



POLITICAL PARTIES, IDEOLOGY AND RELIGION: A CASE STUDY OF THE NIGERIAN STATE

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ABSTRACT

Political parties are crucial entities in politics and are birthed from the political thought, culture, consciousness, and enlightenment of the members. A political party is an organized and structured "coetus of people" with a "sui generic" identity established to recruit, educate, and training candidates to be elected into the vacant public offices by credible electorates within the provisions of the Constitution. The concept of Ideology pertains to the apparatus or order of ideas, particularly one that forms the foundation for policy, economic and political theory. It is also the rationale by which systems, institutions, organizations, governments, and states function with relation to political parties. It defines the reason behind a party's manifesto, its choice of candidates, and the most crucial policies adopted following the election into office. For a post-colonial state such as Nigeria, the challenges posed by political parties, ideology, and religion is one that has affected the overall impact of democracy in the state. Thus, this innovative research paper examines captiously the genesis and amplifications of political parties in Nigeria with insights from the first generation political parties to date. This research paper also explains the concept of religion and its impact on Nigerian polity. For this research paper, the historical approach was adopted as well as the qualitative method of secondary data collection.

Keywords: Political parties, Ideology, Religion, Nigeria, Public office.

INTRODUCTION

Political Parties are crucial entities in politics as well as active participants in the political process of a Nation. They are significantly competitive as political parties are generally vote-seeking parties and office-seeking parties [Strom: 1990].

Political Parties are found in all countries of the world; democratic and undemocratic. They consist of persons, who by their common views on important public questions desire to govern to put their principles into operation [Singh, Singh: 1950]. Political Parties serve as intermediaries. They help facilitate inclusiveness and participation in politics as a political party's internal organization impacts its electoral effectiveness [Caillaud, Tirole: 2002].

Political Parties can take various patterns of development as well as a political ideology that define the manner of development and effectiveness. For example, regional parties could emerge under regional or cultural interests. These parties are often restricted to a particular state and are rooted in both regional aspirations and grievances [PAI:1990].

Political shirking is a phenomenon that is peculiar to political parties and not necessarily the politician. This is when political figures and actors are influenced by their political parties to avoid work, duties, or responsibilities, especially if they are somewhat cumbersome and demand a huge sum of money. Senators often shirk in the last term. The “ADA” roll call voting scores of 1947-2006 is proof of this. The degree of shirking is limited by political parties but could in some cases be caused by political parties, which constrained the politician in his last term, and varies by post-senate career choices [Debacker: 2012].

The decline of political entities is a universal dilemma yet peculiar to political parties. Although all political parties tend to evolve, they can become too fragmented to respond adequately to complex issues such as energy and the economy when in public office. A divergent perspective is the position that parties can adopt née political conditions hereby becoming stronger through the imaginative use of techniques employed in the service of candidates [Everson: 1982].

One political psychology adopted by political parties when presenting a candidate for election is personality profiles. This informs the political party's preferences [Caprara, Barbaranelli, Zimbardo: 1999].

In regards to an informational rationale for political parties, political parties in the United States emphasize the importance of parties as producers of political brand names. Claims by proponents that these brands are of inestimable value both to voters and candidates, enabling voters the ability to make decisions as well as candidates win elections [Snyder, Ting: 2002].

Political parties are generally able to position themselves on new issues by establishing long-standing agendas that condition the way they respond to new challenges. The response of a political party to an issue arising on the agenda is conditioned by the bounded rationalities of party leaders and the reputational constraints imposed by prior policy positions [Marks, Wilson, Ray: 2002].

Political Parties occupy an important role in the social flow of political communication. We address several questions regarding party mobilization efforts [Huckfeldt, Sprague: 1992].

Thus, political parties, in their role as gatekeepers mediate the relationship between country-level factors, such as women's participation in the labor and political outcomes for women [Kunovich, Paxton: 2005].

Political Analysts and Scientists who examine the changing structures and dynamics of past politics, have given themselves to observe the fusion of political and non-political spheres of social life and political parties have directly and indirectly been pivotal to this process [OFFE: 1985].

1.0 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION:

Five salient concepts enable the cerebral understanding of this research paper. These five concepts must be conceptualized: 'Political Party', Ideology, Religion, Nigeria, and the term Public Office.

i) Political Party: A political party is an organization that facilitates the process by which candidates can compete in a specific country's elections. They hold similar ideas about parties and often promote specific ideological or policy goals. A political party is also an organized group of persons who seek to acquire and exercise political power. The various types of political parties include cadre parties, mass-based parties, ethnicity-based parties, etc. Political parties play a vital role in political stability. Their ability to work hand in hand with the opposition after losing an election is vital to political growth and development [Alesina, Ozler, Roubini, Swagel: 1996].

ii) Ideology: Ideology deals with a system of ideas that form the basis of economic or political theory and policy. It is a set of opinions or beliefs that govern a group of people or individuals. It often refers to a set of political beliefs and ideals that characterize a particular culture. Ideology could either be political, cultural, economic, or social. Examples are Capitalism, Communism, Socialism, and Marxism. Political ideologies can be flawed in a certain sense. They are flawed, in the relevant sense, when they function as persistent barriers to the acquisition of this knowledge [Stanley: 2015].

iii) Religion: Religion is the belief in and worship of a deity, superhuman controlling power, a personal God, or gods. Religion generally has some conjunction with the arts [Mellon: 2014].

There are some features of religious belief and practice that warrant principled toleration of religion on either moral or epistemic grounds. There plainly are such features, for example, that religious beliefs are often matters of conscience and thus would fall within the scope of any argument [Leiter: 2012].

Religion has numerous interactions, tensions, and possibilities in politics, and as one cannot act independently of the other in a democracy [Audi 2020].

2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For clarity and the critical, empirical assessment of political parties, Ideology, and Religion with Nigeria as a case study, the most suitable theory for this paper is none other than the "Group Theory". Group Theory deals with the study of how individual political actors assemble to form political groups that participate in social and political developmental processes. Group theorists argue that the concentration of power is not portrayed in the minority class of the elite but rather dispersed amongst various interest groups that compete against each other [Varma: 1975].

3.0 POLITICAL PARTIES, IDEOLOGY, AND RELIGION: A Case Study of the Nigerian State

The issue of political parties and ideology in Nigeria can be traced to as far back as the independence and establishment of Nigeria as a democratic republic and particularly the overthrow of Yakubu Gowon. Nigeria has experienced constant shifts in its foreign, economic, and internal political policies. Nigeria has thus emerged through the dilemma, and challenges posed by such policies while from one vantage point, the country always seems to be moving smoothly along the chosen path of political change, from another, these developments seem like mere ripples on the surface of black Africa's most complex social formation [Joseph; 1978].

To say religion and politics should be kept apart could be either wrong or right, depending on the context and conditions to which religion and politics are defined. This is contingent on our definition of both concepts. If 'politics' means party politics and religion means the authoritative structure of religion, it is tenable to say that 'politics' and 'religion' should be kept apart [Hurley: 1971].

Religion and politics in Sub-Saharan Africa are somewhat more complex and beyond the ordinary. The over-reaching tentacles of religion have permeated the selection of candidates and ultimately the election process as Christian organizations and associations have morphed into labor groups and now lobby with political parties, politicians, and the masses to influence the outcomes of election which is primarily due to their large following and the overall influence over the people. While many pious works on Christianity on sale in Africa are authored by both African and American evangelicals, popular books on witchcraft and mystical voyages are almost invariably written by Africans and published locally. These perceptions have transcended into Nigerian politics as political parties/party members associate themselves with these fetish crafts to influence the electoral process into a more favorable outcome through the means of spirituality. Religious leaders across all religions and faith in the case of Nigeria, this is the state of religious affairs in the Nation. The vital debate on the topic of religion and politics or its involvement with politics is the overall formulation of public policy in Nigeria. Surely the revival of the politics of religious affirmation transcends Nigeria's borders as this has become more prevalent in Africa [Ellis, Haar, 1998; Ilesanmi, 1995].

It is often thought by many discussants and theorists of Nigerian politics that Nigeria being a 'secular state' ought not to have religious crises. However, the constitution does not give preference to any of the two dominant religions – Christianity and Islam. Yet practices of successive governments give the impression of a country whose governments have inclinations towards either of the two religions or both. In the case of Nigeria, religious activities and practices ought to be independent of the Nigerian government and vice versa. It is the involvement of the Nigerian government in religious matters that ultimately fuels and creates religious crises across the borders of the country [Magbadelo; 2003].

There is ever-increasing proof that social movements constitute an important repository of Africa's political practice. The dilemma however is that formal institutions are sometimes unable to penetrate and impose their logic on social movements. Christian Coulon argues that 'religious recomposition' witnessed in Nigeria in these present times is neither simply a 'revivalist movement' nor a mechanical response to political and economic crises [Ibrahim, 1991].

Political parties in Nigeria tend to weaponize certain inherent conditions and variables in the state to get into a public office. Issues such as tribalism, nepotism, marginalization, ethnicity are phenomena adopted by political parties to cause social disparities and political upheavals so much that if their candidates don't get elected, the nation will remain ungovernable.

4.0 RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND IDEOLOGY

Religious Identity or affiliations and ideology pose a threat to not only the political institutions of Nigeria but also the manner of social relations in the state and amongst citizens. Thus, those who owe allegiance to their religious affiliations and political ideology and are privileged enough to function in the position of political power, make decisions, and draft policies based on bias and prejudice. Hence, the loyalty towards religion, political party, and ideology eliminates every sense of patriotism, nationalism, and Pan Africanism without any sense of objectivity. Political parties, political actors, and institutions alike then make decisions not based on what is lawful and expedient, but rather, on the judgment of the identity of their religion, and ideology thus discarding the statutes and provisions of the constitution and international law [Paden, 2015].

The two most practiced religions in Nigeria are Christianity and Islam and each has its identity patterns.

4.1 CHRISTIAN IDENTITY IN NIGERIA

The Christian section of the Nigerian religious street is also complicated and its major clusters are the Roman Catholic, mainline protestant, evangelical, pentecostal, and syncretistic groups that blend the Christian faith with indigenous religions. The Christian Association of Nigeria consists of five blocs: The Christian Council of Nigeria, The Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, The Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, The Evangelical Fellowship of West Africa, Pentecost, and the Organization of African Instituted Churches. The CAN umbrella organization shows clear internal tensions, although the Various Churches have agreed to build an ecumenical center in Abuja, partly to create parity with the National Mosque. In 2015, the Roman Catholics sect suspended its membership in CAN because its Pentecostal leaders are too closely associated with the governments of President Goodluck Jonathan [Paden: 2015].

What is presented by some political and religious leaders as being according to "religious teaching or ideology" can be reforming a society marked by secularism. One way in which Religion can be seen to be compromised and limited is how so-called "Religious" factors have often been reduced to "confessional" or even sectarian factors [Taylor: 1997]).

4.2 THE MUSLIM IDENTITY IN NIGERIA

In Nigeria, a further refinement of religious identities is evident in the Muslim Community, historically; the predominant types have revolved around Sufi brotherhoods. After the collapse of the first republic in the wake of assassinations, the military era began the transition to an oil-based economy. This petro-state era had a significant impact on the Muslim establishment in allowing for an increase in the number of pilgrims participating in the annual trips to Mecca. Following independence, public interest grew to an almost insatiable level and to date, many non-state actors try to debate the role of religion in Nigeria society. Religion has thus become an important, albeit potentially fluid component in the evolving state ideology [Paden: 2015; Olcott, Ziyaeva: 2008]

5.0 POLITICAL PARTIES IN POST-COLONIAL NIGERIA

A postcolonial state is a phrase used to characterize and describe a nation that experienced colonial rule. The essence of independence is the privilege of autonomy and the ability for such a state to run itself beyond any form of external interference. For the so-called third world or developing nations of the world, this has not been the case. There has emerged a systemic and institutional control of these states. This is achieved through the indirect control of the economies of these nations through agencies such as multinational cooperation, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank. Through these agencies, the so-called third world or developing nations are hereby kept in perpetual debt as unprogressive economic policies such as the devaluation of the nation's currency are prescribed.

5.1 THE FIRST REPUBLIC (1963-1966)

Sequel to the provisions of the commencement of the newly established constitution on October 1, 1963, late Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe was declared the first constitutional President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria whilst Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa functioned in the office of Prime Minister. In the formative years of Nigeria, the first republic saw a high degree of political consciousness and enlightenment as political parties lacked any form of proliferation in their conduct, character, and agenda. Hence merger between various political parties for a common good and zeal for patriotism fostered a sense of cooperation that transcended culture, politics, religion, and ideology. This led to the alliance of two major parties The Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) and the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA). Subsequently, the alliance of Chief Obafemi Awolowo (AG) and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe's (NCNC) was due to the distrust between NPC and NCNC after the population census of 1962/63. It was this census that gave the NCNC the impression that the population figure from the region was doctored.

Nigeria's first military coup d'état was carried out on the 15th January 1966 by five Majors - Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu who was born in Kaduna, the Northern part of Nigeria, Emmanuel Ifeajuna, Timothy Onwuaturigwu, Chris Anuforo, Don Okafor alongside Humphrey Chukwuka, and Adewale Ademoyega all under the leadership of Major Chukwuma K. Nzeogwu. Sequel to the execution of the coup d'état, Prime Minister Alhaji Abubakar, premier of Northern and Western Region sir Alhaji Ahmadu Bello and the Minister of Finance Chief Samuel L. Akintola alongside Chief Okotie Eboh were found dead which created the belief to some degree that the coup had an ethnic coloring. This occurrence further created an impression on the lasting Yorubas and Hausa Fulanis because the ceremonial President Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe traveled to the United Kingdom on health grounds and toured the Caribbean after. Also, Dr. Michael I. Okpara, Chief Dennis Osadebey, and Dr. Kingsley O. Mbadiwe respectively did not meet similar fate during and sequel to the execution of the coup. Aside from the mentioned civilians who were killed, Brigadier Samuel Ademulegu, Brigadier Zakariya Maimalari, Col Kur Mohammed, Col Sodeinde, Lt. Col. Abogo Largema, and Col. Arthur Unegbe who was the only Igbo military officer to be killed [Ademoyega, 1981; Akinola, 2014].

The coup in Nigeria gave the problems of ethnicity, religion, and ideology new dimensions and indeed necessitated fresh thinking about African politics as a whole [Feit, 1968].

In the context of Nigeria's development, the conditioning condition of internal and external forces continues to threaten the unity and sovereignty of the state [Ige: 2021].

5.2 THE SECOND REPUBLIC (1979-1983)

The 1979 Constitution saw Nigeria retain the multi-party system. 1978 saw the establishment of five new political parties which included the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) pioneered by Alhaji Shehu Shagari, Chief Obafemi Awolowo's Unity Party of Nigeria, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe's Nigerian People's Party, Mallam Aminu Kano's People's Redemption Party and lastly, Alhaji Ibrahim Waziri Great Nigerian People's Party (GNPP) [Osaghae, 1998; Dode, 2010; Ogbeyi, 2010; Osiki, 2010; Akinboye and Anifowose, 2015].

In the course of Nigeria's second republic from the period of 1979-1983, political actors took advantage of the state of affairs at the time which ensured the politicization of the Nigerian society [Vaughan: 1993].

5.3 POLITICAL PARTIES AND MEMBERS DEFECTION

The act of defection by members of a political party is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria's party politics. This is when political figures switch their alliance from a political party to another not necessarily for a greater good but rather for political ambitions and the urge to remain relevant in the Nigerian political space. An example of the defection of party members was that of the first republic. During the AG intra-party crisis, Akintola's faction loyalists in the AG defected to his United People's Party (UPP) which he established shortly after his expulsion from the AG in 1962. The metamorphosis of UPP was evident in its transition to the Nigerian National Democratic sequel to Chief Samuel L. Akintola joined forces with Chief Remi Fani-Kayode's group. The present circumstance of the fourth republic is no different from the previous era as party defection has become a norm and a means for political survival. Hence, politicians defect in an ultimate attempt to establish hegemonic party regimes. Hegemonic party regimes are non-democratic regimes that rule with the aid of a dominant political party [Reuter, Gandhi: 2011].

6.0 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Without a shadow of a doubt, it is evident that political parties in Nigeria lack a common fundamental understanding which is that all activities, political agenda, the polity is to foster growth and development in Nigeria. Religion without the wake of basic principles of unity, love peace, nationalism, and patriotism will only further divide Nigeria. Political parties in Nigeria irrespective of whose party is in power ought to enable and facilitate stability rather than make the nation ungovernable just because an opposition party is in power.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to the in-depth discoveries of this paper, the following are strongly recommended;

- i. Political Parties in Nigeria should have a definite ideology that defines their vision for a better Nigeria. Those that lack one (an ideology) are encouraged to adopt one.
- ii. Political Parties in Nigeria should disengage from dirty politics that entail bribery in exchange for votes but rather should be the machinery that upholds the principles of democracy.
- iii. Misconduct by party members at all levels should be dealt with and politicians with party representation should be held accountable.

- iv. The defection of party members should not only be discouraged but almost prohibited. Hence, individuals, political observers, and the citizenry will put careful thought into their choice of party and whose ideology the belief is most appropriate.
- v. The best ideology that is most peculiar to Nigeria should be adequately examined and adopted by all political parties in Nigeria; hereby drawing a common code of conduct for all political parties to uphold irrespective of the divergent interpretations of such ideology.

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