

**ARTICLE**

# Social Democrats or Property-Owning Democrats? Contending Political Ideologies in Ghana's Fourth Republic

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**Abstract**

This paper analyzes the political ideology of the two main political parties in Ghana's Fourth Republic; National Democratic Congress (NDC) and New Patriotic Party (NPP) to ascertain how their ideological leanings influence their policy positions. The paper relies on extensive review of manifestos and policy documents of these parties as well as the existing literature on political ideology and party politics. A qualitative approach to data collection was employed in soliciting the views of leading members of the NDC and NPP, academics and experts of policy think tanks using semi-structured interviews. Overall, this paper argues that although the NDC and NPP subscribe to the main western political ideologies, these parties hardly adhere to it principles. Thus, ideology, although relevant, is insignificant in mobilizing electoral support in Ghana. In essence, support for these parties in Ghana is largely driven by popular developmental issues that resonate well with the populace rather than the ideological beliefs.

**KEYWORDS:**

Political ideology, Ghana, Political Parties, Social Democracy, Political Mobilization, Manifestos.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 'third wave' of democratization in Africa in the early 1990s, Ghana has emerged as one of the bright spots when it comes to democratic consolidation in Africa (Bob-Milliar & Paller, 2018; Huntington, 1991; Whitfield, 2009; Gyimah-Boadi, 2009; Lynch & Crawford, 2011). The relative stability can somewhat be attributed to the role of political parties (Morrison, 2004; Whitfield, 2009). Owing to the competitive nature of Ghanaian politics, the NDC and NPP have devised several strategies for electoral mobilisation. Ethnic appeals, campaign messages/manifestos and discussions about government performance are among the popular mobilisation tools (Ninsin, 2006; Ayee, 2011). Though ideology has somewhat influenced party mobilisation in other jurisdictions, the nexus between the two in Ghana has not received the needed attention. Accordingly, this paper comes in handy to complement the existing debate and literature. Ideologies are therefore a central element of party politics as they become a major tool in terms of their beliefs that distinguish one party from the other (Dahl, 1967). While defining ideology may be a very difficult task, there is no doubt the concept has been firmly established within lay and scholarly discourse around party politics (Dahl 1967; Griffiths & Hickson, 2010; Gerring, 1997).

Despite the recurrent military interruptions in the politics of Ghana until 1992, the political landscape has been dominated by three main political traditions; the Danquah Busia, the Nkrumahist and the quasi-Nkrumahist-cum- Rawlings tradition (Oquaye, 1995; Morrison, 2004; Whitfield, 2009). The history of active partisan politics in Ghana is credited to Famous Merchant, George Alfred Grant (Paa Grant), who played a significant role in the formation of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) in 1941

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(Austin, 1961). The UGCC was committed to ensuring ‘that by all legitimate and constitutional means, the direction and control of government should be passed into the hands of the people and their chiefs in the shortest possible time’ (Austin, 1961: 280). Although the UGCC was presented as a mass party with nationwide support, its leadership ranks were dominated by privileged elites like Lawyers, Merchants, and graduate teachers (Austin, 1961; Morrison, 2004). Despite Nkrumah’s role as the secretary of the UGCC, the sharp contrast between his radical ideological positions and the conservative liberal doctrines of the core founders of the party led to the formation of his splinter party, the Convention Peoples Party (CPP) which was largely seen as a populist party with the sole objective of ‘independence now’ (Austin, 1961: 292).

With NDC and NPP entrenching themselves as the *de facto* two political parties in Ghana’s Fourth Republic (Whitfield, 2009; Daddieh & Bob-Milliar, 2014), it has become increasingly relevant to examine the ideology of these two political parties and the extent to which their ideologies shape their election campaign promises and policy directions when in government. Do political parties in Ghana follow any ideological pattern? Does the ideological belief of the political party influence the kind of policies they espouse in government? These are questions that have remained unanswered. In exploring the ideological stands of the NDC and NPP, this paper starts with a theoretical overview of the state of thinking on political ideology. Drawing on this literature, the paper examines ideology in the NDC and NPP in greater detail with an attempt to trace the historical emergence of these two parties and how these ideologies came into being in the first place. This foundation will provide the framework for subsequent analysis and discussions.

## 2 | CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The major problem confronting any discourse on ideology is the fact that there is no universally accepted definition of the concept. On this point, McLellan (1986:1) noted that ‘ideology is the most elusive concept in the whole of the social sciences’ due to the difficulties surrounding its exact meaning. Bjornskov (2005:3) corroborates this argument by noting that, ideology is ‘hotly disputed...difficult to define and consequently difficult to measure’. The relevance of ideology in politics is also highly contested. Politics has generally been seen as a mere quest for power (Schwarzenberger, 1964; Morgenthau, 1967). If this holds true, then it can be argued that political ideologies ‘are mere propaganda, a form of words or slogans designed to win votes or attract popular support’ and thereby make politicians ‘power-seeking pragmatists’ (Heywood, 2017:1). In effect, ideology can be referred to as a ‘window dressing’ employed to cover up the ‘realities of political life’ (*ibid*). Nonetheless, political parties rarely seek power just for its own sake but have programs they intend to implement when in government. It behooves therefore, that parties come up with ideas and policies that are appealing to majority of the electorates. Based on this, many scholars (Dahl, 1967; Gerring, 1997; Katsina, 2016) have emphasized the importance of ideology to party organization. As pointed out by Gerring (1997), ‘ideology’ is said to be ‘political’ when it outlines a specific program of action such as a party manifesto. Dahl (1967) asserts that ideology is vital in socializing party members to assimilate party beliefs and values which in turn guides both their internal and external activities.

In the view of Nnoli (2003:178), ‘ideology does not only provide a structure to view society in its totality, but also provide a robust mechanism ‘of conflict management, self-identification, popular mobilization and legitimization’. For these reasons, political ideology is said to be an important prerequisite for well-functioning modern democracies in that it shapes the ideas and beliefs of one group or political entity from the other, thereby giving choices to voters (Carmines & D’Amicos, 2015). Indeed, Seliger rightly observed that ‘politics is inseparable from ideology’ (1976: 120). Thus, political parties must have an ideological inclination no matter how fogged or *dégagé* these foundations may appear from the actual behavior of the parties (*Ibid*). This is because ideology serves as the pillar around which the activities of a party revolve. The reality, however, is that this is seldomly the case in Africa (Conroy-Krutz & Lewis, 2011).

Historically, the concept of ideology can be traced to the French philosopher Destutt de Tracey who used the term in the 19th century to refer to a science of ideas and beliefs that shapes peoples thinking (Knight 2006; Jost et al, 2009; Gyampo, 2012). However, ideology has gone through several transformations and has been firmly established within lay and scholarly discourse in recent times (Gerring, 1997). Tracing the history of ideology, Knight argued that an ideology was mainly seen in the nineteenth century during the rulership of Napoleon Bonaparte as a strong attachment to values of liberal democracy where ‘Ideologues’ earned the wrath of Napoleon for their principled support of the ‘right of man’ in opposition to his dictatorship (Knight, 2006: 619). In recent times however, ideology has been interpreted to mean several things. Knight (2006) described ideology as the way a society rationalizes itself. Knight argues further that although ideology could be idiosyncratic, delusional, and impractical, it possesses the characteristics of coherence and temporary stability (Knight, 2006: 619). Similarly, Gerring (1997) argued that

an ideology is an idea or element that are bound together that belong to one another in a non-random fashion. Just as Knight (2006), Gerring stressed on stability and coherence as key characteristics of ideology with ‘one implying coherence vis-a-vis competing ideologies and the other implying coherence through time’ (Gerring, 1997:980).

Yet, most scholarly works on ideology especially within the field of political science has emphasized the group dimension – thus a world view particularly shared by many (Carmines & D’Amicos, 2015). Drawing from this perspective, Denzau & North (1994) argued that an ideology is a ‘common way a particular group or community views the world and believes it should be structured’. Thus, political ideology is a set of interconnected beliefs held by a group of individuals which explains the preferences on individual political issues that vary along a single global liberal-conservative dimension (Carmines & D’Amicos, 2015: 207). Specific ideologies therefore communicate ideas, beliefs and opinions shared by a group, constituency, or society (Freeden, 2001; Knight, 2006). Drawing from these conclusions, the traditional classification of left-right or liberal-conservative has come to dominate the discussions around ideology (Knight, 2006; Carmines & D’Amicos, 2015). The Left-Right ideological spectrum relates basically to the extent of government involvement in the economy (Ibid). This implies that political ideology has the capacity to shape and guide policy direction in a country. For Downs (1957: 96), ideology is a ‘verbal image of the good society and of the chief means of constructing such a society’. This assertion resonated with Hamilton’s (1987) position. He maintained that an ideology reflects:

*A system of collectively held normative and reputedly factual ideas and beliefs and attitudes advocating a particular pattern of social relationship and arrangements, and or armed at justifying a particular pattern of conduct, which its proponents seek to promote, realize, pursue or maintain (Hamilton, 1987:39)*

For years, political scientists have tried to establish the nexus between ideologies and political behaviour (Gerring, 1997; Jost, 2006). Some research has shown that there is a considerable link between ideology and non-political opinion. For instance, Zaller (1992) argued that citizens in the United States who profess or lean towards a liberal ideology tend to adopt center-left policies and support ‘democratic candidates’ whereas conservatives like center-right policies and ‘republican candidates’. Some individuals are also likely to vote for candidates who share in their ideology (Ibid). However, it is very difficult to extend this argument to political parties in Africa. For some scholars, ideology has little effect if any at all because politics in Africa is largely driven along ethnic rather than programmatic or ideological lines (Horowitz, 2000). Nonetheless, this argument has been sharply debunked by Heywood who bemoaned the ‘importation’ of foreign ideologies into political discourse in Africa by political scientist who paid little attention to how nationalist manipulated local ‘cultural motifs’ to advance nationalist course (Heywood, 1998:142). Heywood(1998) argued that ideology has been part of the political discourse in Africa because, in the face of independence struggles nationalists like Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Jomo Kenyatta among several others advanced African political ideologies that were inherently grounded in the African cultural values. Heywood thus observed:

Some scholars often misunderstood the role of African ideology in contemporary Africa because they view it as monolithic and lacking flexibility or nuance. The truth is that the ideology is dynamic and multifaceted, and the leaders cannot simply manipulate it at will to fool the unsophisticated (Heywood, 1998: 145).

### **3 | HISTORICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL EVOLUTION**

#### **3.1 | The National Democratic Congress (NDC)**

The NDC, traces its roots to the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC), a military regime, that was instituted between 1981 and the early 1990s. The party emerged when Ghana was transiting towards democratic rule, after over a decade rule of the Rawlings-led PNDC (Whitfield, 2009). The constitution of the NDC describes the party as a socialist-oriented, which is deeply grounded in their much-touted values and principles of Probity, Accountability and Social Justice (Abbey, 2018). The popularization of such philosophies by its founder and former military leader, Flt. Lt. Jerry John Rawlings underscored the essence of his previous military interventions in 1979 and 1981, and the subsequent executions of top Army Generals in the popular intensive three-month ‘house cleaning exercise’ (Hettne, 1980).

Some stalwarts of the NDC have described the party as the third political tradition in Ghana, however, some scholars (Ninsin, 2006; Bob-Milliar, 2012; Pokoo, 2012) have argued that the party is grounded in the populist/Nkrumahist tradition. As an offspring of Rawlings and his principles, the NDC constitution describes the party as a social democratic party that ‘believes

in the equality and egalitarian treatment of each person irrespective of their social, cultural, educational, political, religious and economic relations in a multi-party environment' (NDC Constitution, 1992:6). The ideological intention of the NDC's social democracy is to 'marry the efficiency of the market and private initiative with the compassion of state intervention to protect the disadvantaged and the marginalised and to ensure optimum production and distributive justice' (Aye, 2011:372).

However, the party has struggled in clearly explaining what its social democratic values really stands for because the concept has been understood and explained differently by various members even within the same party . Over the past few years, the NDC have made attempts to clarify its much-touted social democracy. In its 2004 manifesto, the NDC defined its 'social democracy' ideology as 'taking seriously the issues of social advancement, especially in education, health, sanitation, water, housing and poverty alleviation as crippling barriers to advancement for the vast majority of our people' (NDC Manifesto, 2004:14). They further stated that this ideology imposes a responsibility on the party to ensure that all social amenities and employment opportunities are made available for everyone.

### 3.2 | The New Patriotic Party (NPP)

The NPP has its roots to an old political tradition in Ghana which dates as far back as the 1950s (Ninsin, 2006). The party is a progeny of the United Party (UP) which was an amalgamation of several ethnic-based political parties that emerged in the penultimate years and shortly after Ghana's independence. The emergence of the UP was a reaction to Nkrumah's Avoidance of Discrimination Act (ADA) which sought to prohibit the formation of political parties along sectional, regional, religious, and ethnic lines (Frempong, 2017). Historically, the NPP traces its genealogy to the UGCC. The NPP's connection to the UGCC and UP was clearly established in their 2000 manifesto, where names of leading members and pioneers of the UGCC and UP were cited. They maintained:

*The New Patriotic Party is the home of all those who believe in the living philosophy of Joseph Boakye Danquah, George Paa Grant, Obetsebi Lamptey, Edward Akufo-Addo, William Ofori-Atta, Solomon Odamtten, Kofi Abrefa Busia, Kofi Amponsah Dadzie, SG Antor, JA. Braimah, Yakubu Tali (Tolon Na), REG Armattoe and others, all of blessed memory (NPP Manifesto, 2000).*

The NPP was among the twelve other political parties that emerged after Ghana returned to a multi-party democracy in 1992 (Ninsin, 2006). The formation of the NPP can be attributed to the efforts of some members of the Progress Party (PP) notably, Mr. B.J De Rocha and Prof. K.G Folsom who sought to revive the party following the liberalization of political space in 1992 (NPP Official Website). Ideologically, the party adheres to the principles of liberal democracy and places emphasis on the rule of law and the protection of individual rights and freedoms in a political environment devoid of intimidation and repression (Ninsin, 2006; Aye, 2008). The party prides itself as a Centre-right and liberal conservative party that considers an effective private sector as crucial to the development of the state. Hence, they support a free market economy, private ownership, and wealth-creation whiles at the same time ensuring that essential policies are implemented to safeguard the most vulnerable in society (CDD, 2004). Indeed, the ideological orientation of the NPP which is evident in the party's Manifestos can be traced back to a famous quote from Dr. J.B Danquah:

*Our party's effort will be to liberate the energies of the people for the growth of a property-owning democracy in this land, with right to life, freedom, and justice, as principles to which Government and laws of the land should be dedicated in order specifically to enrich life, property and liberty of each and every citizen (Danquah 1947).*

## 4 | POLITICAL MOBILIZATION IN GHANA

Undoubtedly, the nagging question on how political parties target voters has received some scholarly attention (Duverger, 1954; Katz & Mair, 1995; Rohrschneider, 2002). Robert Rohrschneider, in his work "*Mobilizing versus chasing: how do parties target voters in election campaigns?*", maintained that most political parties use ideology induced policies to attract or mobilize core voters (Rohrschneider, 2002). Accordingly, strategic party mobilization plays a crucial role in sustaining party vibrancy in Ghana (Ninsin, 2006; Bob-Milliar, 2014). Congruent to Rohrschneider's assertions, it has been argued that ideology, to some extent, underscored the emergence of active partisan politics and the formation of most political parties during Ghana's independence struggles (Austin, 1970; Chazan, 1983; Aye, 2011). This phenomenon was aptly recounted by Naomi Chazan when she noted:

*The range of formal political debate in Ghana since the late 1940s has revolved around seemingly opposing poles: the liberal western-oriented one espoused by J.B. Danquah and later by K.A. Busia, and the socialist-nonaligned pole put forth by Kwame Nkrumah and later elaborated by his self-proclaimed apostles (Chazan, 1983:119).*

As noted earlier, a classical instance of the ideological politics in Ghana is evident in Nkrumah's departure from the UGCC to form the CPP due to some political differences (Austin, 1970; Chazan, 1983). It is on record that whereas the conservative UGCC subscribed to the gradualist approach of 'self-government within possible time', the Nkrumah-led CPP radical group insisted on 'self-government now'. This subsequently culminated into the two main political cleavages; Nkrumahists and Danquah-Busiasts (Ibid). The socialist inspired CPP mobilized around the youth, 'the commoners' or what was generally described as the 'verandah people', whereas the western liberal oriented UGCC, mainly consisted urban elites and individuals from the professional class (Bob-Milliar, 2014). Subsequently, political movements that emerged in Ghana's Second and Third Republics also mobilized around these cleavages.

However, the politics of Ghana's Fourth Republic has differed slightly in terms of ideology and party positions. Though the two major parties; NPP and NDC subscribes to some form of ideology; liberal vs. social democracy, some notable Ghanaian scholars have downplayed the impact of ideology on their mobilization (Ninsin, 2006; Gyimah-Boadi & Debrah, 2008; Ayee, 2011&2016). For instance, Ayee (2016) maintained that both the NPP and NDC resort to populist ideas aimed at improving the lives of the ordinary Ghanaian and not so much into their philosophies. Ayee's assertions re-echoed Gyimah-Boadi and Debrah's (2008) earlier observations that:

*The two parties follow the same ideological line both in terms of manifestos and policies - neo-liberal economics and liberal democracy with a huge dose of populism. In fact, they hardly articulate any identifiable ideology on their policy platforms, other than a vague 'developmental ideology' aimed at improving the lot of the people. Moreover, the parties rarely mobilize electoral support on ideological platforms. Their manifestos and campaign messages do not reflect any clear ideological stance. Rhetorical shifts in ideological positions have been largely driven by changes in domestic politics and the contingencies of outmaneuvering political competitors and dislodging the incumbent (Gyimah-Boadi & Debrah, 2008:151-152).*

If Rohrschneider's (2002) claims on the link between ideology and party mobilization holds true, what then goes into the mobilisation of median voters? Congruent to this, it has been indicated that most political parties move from extremes of the Left-right ideological continuum towards the center to appeal to median electorate (Ward et al, 2007). Party alignment studies have also shown that there has been an increasing incentive for political parties to 'chase' unaligned voters (Franklin et al, 1992; Rohrschneider, 2002). In the Ghanaian case, Ninsin (2006) posits that political parties in the Fourth Republic do not necessarily attract following based on their ideological positions but mostly through 'manipulative appeals to primordial identities, other irrational or emotive factors and material inducements' (p.12).

## 5 | ELECTIONS IN GHANA

Elections, though not an end in itself, have served as the foundation for most emerging democracies in Africa to thrive (Bratton, 1999). However, what accounts for voter behavior across the globe remain an open debate with several scholarly inputs (Downs, 1957; Horowitz, 2000; etc.). From a rationalistic perspective, it has been argued that some electorates vote for some candidates or parties in anticipation of personal (ego-tropic) or collective (socio-tropic) gains (Downs, 1957). Also, some electorates have often been influenced by primordial ties mostly dominated by 'ethnic bloc' voting. Accordingly, Horowitz (2000), in his seminal work, described elections in Africa as a mere ethnic 'census'. Ghana's fourth attempt at constitutional government, since 1992, has witness eight successive general elections which have largely been won alternately between the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) (Gyampo et.al, 2017; Frempong, 2017; Electoral Commission of Ghana, 2020). Similar to the global concerns, the determinants of these electoral outcomes have received some scholarly attention (Jeffries & Thomas, 1993; Ayee, 2011 & 2017; Frempong, 2017; Gyampo et.al, 2017; etc.). Some Ghanaian scholars have attributed the victories and defeats of the major parties to several factors; succession issues within parties, incumbent advantage, manifesto delivery, regime fatigue occasioned by two-term limits, etc. (Boafo-Arthur, 2006; Frempong, 2017; Gyampo et.al, 2017; Ayee, 2002; 2011 & 2016). Antwi (2018), in his recent study on the determinants of voter behavior in Ghana, found that the personality of candidates and campaign messages also influences voter behavior in Ghana. Though some scholars have downplayed the

effect of manifestoes on electoral outcomes in the past (Dunn, 1975; Chazan, 1983), its impacts on elections in contemporary times cannot be underestimated (Ayee, 2016; Lipsmeyer, 2009). For instance, Ayee (2016) linked the political fortunes of parties in Ghana to their manifestos. He indicated:

*No serious and credible party can enter elections without a manifesto. It has become more or less a ‘trademark’ for political parties. This is evident by the fact that both the major and minority parties in Ghana’s history have written manifestos to contest elections. Consequently, it is important that political parties in Ghana and other African countries take their manifestos more seriously than is currently the case (Ayee, 2016:107).*

Manifestos, to a larger extent, gives a graphical representation of the ideological positions (Dinas & Gemenis, 2010) and heavily influences the manifestos drafting process of most political parties (Lipsmeyer, 2009; Amankwah, 2019). Ray (2007) equally described manifestos as the synopses of party beliefs and identity. The two major parties in Ghana; NDC and NPP, have touted their ideological positions to draw public support in elections since 1992.

## 6 | PARTY MANIFESTOS AND POLICY IMPLEMENTATION: THE IDEOLOGY FACTOR

The major parties in Ghana’s Fourth Republic; NDC and NPP have produced eight major manifestos for elections between 1992-2020<sup>1</sup>. Each of these manifestos contained policy intentions engineered to promote the well-being of the ordinary Ghanaian (Ayee 2016). Hence their ‘catchy’ themes (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Manifesto themes of NDC and NPP, 1992-2020<sup>2</sup>

Year/ Theme	NDC	NPP
1992	Continuity and Stability	Development in Freedom
1996	Always for people, Always for development	Development in Freedom
2000	Spreading the Benefits of Development	Agenda for Positive Change
2004	A Better Ghana	Agenda for Positive Change: Chapter 2
2008	A Better Ghana: Investing in People, Jobs and the Economy	Moving Ghana Forward: Building a Modern Ghana
2012	Advancing the Better Ghana Agenda: Jobs, Stability and Development	Transforming lives, Transforming Ghana and Building a Free, Fair and Prosperous Society: A Programme for Transformation
2016	Changing lives, Transforming Ghana	Change: An Agenda for Jobs, Creating Prosperity and Equal Opportunity for All
2020	Jobs and Prosperity for All: The People’s Manifesto	Leadership of Service: Protecting our Progress, Transforming Ghana for All

Source: (Authors’ Compilation 2020)

### 6.1 | The NDC

The NDC’s defeat in 2000 election was believed to have triggered the need for the party to redefine and revive their philosophy (Bob-Milliar 2012). Prior to their social democratic identity, the earlier existence of NDC has been described as an ‘election winning machine’, propelling the party to winning two consecutive democratic elections in 1992 and 1996 (Chronicle, 17.7.2001,

<sup>1</sup>Minority parties have also produced manifestos for elections.

<sup>2</sup>Themes of the major parties are socially driven to promote the common good of all Ghanaians.

Quoted in Bob-Milliar, 2012). Social democracy as an ideology aims at creating a social and economic equilibrium where disadvantaged people democratically acquire power to reform capitalism (Myjoyonline.com, 14.08.2017).

A critical review of the party's manifestos indicates the constant reference to the social democratic foundation of the party (NDC Manifestos, 2004; 2008; 2012; 2016 & 2020). For instance, the NDC's 2020 manifesto was described as the 'people's manifesto' to project and attract the populist support bequeathed to them by their founder, Jerry John Rawlings. A cursory analysis of the NDC's manifestos between 2000-2020 have somewhat focused on social interventions, pro-poor policies, and social development (NDC Manifestos, 2000; 2008; 2016; 2020). For instance, the NDC in 2000 promised to 'expand and deepen the implementation of our integrated approach to poverty alleviation' (NDC Manifesto 2000:18). Similarly, the NDC in 2016 promised to expand the interventions that have been implemented in their previous term over the last four years by introducing additional government support schemes (NDC Manifesto 2016). Criticizing the NPP's property owning ideology the NDC's 2008 flagbearer, Professor John Evans Atta-Mills noted:

*We are certainly not against wealth accumulation by individuals and groups but as a party that is anchored to the social democratic philosophy and espouses the tenets of our ideology unashamedly, all our efforts must be geared towards protecting and supporting the vulnerable, the disadvantaged, the marginalised and the have-nots in society (NDC Manifesto, 2008:2).*

The NDC, after its 2008 electoral victory rolled out certain policies it considered to be in line with their ideology. With reference to the party's 2012 manifesto, John Atta-Mills-led NDC were on record to have distributed over three million school uniforms to needy children in deprived communities. Measures were also instituted to eliminate schools under trees, distribute over 40 million exercise books nationwide, increase the beneficiaries of the school feeding program and establish the Savannah accelerated Development Authority (SADA) to bridge the development gap between the north and the south (NDC Manifesto, 2012). Aside these, the NDC also constructed CHIPS compounds, community day senior high schools across the country although it was unable to construct all before it was voted out, expanded LEAP beneficiaries, and increased in the enrolment of people covered under the Ghana School feeding program (Government of Ghana, 2016; NDC Manifesto, 2016). These policies were set out to relieve the burden of the ordinary people to ensure a just environment in line with the party's social democratic ideology of ensuring equality and egalitarianism.

## 6.2 | The NPP

As firm believers of liberal democracy, the NPP subscribes to the 'development of the individual and of society in a free political atmosphere, under the rule of law, are the principles of the state. Free enterprise, fundamental human rights, and a vigorous pursuit of private initiative are its abiding principles' (NPP Manifesto 2000:7). Consequently, the content of the NPP's manifestos have mostly been modeled and focused on private ownership and private-led industrialization (NPP, 1996; 2000; 2004; 2008; 2012; 2016 & 2020). As a strategy to mitigate the seemingly weak economic fundamentals of the Ghanaian economy and empower citizens, the NPP, as part of its 2000 manifesto, conceived the "CREATE WEALTH" concept (NPP Manifesto, 2000). The essence was to:

- Create jobs
- Reduce the tax and cost of doing business
- Empower the ordinary Ghanaian by supporting entrepreneurial ideas
- Accelerate economic growth and development
- Take the needed measures to promote agriculture
- Ensure access to health care and quality education
- Work to promote home ownership among Ghanaians
- Ensure an even balance development across all regions of Ghana
- Alleviate poverty and ensure safety nets that enhance human dignity

- Light the eternal flame of nationalism
- Totally develop the rural areas through an aggressive integrated rural development
- Husband and protect national heritage (Ibid).

As noted earlier, subsequent manifestos between 2004-2020 were also tailored around that of 2000. The NPP re-echoed their commitment to support private-led industrialization ahead of the 2016 elections. The NPP indicated their intentions to ‘establish an Industrial Development Fund (IDF) to finance critical private sector industrial initiatives. The Fund was to be seeded and fed by funding from Government, multilateral, and private institutional investors’ (NPP Manifesto, 2016:25). As a party that believes in private ownership, industrialization, and private sector development, the Kufuor-led NPP government established the President’s Special Initiative (PSI)<sup>3</sup> in 2001 under the Ministry of Private Sector development to invest in ‘sectors in which Ghana has international and sub-regional advantage’ (Aye, 2008). The essence of that initiative was ‘to move Ghana’s economy beyond HIPC status and reduce the country’s over-dependence on aid and donor support and a few commodity exports by finding new pillars of growth’ (Asante, 2012:9).

Similarly, the 2016 manifesto promised to create a conducive environment to enable businesses access funding from financial institutions to aid the establishment of factories under the one-district one-factory (1D1F) initiative (NPP Manifesto, 2020). The Akufo-Addo led government subsequently launched the 1D1F initiative in 2017 after winning the 2016 elections. As at December 2019, the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MOTI) indicated that a total of 58 out of the projected 181 companies/projects were operationalised with the remaining at various stages of completion (MOTI, 2019).

## 7 | IDEOLOGICAL DEVIATIONS AND POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

### 7.1 | The NPP

Having campaigned on economic hardship, the NPP, upon assumption of office implemented a wide range of policies which were aimed ensuring economic growth and stability and improving the living conditions of Ghanaians. However, most of these policies had social intervention prospects which was a clear deviation from the core beliefs of a liberal democratic party. Having recognized the untold hardships on the ordinary Ghanaian, the Kufuor-led NPP administration, rolled out several Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS) as part of debt relief requirement under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. Between 2001 and 2008, the NPP implemented a host of policies and reforms that promoted economic activities and ensured macroeconomic stability (NPP Manifesto, 2008). As part of the MDGS and PRS of Ghana, the National Youth Employment Programme (NYEP), the Livelihood Empowerment against Poverty (LEAP) and the Labour-Intensive Public-Works (LIPW) were launched. As at 2008, the NYEP had employed about 108, 000 youths in various sectors of the economy (NPP Manifesto, 2008).

In the area of healthcare, the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) was launched to replace the controversial ‘cash and carry’ system that required direct cash payments to access healthcare (NPP Manifesto, 2004). Under the scheme, children below 18 years and adults above 70 years were exempted from paying for healthcare services. In addition, pregnant women enjoyed free maternal care (NPP Manifesto, 2008; Abebrese, 2011). The NPP also introduced the Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP) with support from the Dutch government to provide one hot meal a day for kindergarten and primary pupils (GSFP 2005). In addition, the Basic Education Capitation Grants, Free Metro Bus, Free School Uniforms and Exercise books for children in Basic schools were also rolled out as part of the efforts to make education affordable and accessible to all Ghanaians (NPP Manifesto, 2008). The Akufo-Addo led NPP government also launched the Free SHS policy in September 2017 to offer free second cycle education for students and excelled and progressed from basic schools’ examinations across the country (NPP Manifesto, 2020). The NPP also restored the cancelled teachers and nurses training allowances which were previously cancelled under the erstwhile Mahama administration (Ibid). A critical analysis of these ideological deviations and policy positions of the NPP gives room for probing; why would a party that believes in individualism and ‘property-owning’ implement so many social intervention policies? In response to this, an official of the party’s administrative team pointed out:

*We [NPP] believe in liberal democratic ideals-thus a market economy and the support of private ownership of property. Some people may say that we have implemented a lot of social intervention policies which is rather typical of a socialist*

<sup>3</sup>Great industrialization driven initiative that was saddled by several challenges.

*party. We the NPP are realists and believe that there should be some welfare policies to at least ease the plight of the people. If you have money to buy a Mercedes Benz, think of the ordinary people; give them buses. You cannot buy a Benz for everybody but if you provide buses, many people will benefit from their services. If the economy is doing well and the government subsidises prices of products everybody can be able to move from one point to the other. In this modern times you cannot solely cling to ideology. Even Capitalist countries have introduced a lot of social intervention programs. That is the way forward (Anonymous 2017 Int.)*

In corroborating this argument, some leading members of the NPP noted:

*The thrust of our policies during President Kufuor's tenure were socially driven policies. (i.e., The NHIS, Capitation, School feeding, the cocoa mass spraying etc.). One would expect that a typical capitalist party would have implemented capital or pro-market driven policies. But we should not lose sight of the fact that in recent times even the socialist states are beginning to adopt some capitalist strategies. Even though our ideology is based on capitalism, individual development, rule of law and the likes, we also believe that where there is the need to do or have a hybrid of the thrust of capitalism and socialism, we have done that. This was evident in our first 8 years in power, and you can feel a semblance of it in the first budget of the Akufo-Addo government; Audacious and dramatic amendments to our tax regime as a country; that is not typical of a pro-capitalist party. We [NPP] know where we are coming from, we know what our principles and beliefs are, but we also know when to respond to a situation and when we do it does not mean we have veered off our ideology (Anonymous 2017 Int.)*

*Within policy, advocacy and academia, there is an overwhelming consensus over a lack of understanding and clarity among experts regarding the ideology parties espoused. Political parties have adopted policies which were inconsistent with their ideological stands, and in most cases, their members including party bigwigs cannot clearly explain their ideological stands. It is even more disheartening at the grassroots. This point was affirmed by a lecturer at the department of Political Science, University of Ghana who remarked: "We conducted a pre-election survey in 2012 where inter alia we asked respondents to state the ideologies of their respective parties. Quite a number from the NDC said 'Edey bee k3k3' to wit it is very beautiful or nice whereas those from the NPP mentioned 'Free SHS' (Anonymous 2017 Int.)*

Affirming these views, Ex-President Kufuor noted that NPP's ideological deviation from their liberal democracy is mainly underpinned by the humanitarian factor to ensure the common good of the ordinary Ghanaian. He maintained: 'People ask whether this party [NPP] is leftist or socialist, we are not, but I tell you, we respect capitalism with conscience' (Graphiconline.com, 27.06.2020).

## 7.2 | The NDC

Despite the socialist inclined ideas of the NDC, the Mahama led NDC between 2012 and 2016 deviated from the core principles and values of the party by introducing some capitalist inclined policies which were deemed unfriendly to social democratic principles. Some of these policy positions included the withdrawal of teacher and nursing trainees' allowances. The NDC also imposed taxes on several items while in government. Notable among these taxes included levies imposed on head potters (Kayayei) by local authorities, duties on importation of spare parts, special petroleum tax, 17.5 percent VAT/NHIL on domestic airline tickets, 5 percent VAT on real estate sales, taxes on selected imported medicines that were not produced locally, and the taxes imposed on contraceptives, which were subsequently withdrawn. In addition, the NDC government froze public sector employment and removed subsidies on various products. The effects of these policies created 'unprecedented levels of hardship' on many Ghanaians. These 'unfriendly' policies were believed to have been occasioned by the Mahama-led government's decision to subscribe to International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout due to the fiscal distress on the Ghanaian economy. Congruently, it has been maintained that the incessant public outcry contributed significantly to the NDC's monumental defeat in the 2016 general elections (Gyampo et al, 2017; Ayee, 2017). Admittedly, interviews with some leading members of the NDC and policy think-tanks affirmed the NDC's ideological deviations. A prominent lawyer and leading member of the NDC equivocally criticized the party's deviation from its core social democratic ideology. He noted:

*When you see what happened under President John Mahama, clearly, I do not see how our ideology manifested in our policies. If you are a social democratic party, whiles leaving office you should be able to invest so much in social interventions*

*and development projects. I think that we are still struggling to find that ideology that best describes us (Anonymous 2017 Int.)*

Furtherance to this observation, a researcher at the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD)-Ghana, observed:

*The NDC claim to be a socialist party but when it comes to power you see them driving the capitalist intensive agenda. Socialists are concerned with the plight of the people, but the NDC is not' (Anonymous 2017 Int.)*

In rebuttal to these claims, the General Secretary of the NDC, John Asiedu Nketiah, insisted that the party was a social democratic party that believes in the freedom, equity, and social justice, and have largely been guided by that. Nonetheless, he noted that the lack of clarity in the party's ideology remains a challenge. He noted that:

*The NDC has one ideology, but the problem is that we have differences in understanding what the ideology is. When we talk about social democracy some people equate it to socialism, communism etc. this informs their perception about the way forward when there is an issue. These different interpretations have sometimes led to misunderstandings within the party (Nketiah, 2017 Int.)*

As part of efforts to rejuvenate the ideological position of the NDC, the party launched the Ghana Institute of Social Democracy to 'provide a clearly defined direction to NDC's political activities and governance' as well form the intellectual wing for training party members about the core ideologies and values of the party (Myjoyonline.com 14.08.2017). Similar to the observations earlier, a political scientist noted:

*Parties in Ghana are an amalgamation of different interest, sometimes conflicting, and formed on ethnic cleavages which is a clear contradiction of ideologically driven parties. From the forgoing analysis, political parties from their conception, aim to capture political power and execute their agenda. Political Parties in principle, are ideologically driven, but are only practically interested in implementing or promising policies that would win them the next election (Anonymous 2017 Int.)*

Though ideology plays a major role in political campaigning in Ghana (Obeng-Odoom, 2013), the above assertions somewhat affirm the observations that party ideology remains fluid to the politics of the 21st century. This is because most political parties are practically not dogmatic in their mobilization. This observation holds true in the Ghanaian case because the competitive de facto two-party system has affected a purely dogmatic positions of political parties. This, to a larger extent, explains why the two leading political parties in Ghana; NDC and NPP choose and mix policies to appeal to the existing political market. Generally, the politics of developing countries have mostly centered on 'bread and butter' issues and Ghana is no exception. So, parties that are able to churn out policies that resonates well with the ordinary Ghanaian is likely to win some political sympathy from median voters and not much on the ideology of parties.

## 8 | CONCLUSION

Political parties are competitive in nature and set up with the objective of winning political power and implementing their policies. Due to the competitive nature of political parties, ideologies are a set of distinctive features that separate one party from the other. Since Ghana's return to democratization in the early 1990s, the political landscape has been dominated by two main political traditions which profess different ideologies (Whitfield, 2009; Daddieh & Bob-Milliar, 2012). Whereas, the NPP is associated with liberal capitalism, the NDC claim to be oriented along populist social ideologies. However, it has been observed that both parties have pursued similar socio-economic policies that may have clouded the ideological distinction. Notwithstanding the fact that this phenomenon is not exclusive to the Ghanaian context, it seems to have become the norm rather than the exception giving room to question the foundations upon which these parties were established. For instance, the mobilization of support for these two leading parties is largely underpinned by ethnicity, personal ties, patron-client relationships among others (Gyampo, 2012; Debrah, 2014) rather than ideological manifestos. Though, it has been maintained that 'party politicking' for the 2012 general elections was somewhat conducted on ideological lines (Obeng-Odoom, 2013), this paper has shown that the policy propositions and implementation of both parties have often prioritize addressing human needs and promoting development in general, and not a strict adherence to ideological positions.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

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