

## **FRAIL IDEOLOGICAL CONTENT AND OPPOSITION POLITICAL PARTIES IN NIGERIA, 2014-2018**

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### **Abstract**

*This study interrogates the role and requisites of opposition political parties, particularly the place the ideological content of opposition political parties in the Nigerian political system. No doubt, by their nature political parties are presumed life-wires of democratic political systems. With reference to their frail ideological contents, how valid is the foregoing assertion in the context of opposition political parties in Nigeria? Data for the study were sourced through documentary sources and analysed through textual analytic technique. The study found that largely on account of the frailty of the ideological content of opposition political parties there is weak distinction between the cosmology and the mode of operation of both opposition and ruling parties in Nigeria. The general drive of both members of the ruling and opposition political parties is power grabbing at all costs even when grossly unprepared to deliver good governance. This largely explains why there are often massive defections that cut across ruling and opposing political parties. Against this backdrop, the study recommends that Nigerian political parties, especially those in opposition should rise to the occasion by generating and propagating clearly thought-out and ideologically adroit alternatives to the ruling political parties. In this way, the Nigerian political system will benefit from deep-seated ideological content and issue driven opposition.*

**Keywords:** Ideology, Opposition, Political parties and Political systems

### **Introduction**

Nigeria's return to civil rule twenty years ago, precisely on 29 May 1999, was greeted with high expectations hinged perhaps on the fact that the lessons learnt from the failed experiments over the years, will lead to value adjustment and approach that consequently can transform the country politically, economically and socially, particularly, as expected of a democratic nation. However, to achieve worthwhile developmental goals in a democracy, party politics must go hand in hand with democratic opposition parties that give the country's political system liberal content. Unfortunately, it appears that since the return to civil rule in 1999, the opposition political parties have not really functioned or performed their expected roles in Nigeria and that is not without consequences on the general viability of opposition politics in the country. The challenge of opposition political parties in the context of Nigeria's democracy seems enormous, for one it can be attributed

to the ideological poverty of the political parties (ruling and opposition) which further depicts the Nigerian political system as a theatre of drama of some sort.

The picture is much like having drivers irrespective of their lane, free to drive into either the left or the right sides of a tarred road. The ideological poverty that has been devilled political parties in Nigeria breeds chaos. As observed by Omotola (2009:614), "... at the very heart of the success or otherwise of a political party is the important question of political ideology". It is therefore presumable that the full potentials of Nigeria's democracy in terms of being people oriented and good governance delivery, is predicated not just on Nigeria's political system per say, but on the capability of Nigerian political parties built on ideology. The Nigerian political system appears inundated by ideologically baseless political parties, and the process, opposition political parties appear much like the ruling party stripped of political power.

No doubt, party system is driven by ideologies and there is no law barring Nigerian opposition political parties from operating on ideological basis. Against this backdrop, some questions readily come to mind. What is the value of an opposition political party and how do they operate in Nigerian? Furthermore, what is the interface between frail ideological content, opposition political parties and the Nigerian political system? In response to these questions this brief introduction is followed by literature and theoretical considerations and a discuss of salient methodological issues. The next two sections of the paper are devoted to addressing the modus operandi of opposition political parties and their interface with the political system in Nigeria, respectively. The last section is the conclusion.

### **Relevant Literature and Theoretical Considerations**

In politics, opposition comprises of one or more political parties or other organized groups that are presumed alternatives to the ruling party, that is the government or administration in power (Blondel, 1997). To him, the degree of opposition varies according to political conditions or environment. For example, across authoritarian and liberal systems opposition may be repressed or welcomed. Political opposition is a recognized political party that is present in a parliament (or assembly) or some other legislative arm and does not control the floor, usually due to being in the minority. In some political systems, opposition party is also an unrecognized political party. This is typically the case in a one party states. Political system consists of a coordination of interface by which a state makes its laws, policies and other binding decisions upon which the society is run. Political system also may be viewed as consisting of inputs from the environment or from within the political system itself, the conversion of these inputs within the system and production of outputs into the environment (Almond and Powell, 1966).

An ideology is a collection of ideas or beliefs shared by a group of people. Very often it refers to a set of political beliefs that characterize a particular culture. Political party may also be defined as a group of organized individuals guided by certain defined principles and ideology, who seek governmental power through election, based on clearly thought out manifesto. Political party is an indispensable instrument of democracy and political development. Opposition political parties occupy special position in the political

landscape of every organized society or democracy. This is because they play very special roles in holding the government of the day accountable to the people and also in offering alternative options to governance based on its ideological convictions (Wahab and Muhtar 2010). More so, opposition political party is the major pillar for sustained democratic governance. Where the opposition content is lacking, democracy suffers (Wahab and Muhtar 2010).

The theoretical thrust of this paper is hinged on the perspective of Almond's work on political system. His works which involves what he calls "the functional approach to comparative politics", as described in *The Politics of Developing Areas*, and his *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach*. This will greatly influence our understanding of political system. According to Almond and Coleman, all political systems have four characteristics in common and in terms of which they may be compared. First of all, "political systems, including the simplest ones, have political structure... Second, the functions are performed in all political systems, even though these functions may be performed with different frequencies, and by different kinds of structures... Third, all structures no matter how specialized, whether it is found in primitive or in modern societies, is multifunctional...Fourth, all political systems are mixed systems in the cultural sense. There are no 'all modern' cultures and structure, in the sense of rationality, and no 'all primitive ones, in the sense of traditionality (Almond and Coleman 1960:50).

Going further, they posit that all political systems, in this sense, are transitional (p.51). Although, Almond nowhere offers a specific definition of function, but Dahl (1966), defines function as a service rendered by a system for its environment. Almond postulates seven functional requisites which must be fulfilled by any political system. On the political or "input" side are political socialization and recruitment, interest articulation, interest aggregation, and political communication. On the government or "output" side are rule-making, rule applications and rule adjudication (Almond and Coleman 1960: 52). The functions according to Almond are not of equivalent nature, in that political communication is a mechanism by which the other functions are performed - output, as well as input, not to mention feedback. "An adequate analysis of a political system must locate and characterize all these functions and not simply those functions performed by the specialized political structures" (Almond and Coleman 1960:53).

Nowhere, however, did Almond make it clear just why these functions, and not others, are necessary or whether they are sufficient for system maintenance. Almond is deeply sensitive to the parochialism of traditional comparative politics. His "functional categories" were developed for the purpose of comparing whole political systems – Western and Non-western; modern, transitional and traditional. The functions, however, are highly ethnocentric in their derivation. 'The problem essentially was to ask a series of questions based on the distinctive political activities existing in Western complex systems. In other words, the functional categories were derived from the political systems in which structural specialization and functional differentiation have taken place to a very great extent (Almond and Coleman 1960:54). This requisite assumption provides the Procrustean bed to which all systems are fitted "the same function may be performed with different frequencies and by different kinds of structures" By providing explicit and

standardized criteria by which political phenomena can be examined, genuine comparison becomes possible. Here lies the enormous contribution of both Gabriel Almond and David Easton to the study of comparative politics from intuitive and *sin generis* to the level of self-conscious theory and systematic analysis.

This theory above is chosen because it is the most comprehensive statement of the theory of political development and of the developmental approach to the study of politics. (The term political system is used in old times as government, nation or states). Almond and Powell (1966) began by discussing the political system which they think of in terms of two main concepts – political culture and political structure. The structure of the political system is the “observable activities which make up the political system. The particular activities in which individuals are involved in the processes are referred to as roles”. Any number of systematically related roles is a political structure. Therefore, understanding the structure of a political system is to understand the roles which the occupants of those structures play; for instance, the political structure of court from the roles of the judges, prosecutor, plaintiff, defendant, court orderly, jury or counsels etc. In other words, the political system is concerned with the structures that perform the functions.

Political culture, according to Almond and Powell (1966) is “the pattern of individual attitudes and orientations toward politics among members of the system. It is the subjective realm which underlies and gives meaning to political actions”. Such individual orientations involve several components including (a) cognitive orientations – knowledge, (accurate or otherwise of political objects and beliefs); (b) affective orientations – feelings of attachment, involvement, rejection, and the like, about political object; and (c) evaluate orientations – judgments and opinions about political objects, which usually involve applying value standards to political objects and events.

Now, when we talk of political development, we are referring to two related changes in political culture and political structure. Accordingly, the developmental aspect of political culture is cultural secularization. Secularization is the process whereby men become increasingly rational, analytical, and empirical in their political action. Then, a secularized political culture is characterized by the “emergence of a pragmatic, empirical orientation. Attitudes in a secular political culture tend to be the “market place attitude” attitude, that is, a predisposition or toward “give –and-take interactions, in which each side bargains” for limited objectives. And, to the extent that a culture is secularized; orientations tends to be specific rather than diffuse.

Even though all countries in the world do not organize their political affairs in similar ways nor even run a universal system of government, universal expressions of good government exist and are similar. This is based on the premise that human desire for good governance is motivated towards the satisfaction of similar universally acknowledged basic needs. Therefore, with regards to Nigeria, this theory exposes the under-developmental character of Nigerian political system and the inherent weakness of opposition political parties in Nigeria which makes it difficult for the country to attain universally acceptable measures of good governance.

### **Methodological Issues**

Our basic assumption in this study is that by their nature, political parties are presumed life-wires of democratic political systems. With reference to their frail ideological contents, how valid is it to posit that political parties are life-wires of democratic political systems in the context of the modus operandi of opposition political parties in Nigeria? In other words, what is the value of opposition political parties and how do they operate in Nigeria? In addition, what is the interface between frail ideological content, opposition political parties and the Nigerian political system? In line with foregoing questions, the study hypothesizes, first, that largely on account of the frailty of the ideological content of opposition political parties there is weak distinction between the cosmology and the mode of operation of both opposition and ruling parties in Nigeria. We also hypothesize that there is significant interface between frail ideological content, opposition political parties and the Nigerian political system and that the drive for power grabbing at all costs cuts across members of the ruling and opposition political parties, even when they are grossly unprepared to deliver good governance.

This paper is largely qualitative and relies on documented sources such running records, reports, etc among others as sources of its data. As such, focuses on secondary sources of data, from which it generated the needed data used in the article. We arrived at the research conclusion through data from text books, academic journals, newspapers, newsmagazines, as well as the current wave of online journals, that contain useful information regarding the issues under study. In addition, oral statements and actions of political leaders and public opinion leaders where necessary are also utilized in this study. The study took due advantage of the technique for the analysis of data from documentary sources. Accordingly, data for the study were duly analysed through textual analytic technique.

### **Modus Operandi, Frail Ideological Content and Opposition Political Parties in Nigeria**

It is not covert that ideological content poses a big challenge to the operation of Nigerian political parties, irrespective of the political party standing as a ruling or an opposition political party. To that extent, Nigerian political system has been inundated by deep confusion and internal chaos such that one cannot look, and just by modus operandi of a political party ordinarily informed by its ideological content, say with certainty, that 'this here' or 'that there' is the opposite or alternative option to arriving at a better policy choice and delivery for good governance. Instead, what happens is that all political parties and its members employ all manner of strategies, campaign of calumny, religious and ethnic incitement, lies and deceit, promises that are not feasible, in an attempt to win favourable disposition before the electorates. Thereby leaving the electorates, especially the less informed, much more confused, incapacitated, totally unable to make good choices of leaders. So, instead of people being concerned about the capacity of the party and its candidate to deliver on good governance, instead of the electorates standing up to raise questions on feasibility of campaign promises they are lost in fruitless arguments like the religion of the prospective leader, his or her ethnicity or zone, among others. Then because the party's choice is not supreme over that of big wig members, be it ruling or opposition

political party, their strong members go about advancing arguments that best serve their interest.

Mostly, there is no attention at all on matters of governance and ability of a party to deliver on its manifesto through its candidate, therefore the need for the party to nominate a candidate that will best represent it. For instance, recently in Anambra state, in the governorship election of 18 November 2017, the incumbent governor, Willie Obiano serving his second term in office, was gunning for a second term in office. For his ruling party, APGA, it was mostly a question of “leaving Anambra North Senatorial Zone to complete its eight years”. Then again, there were other candidates from the same zone who belong to other political parties; notably; Oseloka Obaze of Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, and Tony Nwoye of All Progressive Congress, APC, all made the case that the governorship of Anambra state should remain in Anambra North Senatorial Zone for the next four years. The same argument advanced by Willie and his APGA ruling party is the same argument the opposition advanced ahead of the 2017 governorship election in Anambra state. Then again, in Anambra Central Senatorial Zone, Osita Chidoka contested to be governor on UPP platform. For him, the zoning arrangement is baseless and unfounded. Similarly, Chudi Offodile of Anambra central who joined the race on UPP platform on similar sentiment that Anambra state is not divided and never did Anambra people seat down to decide that each zone should govern the state each for a period of eight years and then it moves to the other zone.

In Anambra South Senatorial Zone, Sen. Andy Uba, George Muoghalu, John Bosco Onunkwo, all joined the race on APC platform and like their central counterpart dismissed the argument of zoning. In fact, Andy Uba repeatedly stated that he must get the APC ticket and that he must win the incumbent governor and then sack APGA the ruling party from Anambra state. In APGA, there is an aspirant: Elo Aforka who is from central, he gunned for the ticket too, under Martin Agboso’s leadership. The point is that each person made case that tends to serve or better, position him to get what he wants which is Anambra seat of power. It is therefore mostly about the individual, not necessarily about the party. Thus, you see both APGA members and APC members advocating for zoning, while those who will crash out of the contest if it is zoned, insist it must not be zoned. Again, what we can see here is personal interest and personal opinion dominating party interest and opinion.

At national level, the ruling APC after over three years in office still blames PDP, the former ruling party, but now in opposition for all the problems and challenges they face in government. The APC has insisted that PDP stole the country into recession and insecurity and all the problems facing the government of the day. As an opposition party, the APC accused the PDP of lacking the ability to deliver good governance (Ajayi, 2018). However, it is the ruling party but it still accuses the PDP of destroying the country and making it impossible for them to freely work to deliver on their campaign promises (Butty, 2015). This is a very good case of lack of ideological content. The APC as an opposition political party used a side of an argument and appeal to emotions of unsuspecting Nigerians to gain political grounds over PDP but when they won, they saw a different reality from what they have been telling people. But instead of accepting the challenge and

be honestly committed to solving the problems based on ideological tenets of the party, the party went back and turned its argument again just to score political point. In truth, no level of blames to PDP will solve any problem currently facing Nigeria under APC leadership.

Moreover, at the root of lack of ideological content of Nigerian political system, vis-a-vis its modus operandi, lies the excessive monetization of the whole political process. Thus, opposition political parties are built around individuals who drive the party towards their own selfish agenda as advanced in their arguments during election and after the election. This usually depicts inconsistency because integrity and consistency can be ensured by the system and institutions not individuals. The dangerous determining position of money in Nigeria's political process has subjected opposition political parties to the same challenge of building party around individuals with financial muscles to bankroll elections in order to help the party to win. The APC comes to mind with its 2015 presidential candidate Buhari; the political alignment in the party which attracted serious financial capacity used in building and sponsoring the party to win the 2015 presidential election. From this standpoint, we can say that frail ideological content of opposition political parties in Nigeria not only has enormous impact on the manner opposition political parties operate, also, the innate confusion in Nigeria's political system has positioned opposition parties as an unwanted specie that must be annihilated except it learns fast and play in any manner to win political power. And so, apart from the usual banter and sharp rebuke of the party in power by the opposition party, there is little or no difference between them. In reality, opposition political parties in Nigeria only but engages the same or similar strategies employed by the ruling political party to wrestle political power. Then lose its voice of opposition and also forget the how question, as well as bringing its argument as opposition to reality, when it becomes the ruling party.

Nigerian political landscape has certain features and certain requirements are needed to navigate through so as to successfully acquire political power. Nigerian opposition political parties do not intend to remain in opposition forever. In fact, if it remains in opposition for too long, chances are high that it will lose great number of its members. They will leave and join the party in power. Therefore, opposition political parties try to do everything possible to remain relevant and also wrestle power from the ruling political party.

### **Frail Ideological Content, Opposition Political Parties and Nigerian Political System**

So far it has been demonstrated that there is no clear line ideologically, separating ruling political parties and opposition political parties in Nigeria. We have also tried to establish how the inherent crisis of Nigerian political system impacts on Nigerian opposition political parties. However, there is no law barring Nigerian opposition political parties from operating on ideological basis. Therefore, it is totally a choice, perhaps a necessity, not the rule, for opposition political parties to operate without clear cut domesticated political ideology. It is therefore necessary to reflect on the value of opposition political parties in Nigerian political system, their opposition capacities and the opposition content

of Nigerian opposition political parties and the distinction or lack of it between them and ruling political parties.

Opposition political parties occupy special position in the political landscape of every organized society or democracy. In principle, the roles of opposition political parties are clear and very well differentiated from the roles of ruling political parties. Opposition parties therefore do not stop at criticizing the government in power and whipping up all manner of sentiment and using all available manipulative instrumentality to gain access to power and when in power, strangely, do nothing differently. In actuality, opposition political parties while doing their job as the opposition, always give better option in terms of policy choice and action path that are in the best interest of the people. They offer policy alternatives that the ruling party is not offering. The America Republican and Democratic political parties comes to mind. In the 2016 America presidential election, the then Republican Party hopeful Donald Trump was clear about his stand on terrorism. Generally, his stand is the Republican Party's stand; although there is minimalist and maximalist part to that. But essentially, the Republican Party stood for an alternative policy option offered by the Democratic Party under barrack Obama in the war against terror, which it was expected Hillary Clinton the then Democratic Party hopeful will carry on with. Since winning the election and taken the oath of office, Donald Trump has commenced the implementation of that policy option in dealing with terrorism in America, irrespective of how unpopular the policy looked or how politically incorrect it seemed. But the situation in Nigeria where opposition political parties are not even clear about their policy option on most issues of public and national interest or other challenges, what then will they possibly implement in the event that they win an election? A situation also where opposition political parties wilfully make empty promises, tell lies and summarily deceived masses in an attempt to gain political power, gained the political power and fail to show any form of commitment to any of its promises that brought it to power. This the reality, situation or political system in which opposition political system political parties in Nigeria operate.

There is another reality: Nigerian opposition political parties can actually be different. They can actually operate in a different manner that sets them apart through ideological content, with which they set out to transform the ills of the ruling political party. It is indeed possible for opposition political party to function differently. In fact, it was by its very design, meant to function differently. But in our case, they function mostly the same way as the ruling political party thereby losing their value and denying the Nigerian political system its opposition content. While the Nigerian political system has some impacts on Nigerian opposition political parties, in turn Nigerian opposition political parties have some impacts on the Nigerian political system. The prevalent pattern in which Nigerian opposition political parties operate in a manner that casts doubt to their opposition credibility is clear manifestation of a problem of frail ideological content of those opposition political parties. When opposition political parties function on the basis of a clear political ideology, the implication is that it already has its modus operandi set out. When opposition political parties are committed to play ideologically based politics, where their manifestoes become their operational guidelines, and where members of the



political parties are only but members of the party not institutions within the party, then the opposition political parties are certainly on their way to changing the system. In a situation where the opposition political parties immediately leave their own agenda and rather go with the flow, building individual members into institutions within the party instead of building the party as a supreme institution and one above any individual, leaves the political system directionless. When, as it is with Nigerian opposition political parties, they allow themselves to be overtaken by arguing over non issues, why downplaying the weightier issues like real programmes and how to get them done, then there isn't much hope for the political system to develop. Indeed, when they fall for, or sacrifice the party's supremacy to money so the party can continue to be funded by wealthy people in the party or the party is favourably disposed to, then certainly, the focus is not the people. When the party leadership becomes highhanded and only bent on winning political power without a detailed activities of the government in line with the party's ideology, then suffice it that opposition political parties have not only failed our political system, but have also contributed immensely to the confusion in the political system.

When casts his or her mind to the fact that that no party may remain in opposition forever, in other words, an opposition political party can become the ruling political party, opposition party ought to be prepared for governance at all times. The important thing however is that the opposition party must be awake to its position as an opposition political party at any given time and function as an opposition political party. However, in a case as in Nigeria where political parties do not operate on the basis of ideology, it has become increasing difficult for opposition political parties to ideologically impact positively on the political system.

### **Conclusion**

In view of the foregoing, and considering the impact of Nigerian political parties on the country's political system, we note that there is lack of clear distinction between ruling political party and the opposition political parties, and the fact that much of the expectations of Nigerians on the country's return to democracy in 1999 are yet to materialize. What difference will ideologically based opposition parties make in Nigeria's political system and in the country in general? One can presume that the impact of having ideologically based political parties, particularly opposition political parties is of extreme importance for Nigeria's progress.

In character, Nigerian political parties are the same irrespective of whether they are ruling or opposition political parties. Abundant evidence from our findings reveals that most Nigerian political parties have interfacing membership. This is to say that the most former members of the former ruling PDP, are now the members of the current ruling political party; APC. A large chunk of Nigerian politicians simply moves from one political party to another and are accepted into their new political family. No attention is given to the political orientation or ideological belief of the decamped politician. In fact, it does not matter at all. Therefore, apparently, there is appreciable level of confusion firmly rooted in what the political system allows or encourages. As a result, opposition political parties sometimes pass as victims of the problematic political system. This is only one way of

looking at it, or put differently, maintaining the prevailing order. However, the task of opposition political parties goes beyond assuming political power or removing a sitting government or ruling political party.

The opposition must hold the ruling party accountable and constructively engage them to deliver on their mandate to the people. Governance is all about the people and building a better working and fair society for all members of the society. Therefore, the need for political parties to have ideologies upon which they advance their expectations and demand for the people's mandate, is paramount. This also enables them to launch their programmes and bring their policy alternatives to reality. So, while Nigerian political parties both ruling and opposing are all scheming to retain or capture political power at all cost, and scheming to out play the other at the polls using all manner of extra-legal means, commitment to adroit ideological reality constitute a core problematic of Nigeria's political system. So also the opposition political parties through their frail ideological base-demonstrated by their manner of operation without clear cut difference, in turn impacts Nigerian political system negatively.

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