

IDEOLOGICALLY SPEAKING: THE DEPARTURE OF ALL PROGRESSIVE CONGRESS FROM PEOPLES DEMOCRATIC PARTY

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Abstract

The paper examines the frequently repeated complaints in Nigeria that the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressive Congress (APC) do not offer much in terms of alternative policies. The argument that the two major parties have no clearly articulated alternative visions and strategies in an ideologically-driven manifesto, that they lack ideology/ideological differences. We extracted information from party campaign discourse; speeches, open letters to the electorate, policy documents and election manifesto (platforms) issued by PDP and APC. This involved: (1) providing the issue-specific information necessary for explaining party's ideological position. (2) Distilling general ideological positions from policy specific information mainly on 'Free Enterprise' and 'Social Welfare'. We argue that the two major parties in Nigeria do not lack ideology or ideological coloration; the difficulty is in maintaining strict ideological cut in the era of neoliberal consensus.

Key Words: APC, Ideological differences, Neo-liberal consensus, Nigeria, Party Politics, PDP.

Introduction

The Fourth Republic in Nigeria was initiated through the 1999 Constitution. For its first elections, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) recognized only three political parties – the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), the All Peoples Party (APP) and the Action for Democracy (AD). Following a Supreme Court judgment on the case Balarabe Musa v INEC, conditions for registration of political parties were liberalized. The Supreme Court ruled that INEC acted illegally by imposing conditions that were not known to the Constitution for party registration and declared their action illegal. Subsequently, Nigeria's political space witnessed an unprecedented opening with the emergence of 63 registered political parties by April 2011. Prominent among the new parties were the

Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the Congress for Political Change, (CPC) and the People's Progressive Alliance (PPA). In addition, many small parties took advantage of the liberalization of the political space to register parties that have proven unviable.

This weakened political opposition and prevented the opposition from presenting a credible challenge to the then ruling Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP). From 1999-2015, the PDP was in control of the governments of the federation and the majority of the states, leaving the opposition mainly of ACN, ANPP, CPC, APGA, and LP with the control of a few states. It appeared that some of the opposition political parties were established to access INEC's funding support or as fall back mechanism for political heavy weights who lose out in power struggles within their parties.

The National Assembly intervened in the matter through Section 78(7) of the 2010 Electoral Act, which provided INEC with the power to de-register political parties that failed to win any executive and legislative seats in elections. Only ten parties won seats in the 2011 elections. They include the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), All Nigeria People Party (ANPP), Labour Party (LP), Progressive People Alliance (PPA), Peoples Party of Nigeria (PPN), All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), Accord Party (AP), Democratic People Party (DPP) and KOWA Party. "On 18th August 2011, INEC de-registered seven parties that did not contest for any election office in the 2011 elections. Two more de-registration exercises were carried out reducing the number of parties from 63 to 25" (Ibrahim, 2013).

On Wednesday 6 February, 2013 four opposition parties came together and agreed to form a new political party, All Progressives Congress, (APC). The plan of the politicians was to be strong enough to snatch power through the ballot box from the ruling Peoples Democratic Party, (PDP) which prides itself as the largest political party in Africa, in anticipation of the 2015 general election. APC was made up of four parties: the Action Congress of Nigeria, ACN; the Congress for Progressive Change, CPC; the All Nigeria Peoples Party, ANPP and a faction of All Progressives Grand Alliance, APGA. The party received approval from the nation's electoral umpire, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) on July 31, 2013 to become a political party and subsequently withdrew the operating licenses of the three previous and merging parties (the ACN, CPC and ANPP).

There were a lot of public suspicions basically suggesting that the APC was nothing but rebranding project for the political union of ACN, ANPP, CPC and Okorocho-led APGA which will not produce anything new in Nigerian politics. There was almost a consensus that it was simply a strategy for 2015 that may not go beyond being a common platform for candidates' selection involving ACN, ANPP, CPC and Okorocho-led APGA. There was also the frequently repeated view that there is no ideological difference between the two major parties. In that regards, Soludo (2013), argues that the APC was an alliance of convenience by disgruntled politicians lacking any progressive ideology save their inordinate ambition to grab power at the centre, that the "soul of the party" was not really

different from the much derided PDP, and that it lacked a sophisticated manifesto. In the same vein Agbaje, (2013) asserts:

I have traced the foundations, evolution and (lack of) ideology of Nigeria's major political parties and concluded that we are yet to evolve a political party system in its normal characterization in which there are clearly defined parties with contrasting visions, ideologies and policy platforms and with stable membership and programmes (http://businessdayonline.com/2013/09/nigerian-political-party-system-2/#.VGEXo_nF-38)

In this same line of argument; Lukman (in Ogulensi, 2013) traced the origin of all the political parties in Nigeria from one source, thereby questioning their ideological differences.

The account of the histories of the current Nigerian political parties shows that they originated from the same source. ... The AD, precursor of the ACN, was founded by a group of South-Western PDM members; the PDM is the same platform that produced the PDP and the APP (which became the ANPP, from which the CPC broke off in 2010). It could easily be argued that what we have in the APC is simply a reconstruction of old alliances: Old wine in old but re-labeled bottles, if we want to be really cynical (Lukman in Ogulensi, 2013).

The Sokoto State Governor, Aminu Tambuwal believes that one of the biggest problems with Nigerian politics is the lack of an ideological identity of its political parties. "The problem is that none of these political parties are ideologically-based. Political parties in Nigeria are mere vehicles, conveyor belts that convey people to various elective offices" (Tambuwal, 2018). According to Bode George, a member of the Board of Trustees (BoT) of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), political parties in Nigeria lack ideological differences: "for me, if you look at the Nigerian politic, all political parties don't have ideological differences – where you say far-right, far-left or center-right, center-left-we don't have that" (Bode, 2018). For this school of thought, "the major parties in a two dominant party system must articulate clearly alternative visions and strategies in an ideologically-driven manifesto. This suggested that such parties must have distinctly opposing values and ideologies" (Egwim, 2018).

This raises the question: ideologically, is there any difference between the APC and the PDP? What are the impacts of the dominance of the market economy over other systems on the 21st century Nigerian party ideology? Steger, (2005) notes that "globalism not only represents a set of political ideas and beliefs coherent enough to warrant the status of a new ideology, but also constitutes the dominant ideology of our time against which all of its challengers must define themselves". This study aims to contribute to the recent

literature which has painted the picture of changes in ideologies of political parties due to the process of globalization and the neo-liberal hegemony (Egwim, 2018, Walczak, 2012).

Analytical Framework

Our point of departure is to look beyond party membership and party origin. The focus is on the 21st century influence of the dominance of the market economy on party ideology - the seemingly consensus on the political agenda, a convergence of commitment to some normative values and ideas by the political class, which is distinctively neoliberal. The preferences for neoliberal economic policies: free enterprise, privatization, deregulation, commercialization, liberalization, and globalization which cut across political divide. The emergence of liberal democracy and the triumphal ascendancy of capitalism and the free market system that promote economy driven primarily by the private sector; rather than government intervention and social spending as a result of the collapse of Soviet Union/communism.

This is anchored on the social consensus theory put forth by Hartz, (1955) which argues that ideological consensus breeds political parties that share similar “principles” but differ in strategies. Hartz used the theory to explain the phenomenon of two dominant party system in U.S by arguing that America is characterized by basic agreement; the two parties evolved within this consensus to offer different policies that can appeal to the majority.

The United States' political culture was born liberal in the eighteenth century. Liberal ideology is characterized by competitive individualism, the right to private property, limited government, and a free market. Democratic and Republican parties therefore, share a common set of assumptions about American society and this to a large extent limit the ability of American government officials to enact policies that challenged these liberal assumptions. The ideological consensus in U.S. created two major political parties that look very much alike. Differences arise between these two groups because each party has a slightly different opinion on how best to achieve these goals. The pursuit for votes is often a competition of personalities rather than ideas. Schlesinger Jr. (1962) argues that “such words (*Liberal / conservative*) in the American consensus tend to be counters in a game rather than symbols of impassable divisions of principle...” Ambiguity and even interchangeability of position testify according to Schlesinger Jr. (1962) to the absence of deep differences of principle in American society.

In Nigeria, IMF induced economic policies of neo-liberalism in the era globalization have insured that political parties share ideology. The modern day Nigerian elections are conducted in an atmosphere that suggests that fundamental ideological issues are settled across national political parties (ideological consensus). According to Yar’adua, (2017) Nigerians in the recent years have reached a national consensus in at least four areas: (a) To deepen democracy and the rule of law; (b) Build an economy driven primarily by the private sector, not government; (c) Display zero tolerance for corruption in all its forms,

and, (d) Finally, restructure and staff the government to ensure efficiency and good governance.

Since 1999 return to democratic rule in Nigeria under the PDP, government policies had bestowed more thrust on the private sector participation in the economy. In the era of global consensus on the neoliberal ideology with emphasis on free enterprise, privatization, deregulation, commercialization, liberalization, Foreign Direct Investment and globalization, political parties find it difficult to distinguish itself by maintaining its ideological departure. Main stream political parties share policies within the same ideological paradigm which is distinctly neoliberal only differing in the strategies of implementation, personality of their candidates, and performance in office to seek public support.

Contrary to the popular opinions, the Nigerian party competition has come to resemble that of the U.S. in the era of neoliberal consensus. The implication is that Nigerians whether conservatives, liberals or progressives agree on these basic aims of deepening democracy and the rule of law; restructuring and staffing the government to ensure efficiency and good governance, but differ on how best to build an economy driven primarily by the private sector, not government; and displaying zero tolerance for corruption in all its forms. Rather than developing distinct ideological positions, the two parties developed policy platforms. While the personalities of the candidates remain at the forefront of election campaign discourse, the candidates and their political parties differ on key local issues that are important to voters. Evidence of polarization can be seen but not on a strict ideological bases. Partisan politics and party polarization stall legislations based on stand on national issues, e.g. APC refusal to support the passage of the 2014 Budget over the perceived role of the presidency in the River State crisis.

The hegemonic strand of the neoliberal ideology and the seemingly neo-liberal consensus in the 21st century Nigeria means that the political parties can only differ in effective governance, policies, and candidate's personality than ideology to seek the public support. The formation of APC for the first time raised the possibility of a genuine competition between the PDP and the APC based on national issues.

Methodology

The study was carried out on the bases of access to the broadest possible array of current published and unpublished materials: partisan campaign discourse, platforms / manifestoes, speeches and 'open letters' to the electorates emanating from the two major parties in Nigeria; books, journals, periodicals, articles, seminar papers, and dissertations. "The most useful set of indicators for party ideology are provided by partisan campaign discourse, specifically those platforms (manifestos), speeches and "open letters" to the electorates emanating from the major parties' (Gerring, 1998:6). The basic question according to Gerring is "do they carry messages that are internally coherent, externally different (from one another), and stable (through time)?" We extracted information from

party campaign discourse; speeches, open letters to the electorate, policy documents and election manifesto (platforms) issued by PDP and APC in Nigeria. This involves: (a) Providing the issue-specific information necessary for explaining party's ideological position. (b) Distilling general ideological positions from policy specific information mainly on 'Free Enterprise' and 'Social Welfare'.

The text published by a political party in order to compete for votes in national election (manifesto) is one of the parties' authoritative policy statements and the indicator of the parties' policy preferences at a given point in time. Manifesto data can be used, and have been used, to provide valid and reliable measurements of party policy position. While the two major parties (the APC and PDP), have prepared manifesto which to some extent differ, there are no serious evidences to suggest that both political parties strictly rely on these manifestos for their policies while in government. Though on paper the two political parties are right-wing parties, one "a little to the Right" the other "a little to the Left", in practical implementation of policies virtually every party implement populist policies. The two parties do not lack ideology per se; but they operate on a shared principle within the hegemonic ideology of our time – neo-liberalism.

Conservative and Progressive Ideological Differences: the Nigerian PDP and APC

If PDP manifesto (conservative) is used as a base, on economy it projects free-market economic system while the manifesto of the APC (Progressive), proffered a regulated economy to cushion the effects of unbridled market economy not to challenge it with an alternative option.

Table 1: CONSERVATIVE VIEWS VERSUS PROGRESSIVE VIEWS IN NIGERIA

Issue	Conservative View (PDP)	Progressive View (APC)
Building an economy driven primarily by the private sector	Bestows more thrust on the private sector participation in the economy	The perspective that intervention can generate jobs and economic growth

Authors, 2018 extracted from National Orientation Agency (2010), Source Book on Political Parties' Manifestoes & Constitutions; Roadmap- to -a -new -Nigeria.pdf

A cursory glance on the manifestos of the two major political parties in Nigeria clearly show that on the ideological spectrum, the two parties are right-wing parties but the APC is "a little to the left of the center". While the PDP bestowed much more thrust on the private sector participation in the economy which makes it center of the right. The APC on paper at least, is center of the left, which bestows much more thrust on public sector investment in the economy (the perspective that intervention can generate jobs and economic growth). The ideology of APC proffer the reduction of the prevailing mass

poverty in the country through financial handouts and public sector job creation; while PDP emphasized the promotion of economic policies and strategies that will lead to the creation of more jobs in the private sector, through increased foreign investment.

Table 2: CORE DIMENSIONS ON ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL POLICIES, NIGERIAN PDP/APC 2007 Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) Manifesto 2014 All Progressives Congress (APC) Manifesto

Source Document *National Orientation Agency (2010), Source Book on Political Parties' Manifestoes & Constitutions* **Roadmap- to -a -new -Nigeria.pdf**

Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PDP aims altogether, at establishing one of the leading economies in Africa; an economy that experiences rapid and sustained growth of not less than 10% per annum. • The creation of a national economy that is highly competitive, responsive to incentives, private sector -led, broad-based, diversified, and market- oriented and open, but based on internal momentum for its growth, is the aim of the PDP. • To get there PDP will sustain the private sector-led economic growth strategy, create and maintain a stable macroeconomic environment for private enterprise to thrive, continue the divestment of government holding ventures where the private sector can operate (p.1261-2). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are committed to nation where every citizen has the opportunity to work and earn a decent wage, and where the disadvantaged elderly, the disadvantaged disabled and the unemployed are assisted by the state. • Building a diverse economy that allows every Nigerian to earn a living and better care for his or her family is our number one priority (p.2). • Encourage state government to focus on employment creation by matching every one job created by the state government through funding with two jobs created by the federal government.
Welfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The party shall be committed to; the principle of participatory democracy that lay emphasis on the welfare of our people; the principle of social justice and equality of opportunities for all citizens. • At the root of Nigeria's political and social problems is poverty and low access to economic opportunities. The improvements in the well being of Nigerians is the ultimate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement a phased social security benefits scheme for the unemployed and vulnerable, beginning with poor disabled and poor elderly citizens. • Indirect conditional monthly cash transfer of N5,000 to the 25 million poorest and most vulnerable citizens...

objective of the PDP's economic policy, and make accessible to every Nigerian the basic need of life. The focus will be to create a market-based economy driven by small and medium scale businesses and regulated by a reformed public sector (p.1259).

- provide allowances to discharged but unemployed Youth Corps members for 12 months

Source: Author's, 2018 extracted from party manifestos. The two parties surely, have a slight different orientation to the management of the economy and social welfare at least on paper.

The APC manifesto clearly showed a hidden recognition of the role of the state in the development process and the need to protect the weak and vulnerable from the vagaries of the market. It highlighted improved welfare for citizens as one of its focal points, suggesting the need for a significant increase in government spending (payment of NGN5000 monthly to the poorest 25m people in the country, construction of 1million low cost houses within four years, reliable electricity generation and infrastructure; transportation, water supply, dams, and road. Attention of the APC as against PDP is more on the people's welfare.

On paper APC is a little anti-neoliberal and more "little to the left" of the two parties. A curious look at *Wikipedia's* analysis of Nigerian's political parties is interesting. It describes the ruling All Progressives Congress as a party leaning to the centre-left, one favouring strict government regulation, a controlled market and upholds social democratic philosophies. It went on to describe the opposition Peoples Democratic Party as a center-right, free market party with economic liberalism at the fore front of its economic policies. Natchaya Zhou & Sumi Nam, in their slide presentation on the theme "political parties in Nigeria" (<https://slideplayer.com/slide/6043341/>) described the ideology of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) as "... Free market oriented political position: center - right ideology: conservatism & economic liberalism..." All Progressive Congress was considered to be "a centre-left political party favours regulated market economic policies, and a strong and active role for government regulation". The ideological inclination of the APC can also be deciphered from the comments of some leaders of the APC, as proffered by Tinubu, (2013) in his address at the British parliament:

We begin from the premise that the Washington Consensus and the IMF/Post-Bretton Woods prescriptions for development have served their time and to a large extent have not delivered on their promises. There is a need for what has been described as a THIRD PATH - a Pathway between the pure market-driven, neo-liberal socio-economic policies and the various variants of the command economic models. That Third Path is particularly important for countries such as ours with an incredibly large and growing poor, poor infrastructure and weak financial and

social institutions (<http://www.thescoopng.com/the-nigeria-that-shall-come-to-pass-text-of-tinubus-speech-at-the-british-parliament/>).

Other areas that were captured in the APC manifesto include: better management of job creation, fight against corruption, free and quality education, agriculture development, housing development and healthcare plan for children and adults, social welfare for the less privileged, roads, power and infrastructure, natural resources, security, freedom of religion and foreign affairs. These were also stated in the PDP's manifesto but the APC relied on the promise of efficiency and the personality of presidential candidate in the implementation of these policies as a point of departure from the PDP to woo the voters. Contrary to some analysts and politicians (Soludo, 2013; Abaje, 2013, Tambuwal, 2018, Bode, 2018) the two major parties in Nigeria do not lack ideology or ideological coloration at least on paper.

Ideological Inclination of APC and PDP in Nigeria: Theory and Practice

The difficulty is in maintaining strict ideological cut in the era of neoliberal consensus in Nigeria. This was summarized by Centre for Democracy and Development (2014):

...The party manifesto of APC is presented in a way that suggests that the party considers good governance, internal security and economic development as its key priority areas. On the other hand, the party manifesto of PDP seems to prioritize economy, energy, agriculture and food security which are well-accommodated within the framework of the market economy that partly explains its policies and programmes as the ruling party at the federal level. While the same logic of open market economy can be advanced to explain the positions of APC on the economy, energy, agriculture and food production where the party promises to promote privatization and commercialization, the populist disposition of the party tends to overshadow its inclination towards economic liberalism.

There is a solid commitment of various factions of the Nigerian ruling class to neo-liberalism across boundaries of political parties. The class base of the national leadership in APC is decidedly neoliberal. It is also significant that generally, some of the same personnel that anchored the PDP policies are prominent in the APC. The observation of The Punch columnist, Uche Igwe regarding who and who were at the APC Policy Dialogue, is particularly instructive:

It was a collection of experts of some sorts. However, some 16 years ago, as the civilian regime of President Olusegun Obasanjo was preparing to take over from Gen. Abdusalami Abubakar a similar conference was held. I looked around and saw exactly (probably a majority) of the people who attended the conference in

Abuja. They also offered the same nice proposals and suggestions that we had last week (The Punch May 29, 2015:96).

While the two major parties (the APC and PDP), have prepared manifestos which to some extent differ, there are no serious evidences to suggest that both political parties strictly rely on these manifestos for their policies while in government. The seemingly national consensus in Nigeria to build an economy driven primarily by the private sector, not government; restructure and staff government to ensure efficiency and good governance which is driven by the neo-liberal ideology since the end of the cold-war has encouraged parties with overlapping points of view whose main focus is to win elections, not to represent vastly different sets of beliefs.

As it stands in the 21st century Nigeria, there is no alternative ideological position to the mainstream neoliberal ideas. It is also difficult to distinguish between the neo-liberal economic policies of the party at the centre and those of the state governments including those controlled by the opposition parties in Nigeria. Almost nothing in terms of policies will show that the states are being ruled by different parties. Virtually every Governor implement 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. Where any of the parties have a hard working elected public office holder, his performance will translate to the success of that party and the party would be seen to have performed well in that state, seat or office.

Conclusion

Political parties need not be solely ideological in their make-up and operation to be effective and present alternative choice to the electorate. They can also be issue based. Differentiation of the major political parties should be based on their stand on issues and efficiency in governance giving rise to issue based political parties rather than ideological parties. Hence, the parties share ideology, the electorates should rely on effectiveness in office to guide their choice of candidates and parties. The rating of individual political party should be based on the effectiveness of their policies while in government. In the era of de-emphasis on ideologies the personality of individual contestants should be given prominence in the internal selection of candidates by the political parties.

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