From the foregoing, one realizes that a political party is not just a group of people, but a group of people who share a common view or political philosophy and seek to win elections so as to exercise political power or take control of government. But inasmuch as political power in a democracy belongs to the people, political party can only legitimately acquire this power

through election. Yet to get voted into the government, a political party must make itself the desideratum to both its members and the electorate. This is where manifesto comes in because the attractiveness of any political party depends on the beauty of its manifesto, which makes it appealing to the people.

In democracies, political parties prepare electoral manifestos which set out their strategic direction and outlines of prospective legislation should they win sufficient support in an election to serve in the government. Manifesto is comparable to agenda of a meeting. The items in the agenda show how important the meeting is and influence the attendance to the meeting. Political manifesto is the blue print, an action plan, which serves as reference point and shows the people how much understanding the party has of the situation of their society. Manifesto is used in comparing political parties as well as making the choice of party to join. It is believed that the better the manifesto of the party the better the party. Legislative proposals, which are features in the manifesto of a party, which has won an election are often regarded as having superior legitimacy to other measures, which a governing party may introduce for consideration, by the legislature. This is because such proposals are pre-meditated and well-planned and reflect the feeling of the electorate, having attracted them to vote in the party.

The importance of political manifesto lies in the fact that it is a synopsis of what the party stands for. It shows the party's basic beliefs, its vision and mission. It shows to what extent the party appreciates that common good of the society as well as its plan to lead the state into higher standard of living. Sequel to this, Abonyi (2005) believes that a manifesto is a download of political ideology. It is road map leading the political party and its members and provides the ground for the evaluation of the political efficiency of the party in power; that is, the assessment of the extent the party has lived up to her campaign promises.

Consequently, one may take ideology to simply mean the society's world-view. However, there is a slight difference between worldview and ideology as Stevenson (1974:7) points out.

The difference between a world view and ideology lies in a world view as proposed way of life by a philosopher, thinker etc, practiced by a very limited number of persons, mostly its original proponent and perhaps, his/ her immediate circle of associates, relatives; while an ideology is a way of life of large social group or one seriously contending for status, and actively impinging or trying to impinge on the key institutions and practices of a society.

This description of ideology as a way of life of large social group goes to demonstrate that political ideology is more than a set of political ideas. It is a belief system, which ought to be internalized by every member of the social group and from which their actions ought to flow. This explains why Agena et al (2005:155) hold that ideology offers a strategy through processes, institutional arrangement and programmes for its attainment. It may be described as verbal image of a society and an ideal proposition about how to achieve such a society. Political ideologies are usually formulated to be reasonably coherent containing practical ideas about the establishment of a good society or maintaining an existing one through reform. Most creators of political ideologies mainly seek to achieve belief and following or to achieve particular effects through actions. Mullins (<http://www.wipimedia>) admits that an ideology must be logically coherent, that various articles of the ideology must be compatible but adds that as a way of life,

ideology must possess some other features which include having control over the cognitions of members or believers of the ideology, capability of guiding one's evaluations and provision of guidance towards action. To be grasped from these is that ideology possesses those who imbibe it and motivates them to actions and inactions they might otherwise not have taken.

The implication of the above features of ideology is that no action can take place without an underlying ideology (Muendane, 2006:18). One of the characteristics of ideology as shown above is that it must provide guidance towards actions. The kind of action of one is influenced by the ideology he/she holds. An ideology is a conceptual scheme with a practical application. The main purpose of ideology is to offer change, positive change, in society through a normative thought process. It is a system of "abstract thought...applied to public matters and thus makes this concept central to politics" (<http://wikimedia.org>, 2007). Hence ideology is not a mere plan for action in that one executes plans consciously but an ideology influences the action of the society even unconsciously. This is why Karl Marx underscores that an ideology inspires action or it ceases to be one. Ideology is therefore not just a theoretical system which attempts to explain reality, but does not propose any action for human being. It, in addition to providing explanation of reality, proposes action for human beings, thus it is also a system of practical actions. McIntyre (1980:49) brings out this idea vividly when he maintains that ideologies have:

Three key features; the first is that it attempts to delineate general characteristics which do not belong only to the changing world which can be investigated only by empirical inquiry...The second central feature of any ideology is an account of the relationship between what is the case and how we ought to act, between the world and that of morals, politics and other guides to conducts... The third defining property of an ideology is that it is not merely believed by the members of a given social group, but believed in such a way that it at least partially defines for them their social existence.

The fact is that ideologies are based on fundamental assumptions, beliefs which sponsor, directly and indirectly, other philosophical values such as epistemic values, moral values, metaphysical values etc. All these delineate other values, norms and attitudes in the area of political law, economics, technology and so on. For instance, political party that has progressive ideology is likely to imbibe moral relativism which changes moral value as situation demands and gives individual the fiat to make moral decision on issues concerning their private life.

So far, this discussion of ideology and manifesto has shown that the two are intricately interwoven and a political party cannot deal with one to the neglect of the other without having problem hence, the need to draw a clearer picture of the relationship between the two. Let's start by a way of analogy. The relationship between political ideology and manifesto is like that between a building plan and the idea of the building. There is no doubt that the beauty of an edifice is highly attributed to planning and designing. When a building is well planned and the builders are meticulous in transmitting the plan from paper to the site, the desired house cannot but appear. Yet some ideas informed the planning. This is why if someone just buys a plan without the consideration of the ideas that informed it, he might be heading to disasters. This is because the plan might not be suitable for the soil of their site, for instance.

Bringing the above to the present discuss, what people look at is the manifesto of a political party – the building plan. But this manifesto is a mere transmission of the political ideology into a verbal form, and in the language of needs that can be understood by the masses. Just as using a building plan without knowing the ideas behind it spells disaster in building, a manifesto that does not flow from a political ideology spells doom in politics. Therefore one can say that political manifesto is ideology. However, it is written in a language many will understand. The implication of the interpretation of ideology of manifesto is that manifesto must possess all the features of ideology namely, logical coherence, power over cognitions, be capable of guiding one's evaluation and provide guidance towards action. Taking the issue of logical consistency, once a party's manifesto proposes privatization of one sector of the economy and at the same time advocates government takeover of another aspect, such a manifesto is logically inconsistency. It lacks internal consistency as it is drawn from two opposing ideologies. Sequel to that, one is right to take manifesto as the practical ideology. It is a statement of blue print of action which is downloaded from ideology. And if a manifesto is a downloaded ideology, then it is ideology. One can now say that a true manifesto that worths its take cannot be without ideology. This is the bane of Nigerian politics where party's manifesto appears to be downloaded from no clear ideology and has nothing to do with members. This has led to the claim that Nigeria, and Africa in general, has no ideology (Ogugua, 2007:193).

### **Evaluation**

From what has been said so far it is obvious that manifestos of political parties in Nigeria lack clear ideology otherwise things would have been different (Akinkuotu, 2015). This has enormous consequence for Nigeria politics. In the first place, this palpable absence of ideology has occasioned rampant formation of political parties in the country. All it takes to form a political party in Nigeria is a financier and a few peoples who are ready to dance to his tone. The members lack the vision of the party thus formed (that is if it has any) and when pushed into the position of authority the party will have nothing to show. The outcome of this is the presence of too many mushroom political parties in the country. Ajiboye (2014) laments this as he complains: "Nigeria's political parties have many similarities than differences, the only visible difference being their names. It is sad we lack the opportunity to vote in terms of party ideology..."

The existence of too many political parties without clear ideological differentiations further creates crisis of choice of party among the populace. This is because looking at the manifestos of these parties they promise the same enticement and practically look alike in all ramifications. The result is that many Nigerians have declined belonging to political parties and during elections cast the votes to persons they think can provide their immediate want once in power.

A much more serious implication of dearth of ideology in the manifestos of political parties in Nigeria is deficiency of commitment to party ideals and manifesto. Take this issue of zoning in the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) for instance. A supposedly elderly statesman like Obasanjo, a former leader and the chairman Board of trustee of the PDP then, at the commencement of the squabble on whether or not Goodluck Jonathan should contest the presidential primary election in the PDP 2011, bearing in mind the party's zoning formular which mandates the stay of power



in the North till 2015, said there was nothing like zoning in the PDP. But when Goodluck contested and won the primaries, the same Obasanjo reverted to the PDP is committed to zoning. Does this show commitment to the party's policy? That singular act is what put the PDP in the ebb it currently is, other factors notwithstanding. The same attitude is seen in political leaders who abandon the manifesto of their parties to pursue their idiocy for want of motivating spirit, and any attempt for the party to correct them results in his defection to another party.

If the parties had ideologies which the members believe in, the ideologies could have according to Mullins (2007) had power over their cognitions, be capable of guiding their evaluations, and provide them with guidance towards actions. But this has not been the case. Giving credence to this, Audu (2011) writes that the manifestos of Nigerian political parties are bigger than any encyclopedia one can think of yet things get worse daily.

Another major implication of paucity of ideology in Nigerian politics is cross carpeting. The ease with which people decamp and re-camp from one party to another is a proof that all parties in Nigeria are the same. Supposing the parties had different ideologies, it would have been very uncomfortable for one to leave his party and his beliefs about its ideology for a new party with the manifesto built on an altogether different ideology. Ideology as a system of beliefs is not easily changed. It has been suggested that the crops of political parties in Nigeria today have no ideologies and the members do not even understand what their parties represent or stand for. They always decamp and re-camp as soon as they are not nominated to run on the platforms of their respective parties. During the three most recent general elections, Nigerian politicians were just joining any party as long as they had chances of becoming the gubernatorial, senatorial etc candidates. This is what gave the All Progressive congress (APC) upper hand in the just concluded 2015 general elections but now the chicken have gone home to roost. Currently people of various parties are jumping board to join the APC for their selfish motives, some to avoid molestation and others for maintenance of stomach infrastructure. It is a clear evidence of lack of political ideology (Akinkuotu, 2015).

In most developed democracies, and even in the earlier Nigeria political history, political parties have ideological viewpoints which form the rallying point for its members as obtains in the ideologies of the republicans and democrats in the United States, the labour and conservatives in the United Kingdom. In Nigeria, the NPN and UPN of the Second Republic and the NRC and SDP of the Third Republic had republican and democratic tendencies respectively in each case. Members of these parties believed in certain principles that made up their party's mandate and manifesto.

But in Nigeria today, the reverse is the case. Most political parties have no ideologies and anything goes. At times a party may profess to have conservative ideology while the manifesto shows progressive undertone and vice versa. Nigeria politicians should learn lesson from what happened between Obama and Hilary Clinton both of the Democratic Party in the United States during the primaries that gave Obama the party's flag in 2008. One wonders why Clinton did not become a republican considering the long and hard presidential tussle between her and Obama. She did not do that because she believes in the Democratic ideology of the people's welfare as opposed to the market principles of most republicans. Political parties are saddled with the responsibility of creating competing ideologies that must be embedded in the socio-economic realities of the people that will motivate their support as electorate. "It is obvious that most

political parties in Nigeria lack this fundamental responsibility, none of the parties have the mechanism and structure to reorient the masses on a broad based ideological political culture” (Onwa, 2015). Hence, they do not command respect and support of the majority of common Nigerians.

As Anyaehie (2007) rightly opines, “The truth of beliefs and values (ideology) should be determined by their efficiency in effectively propelling man from any one part of his experience to another” (163). In this regard one can audaciously say that Nigeria’s political parties have failed abysmally by not providing the people with true beliefs and values. This calls for re-appraisal of their political ideologies, if they have any.

### Conclusion

The way out of political problem is reformation of Nigeria political parties along a clear vision based on a reliable system of beliefs that will be able to capture and envelop the interest of the members of the party and motivate them into actions. Such reformation will not only reduce the number of political parties in the country and make the choice of political parties much easy but will bequeath the nation political parties that Nigerians can be proud of and to whose manifesto the members will be committed to. But to ensure that the basic aim of the reformation is realize, it should be followed by mass political education of the masses to acquaint them with the rudimental spirit of democracy and the ideologies of the parties. This ought to be as “[...] individuals will develop a substantively meaningful ideological orientation and ideologically organize their attitudes toward specific political objects if they have acquired enough information about the conceptual content of the left-right continuum” Federico, C. M. (2009).

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