

Constitutional Perspective on Political Party Ideology in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

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The constitutionalisation of political parties in most third-world democracies began at independence. Nigeria's political parties are no exception. This study examined the place of political party ideology in the Nigerian constitution. This was done with specific reference to parties' ideological guidelines in the Nigerian 1999 constitution. A case study design was utilised for the study. Three political parties studied include the All Progressives Congress (APC), the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), and the People's Democratic Party (PDP). However, references were made to other political parties. Key Informant Interviews were conducted with politicians, party leaders, academics and heads of civil society organisations to elicit relevant information. National Publicity Secretaries, four National Directors from APC Headquarters, and nine serving members of the National Assembly from the three parties—three APC, two APGA, and four PDP—were interviewed. Others were Director Generals, one each from the Electoral Institute of Nigeria and the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD); one programme manager from CDD; one United Nations Development Programme consultant [red text: consultant], and two researchers from the National Institute for Legislative Studies. Secondary data were sourced from the national constitution, party constitutions, party guidelines, and media reports. The data were content analysed. The study attributed the lack of a sharp ideological divide among the parties to the constitutional provisions and the constitutionalisation of Nigerian political parties in the Fourth Republic. Hence, the Nigerian state should refrain from overt constitutionalisation of party matters. This will give parties leverage in the ideological or policy space.

Keywords: Constitutional regulations, political party, political ideologies, Nigeria's Fourth Republic

Introduction

Globally, there have been constitutional reviews to regulate, curtail, and restrict the activities of political parties, leading to democratic reversal, especially in third-world countries. Notably, Van Biezen (2012) argued that several countries, especially third-world countries and post-modern European countries, have since reviewed their constitutions to regulate political parties. Since the national constitution overtly regulates political parties, it suggests that the character of political parties in these democracies could be traceable or explained by constitutional provisions. This increasing trend, according to Janda (2005), was not originally considered a source of party law. With the attainment of independence by most

African countries in the 1960s, more countries have incorporated the regulation of political parties into their constitutions. This surge has prompted scholars to examine the steady rise in the constitutionalisation of political parties both in developed and developing democracies (Barnedt, 1998; Bogaards et al., 2010; Janda, 2005; Biezen and Borz, 2009; Reilly, 2006; Van Biezen, 2012). For instance, Biezen and Borz argued that, historically, the constitutions of liberal democracies in Europe refrained from making express reference to the existence of parties or describing their role in the political system (Biezen & Borz, 2009). However, the constitutionalisation of political parties in Europe began in the immediate post-war period, with the republican constitution of Italy in

1947 and the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany (1949) as the most notable examples. These were, arguably, the first European democracies that expressly constitutionalised their political parties.

In Nigeria, scholars (Simbine, 2005; Aiyede, 2018) have held the position that Nigerian political parties operate without ideology. They argued that this perceived absence of party ideology was responsible for the irresponsibility and crisis that characterised political parties in Nigeria. This position attributes and reduces all the pathological symptoms observed in Nigerian political parties to the presumed absence or lack of ideologies. It is therefore possible that both the lack of ideology hypothesis and other pathologies that characterise political parties could be explained by other variables. While studies on Nigerian political parties (Simbine, 2005; Aiyede, 2018) have explained the seemingly ideological vagueness or absence in the political parties of the fourth republic, with few exceptions, little attention has been given to the constitutional provisions that overtly regulate them. It is against this background that this paper examines the constitutionalisation of party ideologies in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Thus, selected textual references to political parties as contained in the Nigerian 1999 Constitution, as amended was analysed.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative approach. The All Progressives Congress (APC), the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) were the major political parties considered for the study. However, references were made to other political parties. Key Informant Interviews were conducted with politicians, party leaders, the academia and heads of civil society organisations to elicit relevant information. Secondary data were sourced from the Nigerian 1999 Constitution, party constitutions, party manifestos, party guidelines, and media reports. The data gathered were content analysed.

Theoretical Expositions

To further interrogate why parties are incorporated into the constitutions of modern democratic states, it is pertinent to trace how ideas about constitutions and constitutionalism have evolved. The classical liberal and republican ideas of constitutionalism

attributed three major functions to modern constitutions. They include the creation of political systems, the establishment of institutional structures of the state, and the placing of boundaries on the exercise of political power (Castiglione, 1996; Murphy, 1993). Over time, as emphasis on human rights increased, constitutions became the foundation for political legitimacy (Bartolini, 2010). Under this new approach, emphasis extends beyond the traditional function of limiting the exercise of political power (Elkin, 1993, p. 21). This is based on the fact that citizens constitute the mainstay of politics, while political parties are indispensable institutions within a political society.

Therefore, the contemporary focus of constitutionalism is on the citizen as a responsible member of the state (Elkin, 1993). On the other hand, the task of political representation in a democracy is assigned to individuals through political parties. As a result, constitutions gave recognition to political parties as the proxies of citizens, who are the main actors in a democracy.

Arising from this, the competition among political parties during elections and in parliament serves as a balance of power that compels the government to be accountable to the electorate (Bellamy, 2007). Thus, representative democracies incorporate political parties into their constitutions as institutions that contribute to the balance of interests in the political system. Another reason worth mentioning is the role of judicial review and constitutional courts in weighing and determining the constitutional validity or otherwise of ordinary laws, as well as ensuring that political actors act in consonance with acceptable democratic standards (Stone, 2000). It therefore implies that constitutional courts can and do exercise checks on the activity and behaviour of political parties.

Parties' constitutional regulation has progressively moved from one dimension to another. In terms of content, the models of party constitutionalisation have developed differently since the period following the Second World War (Van Biezen, 2012). In the years following the war, from the 1970s until 1989, the emphasis of constitutional party regulation was on parties in government. In the 1990s and the years following it, the emphasis shifted towards a party constitutional regulation model aimed at protecting democracy. Under this model, conditions and limitations on membership in political parties, as

well as freedoms expressed by parties, are defined and enshrined in the constitution (Borz, 2016). Following this sequence, the last model of party constitutional regulation sees parties as a special type of public utility in relation to democratic principles, exemplified by Portugal in the 1970s and Switzerland and Luxembourg in the 2000s (Borz, 2016).

Understanding the Concept of Ideology

Ideology is a concept fraught with considerable ambiguity especially within the social sciences. However, it remains a central term in social science discourse. The intellectual history of the concept is traceable to Antoine Destutt de Tracy (1754–1836). For de Tracy, ideology is a “science of ideas”—the beginning of all forms of intellectual inquiry. Erikson and Tedin (2003, p. 64) offered a simple definition of political ideology. The duo defined political ideology as a set of beliefs about the proper order of society and how it can be achieved. Several other scholars have conceived ideology within the definitional framework of Erikson and Tedin (Adorno et al., 1950; Campbell et al., 1960).

A definition different from that of Erikson and Tedin was given by Denzau and North (2000, p. 24). They highlighted and emphasised the ideological function of group integration or collectivities. To them, ideologies are the expression of the mental framework of a people, held and shared by members of the same community. Ideology offers both an analysis of the political system and a prescription of how the system should be organised.

From the above definitions, three important indices of ideology are evident. First, ideology is shared and held by adherents. Second, ideology provides an interpretation for social, political, and economic situations; and third, ideology normatively prescribes ways of addressing life's situations. There are volumes of literature that treat and describe ideology as a communicator of widely shared credence, values, norms, and opinions of a classifiable group such as a constituency, political parties, class, or society (Freeden, 2001; Knight, 2006). Basically, ideology describes or interprets the world as it is or as it ought to be. It makes assertions or assumptions about economic and political realities, the human world, historical phenomena, present and future realities, as well as

possibilities. It is usually prescriptive, specifying the ideal means of attaining social, economic, and political expectations. According to Heywood (2009), ideologies could be understood as secular religions with inherent controlling characteristics that serve as mechanisms of social regulation, compelling obedience and subordination. In contrast, not all political beliefs or ideologies are closed. For instance, liberalism, with its attributes of fundamental freedom, tolerance, and diversity, constitutes an open form of ideology.

The conceptual discourse on ideology above is by no means exhaustive. It is sufficient to draw on Gerring's conceptual framework for this study. Gerring (1997) identified the core definitional attributes commonly associated with all ideologies after carefully perusing definitions within the social science literature. This method of operationalising the concept of ideology is combined with a “context-specific” definition applicable to political parties (Sartori, 1994).

Gerring's conceptual framework provides the following identifiable attributes of all ideologies. First, ideology is located in thought conceived as ideas and beliefs or a type of political thinking. Second, it is located in behaviour ideology directs and influences the political behaviour of its adherents. Third, it is found in language Ideologies are embedded in precise linguistic norms and speech acts. The subject matter of ideology is found in themes such as politics and power (Gerring, 1997; Campbell et al., 1960). The subjects of ideology include social groups, political parties, individuals or politicians. In the main, ideology functions to explain, repress, integrate, motivate, legitimise, create internal coherence, establish external contrast, specify concrete programmes, and cultivate conviction (Sartori, 1969; Neuman, 1981; Parsons, 1951).

The Nigerian Constitution and Political Parties Ideology

There is a volume of literature that treats political ideology as an integrating mechanism or as a relatively benign organizing device.' This is achievable through the cognitive functions of ideology such as: coherence, contrast, and conviction (Knight, 2006, p. 622; Denzau & North, 2000, p. 24). Put differently, ideology serves as an instrument of self and group identification, a tool

for conflict resolution and management, a guiding formula, a mobilizational as well as unifying strength (Omotola, 2009). However, Thomas Carothers has cautioned against extreme ideological positions. He argued that extreme ideologies could be detrimental to the political system. Noting that, political parties ought to be composed around political ideologies as opposed to ethnic, religious, or regional identities; their ideological contrasts ought to be particularistic yet not very sharp; extreme ideologies are perilous (Carothers, 2006). The parties ought not to be individual vehicles for the self-magnification of charming leaders, but associations with internal democratic structures that look for a political space among citizens and strive for receptiveness, responsibility, and legitimate conduct (Carothers, 2006).

Nigerian political parties reflect the import of Carothers's observation. In Nigeria, political parties have been given a broad policy framework for operation. For instance, the constitution has provided a policy template for all political parties to operate within. In essence, the constitution tries to manage the space political parties have in terms of policy position or ideology. This is done with the hope of checking extreme ideological leanings in the political space. The constitution precisely wants all political parties to adhere to the provisions of Chapter two of the constitution. This point will be discussed elaborately subsequently.

The responses elicited from the field interviews have revealed a *structural* contention on the question of the ideological content and manifesto of the Nigerian political parties with specific reference to the parties of the Fourth Republic.

Respondents argued that the 1999 Constitution has provided the ideological position for the post-1999 political parties in Nigeria. This strand of argument relied largely on the guidelines provided by the Constitution in Section 224, which stipulates that political parties must adhere to and be guided by the fundamental aspirations and imperative principles of state policy as contained in the Constitution. Section 224 of the 1999 Constitution precisely provides that "the programmes as well as the aims and objectives of a political party shall conform to the provisions of Chapter 2 of this Constitution." Specifically, the guideline in Chapter 2, Section 14 (1) of the Constitution reads: "The Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be a state based

on the principles of democracy and social justice." The implication of this is that the policies and programmes of all the parties in Nigeria are required by the provisions of the Constitution to reflect a *Social democratic* ideology. A situation that has made it difficult for any post-1999 political party to radically subscribe to other forms of ideology aside from the one legally granted them by the Constitution. In an interview, a respondent captured it thus:

I think the first point to understand is that the Constitution directs political parties to derive their ideologies from the Constitution itself. In particular, what the Constitution is telling them is that the imperative principles of state policy in Chapter II of the Constitution should be the ideological bases for all political parties. (*KII, former Director General, Centre for Democracy and Development*)

Not all democracies give recognition to political parties in their constitutions. For instance, the United States Constitution and the National Laws of the United Kingdom do not recognise political parties. It is argued that the integration of party guidelines into national constitutions stems from the democratic experience of developing countries; however, the foundation comes from Europe. As in all laws, the party law of a nation has some level of effect on its political parties and, by extension, the political system. As such, Kenneth (2005, p. 8) identified five alternative models that characterise policies for regulating political parties in a political system. He argued that states tend to follow policies that permit, prescribe, promote, protect, or prescribe a party and its activities. Under the prescription model, which explains the Nigerian experience, national governments, through their constitutions, prescribe party laws to regulate the function and behaviour of political parties—the strongest and definitive technique of party guidelines. When taken to the extreme, the prescription model gives regimes the opportunity to control political parties' organisation and behaviour. For instance, in both Germany and Spain, political parties statutorily operate according to "democratic principles," as enshrined in their constitutions. On the contrary, Portugal's constitution, like the Nigerian constitution, is

detailed in prescribing party behaviour, it does not only require parties to be democratic in organisation and management; it also specifies how parties should be named and what should be used for symbols. The appraisal of party regulation in some Western constitutions shows that few Western countries deal with party organisation and behaviour in their constitutions, and the few that do so with moderation.

In a divergent manner, a number of *third-wave democracies* have used their national constitutions as instruments of micromanaging political party organisation and behaviour – of which Nepal, Liberia, and Nigeria are examples. The repealed 1990 Nepal's Constitution, in Article 113, proposes guidelines for political party registration that include the provision of full names and contact addresses of party leaders, as well as restrictions on the types of names or codes a party can adopt. In a similar vein, the Liberian Constitution of 1986, in Article 79, prescribes how political parties should be named and where they can be located. In the main, the 1999 Nigerian Constitution as amended, has regulations for political parties in several Sections: 222, 223 and 224. To the extreme, Section 224 prescribes that “the programmes as well as the aims and objectives of a political party shall conform to the provisions of Chapter 2, which specifies that the Federal Republic of Nigeria will be a state dependent on the standards of “democracy and social justice.” Regardless of the intention of the framers of the Nigerian constitution, the unintentional consequence of these provisions is that parties are gagged through the national constitution. Kenneth (2005, p. 20) stated that, given that constitutions are harder to change than resolutions or secondary laws, entrenching party law in constitutions produces an unbending guideline that can “freeze parties” and party frameworks in abnormal, “dysfunctional shapes.” Nigeria and Liberia illustrate how political parties in terms of ideology or policy can be gagged through national constitutions, while in other cases, such as in the United States of America and the United Kingdom, as well as in other developed or older democracies, the reverse is the case. Normally, the state moderates party behaviour not in the national constitutions but through other legislative laws, in most cases through specialized party laws (Kenneth, 2005).

Globally, the politics of sharp ideological orientation that characterised the Cold War era is waning as a result of the growing consensus on *democracy and market* economy. Studies have shown a diminishing trend in the roles and functions of political parties. For instance, in developed democracies, it is argued that parties are in need of the depth of emotional and ideological affection that they commanded a few years ago (Mair & Biezen, 2001). On the part of the new or struggling democracies, the increasing disrepute of political parties was succinctly expressed in “The Standard Lament” by Carothers (2006). Thus, the roles and expectations for political parties are in rapid decline in many democracies, especially the less developed ones.

However, while the global trend of argument seems to provide a perspective on the seemingly downturn in the ideological emphasis of political parties in Nigeria, evidence has shown that, when political parties compete among themselves, they do so by emphasising divergent policy options rather than taking contradictory positions on the same issues (Klingemann et al., 2006). In essence, the provision in Chapter 2 of the Constitution does not preclude political parties from emphasising particularistic stances on policy issues in the economy, which they can be known for. For instance, a respondent asserted:

I think globally, there is decline of ideology, and I am sure that is one of the few messages of globalisation and the fact that there appears to be consensus that the market defines the way... It would seem to me, that, that kind of ideological differentiation that marks party politics in the cold war era have been on decline...The global concept of politics itself and the assumption that liberal democracy and the market are inseparable... It suggests to me that politics does not emphasise sharp ideological differences. That is the global context. But this, notwithstanding, we still find political parties even within the same ideological spectrum trying to make a difference in terms of the programmes they are offering the people. Their programmes or manifestoes seem to shift

towards extreme right or centre or left. So, you find both the Republican Party and Democrat Party discussing over what should be, about welfare, about concern for the aged, about social protection programme, the need to contact some particular groups of people. You find those issues that tend to structure the responses and the way electorates vote. (KII, GPBT, United Nations Development Programme – UNDP)

Thus, the argument that the post-1999 political parties should derive their party policies and programmes from Chapter 2 of the Constitution has placed a serious demand on the political parties in Nigeria. If you say political parties have ideology, it means that programmatically, there is something that distinguishes one political party from the other at the level of cognitive perception or recognition. For instance, considering the political parties of the First Republic: the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC), the National Council for Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC), and the Action Group (AG), in terms of their ideological positions, the NPC was typically a conservative or elitist party. The AG and NCNC, on the contrary, were seemingly progressive and 'welfarist,' based on social ideology, with a common character of ethno-regional posture, respectively (Ayoade, 1985; Omotola, 2009). Programmatically, the AG's emphasis on free education distinguished it. Its main theme for the electoral campaign was "common opposition to Azikiwe and Igbo dominance under a unitary constitutional system" (Nnoli, 1978, p. 155). On its part, the Northern People's Congress (NPC) resonated and promoted the principle of regional independence within a united Nigeria as well as combating ignorance, idleness, and injustice in the North, among others. While the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) was predominantly in the Eastern Region, the Igbo ethnic group was its support base. In sum, the manifestoes of the parties of the First Republic espoused regional ideology at the expense of national ideology. In the Second Republic, Galadima (2014, p. 111) argued, "People identified the philosophy behind each of the parties." The UPN was known with the tag of free education at all levels; the NPN was identified with house and agriculture policy captured in its logo (a house with

two corns by the side); the UPN had its emphasis on quality education and agricultural revolution. The GNPP was known for its mantra of "politics without bitterness," the PRP was known for its pro-poor disposition, and the NPP was proverbial in its emphasis on social justice and reduced reliance on oil revenue. While the Third Republic parties were designed to be an improvement on the previous ones, the National Republican Congress (NRC) was relatively inclined to the right and the Social Democratic Party to the left (Agbaje et al., 2007).

From the foregoing, each political party had a manifesto and policy position that distinguished it from another, through which people identified it, though superficially. For the post-1999 political parties, Liebowitz and Ibrahim observed that:

The constitution requires that all political parties draw their manifestoes from Chapter Two of the Constitution on Directive Principles of State Policy. That section of the Constitution places a lot of obligation on the state to provide for the welfare of citizens. It is virtually a *social democratic* manifesto. (Liebowitz and Ibrahim, 2013, p. 22)

Furthermore, since Nigerian parties are constitutionally directed and guided by the spirit and principles of state policy, it therefore means that party-shared ideologies can be located within the framework provided by the state. Political parties are not permitted to differ profoundly from what the constitution provides. Notwithstanding, that does not preclude political parties from having alternate policies on topical issues. In the main, party leaders take advantage of this provision of the law when they argue that the constitution has left them with no choice, whereas they do not understand the basic content and policy provisions in their respective party manifestos. They are not driven by the content of their party manifestoes; rather, they are driven by the *prebends* from state offices (Joseph, 2014).

In contrast, party ideology is one of the major determinants of electoral choice of candidate in the developed democracies. For instance, after Trump and Clinton had secured their parties' presidential nominations in the United States in 2016, a Pew Research Poll assessed voters' views of the candidates' ideologies. The result showed that

voters saw Clinton as liberal and Trump as conservative (PRC, 2016). These perceptions were derived from the ideological content of their political parties, namely: Republican conservative (right) and Democratic liberal (left). Similarly, after the election, exit poll data showed a correlation between voters' self-attachment as liberal or conservative. This was reflected in how they voted. Clinton was voted for by 84% of those who described themselves as liberals, who were 26% of the total electorate. Of the 35% who described themselves as conservatives, 81% cast their votes for Donald Trump, while the 39% of voters who said they were *moderate* split 52 to 40 percent between Clinton and Trump, respectively (Kenneth, 2016, p. 4). To the contrary, Nigeria presents a different scenario where ethnicity, religion, zone, and money appear to be the determinants of the electoral choice of candidates instead of ideology (Godwin, 2016). Joseph (2014) has noted in his prebendal theory that the basis for political organization, mobilisation and rent seeking in Nigeria are the constituent ethnicities that constitute the federation. Therefore, politicians see parties merely as part of the constitutional requirements for accessing political office (Godwin & Oluwalogbon, 2024).

They are not part of a party platform to pursue the policies and ideas encapsulated in the party documents. Rather, they are compelled to subscribe to a party platform of their choice to be eligible for an electoral contest. This explains why party activities are most active during election time. Political actors engage in party activities to gain access to party nominations or political appointments for themselves as well as their surrogates. When their ambition for party nomination fails, they tend to switch to another party platform in search of greener opportunities. In Nigeria, therefore, political actors find it difficult to belong to a specific political party; rather, adherence to political parties is unstable and opportunistic (Liebowitz & Ibrahim, 2013). A respondent observed that "Nigerian parties are seen essentially as political machine, and it speaks volume about why in Africa the political elite are in this game" (KII, GPBT, UNDP Abuja).

Politicians do not join parties on the basis of their ideologies; they only join them as vehicles to access public office. Therefore, their attachment is

not for what the party stands for but for the possibilities of accessing state offices as well as state resources. In a prebendal system, the state is considered a collection of offices vulnerable to an individual's or group's appropriation. The state in Nigeria therefore has become an epicentre for power struggle among the various ethnic nationalities, whose only sense of protection is being a member of the ruling political party by any means possible. A respondent asserted that "one of the main reasons for joining a party is for nomination; politicians join political parties because they want to be nominated to contest for public office" (KII, CDD Abuja). While politicians interviewed do not have the basic knowledge of the content of their party ideology or manifesto, others affirmed that the constitution has unwittingly forced the parties to adopt the same orientation and policy position. Therefore, the parties of the Fourth Republic exemplify Otto Kirchheimer's *catch-all party* and Angelo Panebianco's *selectoral-professional party* (Gunther & Diamond, 2001, p. 26). Kirchheimer and other writers have argued that parties, when confronted, to some extent weaken or relax their ideological commitments to cover a wide range of clients in pursuit of votes. As a result, parties are gradually moving towards the *catch-all-parties'* model (Kirchheimer, 1966). The objective of a *catch-all party* is to increase votes, win elections, and rule (Gunther & Diamond, 2001). Therefore, they aggregate a variety of social interests when campaigning for votes during elections. For instance, Suberu (2007, p. 101) has described the PDP as "fractious and inarticulate congeries of politicians." However, Soyinka (2014) has noted that the All Progressive Congress (APC) is a participation in political prostitution. This and other observations have shown that Nigerian political parties have been experimenting under a faulty foundation (Olanrewaju, 2015).

The practice of party politics in the fourth republic has brought to the fore the *predendal* nature of Nigerian politics. Prebendalism describes a pattern of political behaviour that has moderated politics in Nigeria since the First Republic. This pattern of political behaviour has been largely responsible for the legitimacy problem and ineffectiveness in governance (Joseph, 2014). In this sense, the rationale for joining political parties in Nigeria is to provide platforms for political actors

to win elections and gain access to state offices for prebendal ends.

Conclusion

The study attributed the lack of a sharp ideological divide among the parties to the constitutional provisions and the constitutionalisation of the Nigerian political parties in the Fourth Republic. The legal regulations provided by the Nigerian constitution in several sections provide express regulations for the ideological position of Nigerian political parties in the Fourth Republic. The article argued that Nigerian parties have been given a broad policy framework for operation. The constitution has provided a policy template for all political parties to operate within. In essence, the constitution tries to manage the space political parties have in terms of policy or ideology. This is done with the hope of checking the evolution of extreme ideological leanings in the political space. The Nigerian constitution precisely directed all political parties to adhere to the provisions of Chapter 2. Precisely, Section 224 requires all political parties to stick to a social democratic orientation. By implication, the 1999 Constitution has provided the ideological base or policy position for all political parties. Leveraging on Section 224, all political parties are to adhere to and be guided by the fundamental guiding principle of state policy enshrined in the Constitution. Therefore, political parties in Nigeria have been credited with the ideology of the state as provided by Section 224 of the Nigerian Constitution, which seemingly explains the ideological obscurity and evenness found among the parties in the Fourth Republic. Therefore, from the above, it is suggested that the Nigerian state should refrain from overt constitutionalisation of party matters. This will give parties leverage in the ideological or policy space.

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