

POLITICAL PARTY ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA: THE IMPERATIVE OF A UNIFIED PARTY MANIFESTO

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Abstract

Since the return to democracy in 1999, the administration of political parties in Nigeria has deviated from the principle and legacy bequeathed by the founding fathers of Nigeria. Political parties have operated without a common party agenda, ideology and manifesto; rather candidates have pursued their agenda with total disregard for the party vision and action plan. This study therefore, examined the administration of political parties in Nigeria with a focus on the need to formulate a unified party manifesto. The study adopted a qualitative research design. This allowed the use of secondary data information gathered through online materials, academic journals and text books. This is necessary to allow access to historical documentations through which facts can be gleaned. Finding revealed that the operation of political parties in the Fourth Republic were repleted with lack of uniform manifesto and ideology. It also discovered that rather than pursuing unified party manifesto, each of the political parties operate different manifestoes in line with candidate's vision and orientation, which does not present the political party as a cohesive unit. The study concluded that political parties in Nigeria must embrace a united front in confronting the myriads of challenges confronting the country, by adopting a unified manifesto. The study recommended that political parties should set up mechanisms to monitor compliance with party manifesto across all levels of party structure.

Keywords: manifesto, political party, administration, party cohesion, party discipline

Introduction

Since 1999 Nigeria's transition to democratic governance which marked the genesis of the Fourth Republic, the nature and quality of party politics has undergone a transformation, with political parties no longer being driven by ideology (Babalola, 2024). This according to some scholars is attributed to the prolonged military dictatorship which undermined the democratic culture that formerly defined politics (Olanrewaju, 2015; Babalola, 2024).

This prevailing culture of politics which has redefined the nature of politics and party administration in the fourth republic is inconsistent with the legacy bequeathed by the founding fathers of the Nation. Political party administration in the First Republic (1960 –1966), was predominantly shaped by conservative ideology with clearly spelt out manifestoes which endeared the electorate to the parties, (Northern People’s Congress, NPC), pragmatic socialism (National Council of Nigerian Citizens, NCNC), and democratic socialism (Action Group, AG) (Awa, 1974; Ayoade, 1985).

This pattern of party administration was revived in the Second Republic (1979-1983) because many of the political elites of the First Republic dominated the political space. During the Second Republic, the electorates were deeply conversant with the manifestoes and ideological leanings of the political parties. For instance, Chief Obafemi Awolowos Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) earned popularity with its manifesto, termed four cardinal points which were implemented across all levels of governance where it held power. Iyanda (2023) argues that a manifesto is akin to entering into a social contract between political parties and the electorate. These documents serve as a means for candidates to acquire the consent and votes of the voters.

Similarly, the same culture of party administration was discernible in the Third Republic. During the two-party system of the aborted Third Republic (1992–1993), the Social Democratic Party (SDP) was positioned slightly towards the left end of the ideological spectrum, while the National Republican Convention (NRC) leaned slightly towards the right (Babalola, 2024). This culture of ideological leanings along party lines had been sustained until the advent of the Fourth Republic, where political parties cannot be clearly differentiated along the spectrum of ideological orientations.

A corollary to ideology is the party manifesto. Political party administration in the fourth republic has abandoned the culture of implementation of party manifesto. In the fourth republic, party manifesto operates as the vision and programmes of candidates contesting elections rather than a clearly articulated policy directive of the party embraced by all levels of party structure, thereby creating fragmented manifestoes instead of a unified manifesto for the parties. Despite the fact that Chief Awolowo did not emerge victorious at the federal elections in 1979, this did not deter maximum commitment to the implementation of the manifestoes and programmes of the Unity Party of Nigeria at the subnational levels.

A party’s ideology and manifesto is its primary differentiator (Awa, 1974; Hill & Leighley, 1993; Ostrowski, 2023). Political parties deepen democracy and development by pursuing public policy measures and programme to advance the public welfare in line with their manifestos and ideologies. This paradigm appears to be absent in the contemporary political space. Political parties in the fourth republic lay claim to party manifestoes which hardly permeate all levels of political structure within party operational mechanisms. This culture is a departure from the

ideals of party administration and the legacy bequeathed by the founding fathers of Nigeria.

This study therefore examines the administration of political parties in Nigeria, with the extent to which party manifestoes are unified, internalised and implemented across all levels of party structures.

Methodology

The paper focused on qualitative research design. As a result, the work relied on data from relevant books, journals, magazines, the internet and newspapers to provide more insights on political party administration in Nigeria. This is necessary to allow access to historical documentations through which facts can be gleaned. This method affords the opportunity of eliciting in-depth knowledge on how party administration in Nigeria has evolved with its dynamics from the period of independence to the fourth republic. The study specifically collated data from academic literature and other relevant materials that focused on party administration in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The work is hinged on party coherence theory or also known as party discipline. This theory takes its origin from the Westminster model, where party is an obligation of the members of parliament to vote along party lines. Some of the proponents of this theory include Angelo Panebianco and Giovanni Sartori. This theory is particularly relevant to Nigeria because there is lack of cohesion in party administration, and especially in the pursuit of party agenda. According to Cox and McCubbins (2005), they argued the rationale behind cohesion theory is motivated by the desire to protect the party 'brand' in the eyes of the electorate, and that "a party's reputation depends significantly on its record of accomplishment." The accomplishment of the foregoing requires that party discipline is enforced.

Kam (2014) explains that coherence theory is applied in two closely related yet distinct senses. First, the discipline is adherence of the party members at large to an agreed system of political norms and rules, second it is an obligation of the members of parliament to vote along their party dictates. The deviations might be countered by consequences that are designed to ensure the relative cohesion of members of the respective party group (Marland, 2020).

The party must always appear united in every aspect of its correspondence with the electorate to maintain its integrity. Kam (2009) argues, dissent from the party line "sends a signal of disunity and disorganization to voters. In other words, party members at levels must represent belief, the vision, policy and agenda of the party in the interest of the party. This shared ideology is an essential and important part of party cohesion, and reinforcing the given shared ideology through methods such as party discipline is crucial to the ruling party's survival in government.

The theory also stipulates the consequence of failing to adhere to party dictates. Guay (2024) emphasizes that breaking party discipline in both formal and informal

settings may result in a number of consequences. Punishment for members who break party discipline largely varies on a case-to-case basis, but members may find themselves in a variety of positions from being internally demoted in the party to being expelled from the party itself.

The application of this theory stems from the perspective of the essence and role of the political party. According to Ayoade (1991) “political parties are a united body of men and women who subscribe to certain programme and political methodology of implementation”. The primary goal of a political party is to capture state power (Duverger 1951; Dahl 1966; Key 1964; and Michels 1962). Arising from this, the application of the theory implied that members of the political party must fully adhere to the programme and vision of the party.

The culture of party administration in the Fourth Republic appears to deviate from the norm of party cohesion and discipline. The prevailing order among political parties in Nigeria since 1999, especially as it affects manifesto is a contradiction of the ideal of party existence and operation. Theorists of political party maintain the consensus that political parties are united by men and women who subscribe to common ideology, vision and manifesto. This is very much unlike the operation of political parties in the Fourth Republic where the implementation of manifestoes is not unified. Political actors operating within political parties operate on fragmented manifestoes rather than a common manifesto that represent the policy direction of the party. This is essential as it aligns the goal of the party on a common path of development for the country.

Political Party Administration in the First Republic

This work focuses on party administration from post-independence to the contemporary era. This approach was adopted because the political parties prior to independence had a common overriding agenda which is decolonization. This does not imply they do not possess manifestoes that define their development agenda for the country, but their prime agenda was independence of Nigeria. As a result, this work focused on administration of political parties in Nigeria following the attainment of independence.

At independence Nigeria had three major political parties which dominated politics of the First Republic with ethnic coloration and regional affiliation. The parties included the National Council Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) formerly National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, Action Group (AG) and the Northern People’s Congress (NPC). Several other parties emerged in subsequent years. One of the most prominent was the Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU). Others included Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) and United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC). These parties maintained a measure of discipline and cohesion in their administration.

Babalola (2024) argue that political parties in the pre-independent and immediate post-independent periods were ideologically driven. Many of these political parties were known for their conservative approach to development. The NCNC was noted

for its pragmatic socialism, which aim to promote the principles of fellowship, freedom, and opportunity for all, as well as the equality of all persons, communities, and nations (Awa, 1974)

The AG led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo strongly averred democratic socialism as its ideology. This was generally embraced by the members of the party. The leaders of the party maintained that democratic socialism aimed to guarantee equal opportunity for all Nigerians by adopting programmes that sought to provide economic opportunities for the populace and national greatness (Ayoade, 1985). The NPC favoured welfarism as reflected in its slogan of “life more abundant” and “freedom for all”. (Dudley, 1982). The party prioritized the safeguarding of workers’ interests and the enhancement of the overall standard of living for the population.

The approach to party administration in the first republic is synonymous with wit the ideals of party cohesion and application of discipline in its administrative procedure. Perhaps, this administrative orientation is often credited to the charisma and influence of the leaders of the political parties.

The Second Republic

After 13 years of uninterrupted military rule, the country returned to another era of democratic experience from 1979 to 1983 when it was terminated by a military junta. The Second Republic began with the establishment of a democratically elected government in 1979. The democratic space saw the involvement in the electoral process of five major political parties. The Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), which emerged as a reincarnation of the AG and led by Chief Awolowo, and the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), which was a coalition of the remnants of the defunct NPC and factions of all the other former political parties (Abba & Babalola, 2017).

The other three political parties that were involved in the fray were Nigerian People’s Party (NPP), led by Dr Azikiwe, which originated from the dissolved NCNC, the People’s Redemption Party (PRP), a reincarnate of NEPU, led by Mallam Aminu Kano, and the Great Nigerian People’s Party (GNPP), headed by Alhaji Ibrahim Waziri. The NPN maintained a characteristic similarity with the NPC as a conservative party judging from its ideology with leaning towards the centre-right. The party expressed its intention not to alter the class structure of the Nigerian society, with a strong dedication to safeguarding traditional institutions (Dudley, 1982& Kurfi, 1983).

The UPN which was an offshoot of the defunct positioned towards the centre-left, with socialist and welfare- oriented policies such as the provision of free education and healthcare (Babalola, 2024). The PRP, which Dudley (1982, p. 196) describes a ‘residual party’ due to its composition primarily consisting of persons who have been unable to align themselves with the principles of other political parties provided a platform for left wing politicians. The NPP and the GNPP expressed similar ideological stance with proposed programmes that aimed to operate within

the framework of a mixed economy (Dudley, 1982). The PRP provided a platform for leftwing politicians. Affiliation with the party was motivated by a deep-rooted dedication to a specific set of ideas.

Just like the parties that operated in the first republic, the Second Republic politicians and political parties sustained the culture of party cohesion and uniform party programme across of levels of leadership and structure. The UPN was famous for the implementation of the party's manifestoes across all levels leadership where it held political power. Similarly for the other political parties that existed in the second republic

Third Republic

The Third Republic which spanned between 1989 and 1993 was directly under the supervision of the military, which was unlike the previous democratic dispensation that operated under a free democratic space. Ologbenla (2007) states that the creation of two political parties, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republic Party (NRC) by General Babangida distorted the multi-party process. Despite the gagged democratic atmosphere, the Parties of the aborted third republic may also be described as ideologically driven. For example, the SDP was characterized as having a slightly left-leaning ideological stance, whereas the NRC was positioned somewhat to the right on the political spectrum or 'a little to the left' and 'a little to the right' respectively (Abba & Babalola, 2017).

Fourth Republic

The return to civilian rule in 1999 signaled the resurgence of a multiparty system in the country, with several political parties engaging in electoral politics. Prominent among these parties were the Alliance for Democracy (AD), the All People's Party (APP), and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) which were registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in 1998. The PDP remains the only surviving party among the three dominant parties established to contest the 1999 elections (Babalola, 2024). The next section focuses on political party administration from 1999 to the present era.

PDP Administration, 1999-2015 (Federal and State levels)

Following the expiration of the tenure of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo administration in 2007, the Umar MusaYar Adua took the reins of government with the 7-point agenda manifesto. This became the vision and the blue print for the administration. According to Ebi (2022), the Yar'Adua administration's primary policy emphasis, commonly known as the 7-point agenda, included Power and Energy, Food Security, Wealth Innovation, Transportation Sector, Land Reforms, Security, and Education. The agenda became the working document of the administration.

This agenda of the central government led by the PDP did not find harmony and resonance with other PDP controlled states. For instance, in Akwa Ibom, a PDP controlled state in 2007, the then Governor, Godswill Akpabio had the Uncommon Transformation agenda. Nkereuwem (2021) notes that the manifesto of Governor Akpabio focused on good governance, servant leadership and a 'revolution' against

unjust ethnic, economic and socio-political structures that stand on the path of development and progress of Akwa Ibom. The manifesto also includes welfarist policy, approaching development with anger and politics of inclusivity.

In Enugu State, the then Governor Sullivan Chime focused on the 4-point agenda, which centered on key areas for development, often summarized in his subsequent administration as: infrastructure development (standard roads and infrastructure), reforming governance, providing security and justice. This manifesto anchored his 2007 election campaign (Vanguard, 2007). In Katsina State, which is the home state of the PDP presidential candidate, Umar Yar Adua, the Governorship candidate Ibrahim Shehu Shema operated a different manifesto from the Presidential candidate. The manifesto focused on fiscal discipline, infrastructural development, and human capital empowerment. According to the then PDP state chairman, Rabi'u Gambo Bakori, the manifesto of Shema is a continuation of the programme of his predecessor, which is often described as a continuation of the "Umaru Musa Yar Adua legacy" (Muazu, 2014).

The foregoing and many other cases can be advanced to justify the argument on lack of uniform manifesto and rather fragmented manifestoes within PDP across different levels of governance. The probable reasons is attributed to the fact that the PDP as a political party lacks cohesion on developmental agenda for the country, which often reinforce the frequently observed shortcoming in the political space the lack of ideology.

After the death of President Umar Musa Yar Adua, his Vice President, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan was sworn in as the President of Nigeria in replacement of the late President. Many of the Governors continued with their manifestos of the first term (2007) and 2011 election. President Goodluck Jonathan did not toe the line of his predecessor, rather he launched an ambitious manifesto tagged transformation agenda. This was a different programme from the Yar Adua 7-point agenda (Ogala, 2013)

APC Administration, 2015-2023 (Federal and State levels)

This lacuna is not only traceable to the PDP, as this cut across many of the parties. Following the end of the PDP's reign in power in Nigeria's body polity, the APC which took over from the PDP did not run its affair differently. Ashindorbe and Danjibo (2022) stated that nine years since its formation and after almost eight years as the governing party, the APC has shown that it is different only in name from the party it succeeded. Virtually all the ills against the PDP administration and its eventual ouster from power assail the governing APC (Ayoade, 2019).

Under the APC, with the emergence of President Muhamadu Buhari, the party campaigned with the manifesto of "Change". According to Amali (2024), the Change Agenda, was anchored on three-point Agenda and policy directions namely, to secure the nation (Security}; resuscitate the economy and finally to fight corruption head on. These three point-agenda where the vocal points in the

manifesto of the APC throughout the campaign period till the party defeated the sitting PDP government in February Nigerian general election 2015.

This change mantra did not resonate with the other APC candidates at the subnational. For instance, Governor Ajimobi's manifesto in 2015 during his inaugural speech centered on the promise of "the power to do good" and the transformation of Oyo State from a "big village to a modern city". The key focus is infrastructural revolution and urban renewal, security and peace, economic re-engineering, ajumose governance (welfare), education and human capital (Premium Times, 2015).

In Katsina, Bello Masari's 2015 governorship campaign in Katsina State, under the All Progressives Congress (APC), was anchored on the "Restoration Agenda," aimed at revitalizing key sectors of the state after years of PDP rule. The major focus of his manifesto is restoring the honour, dignity, and integrity of the people of Katsina State, promising to revive public institutions. The key pillars of the restoration agenda are education, agriculture, health and water supply, security and good governance (Nation, 2015).

In Plateau State, the candidate of the APC did not harmonize his manifesto with that of the Presidential candidate of his party. Governor Lalong continued to protect and maintain his Three Pillar Policy of Peace, Security and Good governance, Infrastructural Development and Sustainable Economic Rebirth (Nanmwa, 2015). This was the practice with so many candidates at the subnational carrying the banner of the APC. This trend of fragmented manifesto and lack coherence continued with the APC leading up to the 2023 general elections.

During the 2023 elections, the current president decided to fashion a different programme from that of his predecessor. Tinubu's campaign policy document tagged "Renewed hope: Action Plan for a Better Nigeria" was unveiled at the State House Banquet Hall, alongside the inauguration of the APC Presidential Campaign Council (PCC) by Buhari. In the manifesto, aside from phasing out fuel subsidy, Tinubu promised to accelerate full implementation of the Petroleum Industry Act and implement additional favourable policies to attract investment in deepwater assets within six months (Akinwale, 2022).

This manifesto and campaign differ from many of the APC candidates contesting elections at the subnational. In Lagos, the Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu continued with his THEME agenda for Greater Lagos. In a report by the Leadership newspaper in 2023, the Governor, Babajide Sanwo-Olu urged residents of the state to continue to support his administration in its quest to deliver more dividends of democracy in line with THEME's developmental agenda for Greater Lagos to Lagosians. In addition, the Governor promised to add gender equality, social inclusion and youth development to his second term development agenda.

In Edo state, the APC campaign train led by Senator Monday Okphebo as the Governorship candidate unveiled a five point agenda to turn around the state and

restore the lost glory. The manifesto covers security, infrastructure, healthcare, food sufficiency, and education. According to the Governorship candidate, the citizens of Edo are the priority of the State Government, while he promised to carefully implement the programmes in the five point agenda.

The APC gubernatorial candidate in Kaduna formulated a campaign agenda titled SUSTAIN. According to the agenda, SUSTAIN will strengthen safety and security, upgrade infrastructure, strengthen institutions, enhance trade and investment. In addition, the manifesto covers investment in human capital and nurturing of citizens engagement. The agenda is expected to be the compass for the APC administration in Kaduna (Vanguard, 2023).

This section under the Fourth Republic examined the empirical evidences of lack of unified manifesto among political parties in Nigeria, especially the leading parties which are examined as the reference cases for this study. Since the inception of the Fourth Republic, the tradition bequeathed by the progenitors of politics in Nigeria has been vacated for personal political agenda. Political party administration in the Fourth Republic has deviated from the ideal pattern of party cohesion synonymous with the First and Second Republic; rather the political actors are engaged in actualizing their self-interests. Babalola (2024) states that political parties formed after 1999 lack a clear sense of what they stand for, as they were formed, not by individuals with similar ideologies but by individuals only interested in enriching themselves.

This dearth of ideological identity in the Fourth Republic is a common feature of all the political parties and it's a reflection of the quality, character and consciousness of the current operators in the political space. Since the actors in the political consider it a herculean task to align themselves under a common principle of the ideals and philosophy of political parties, with clearly spelt out programme of action that defines the path of direction to the attainment of developmental objectives, it implies that the polity is probably bereft of character that understood the rationale behind Nation-building.

Imperative of A Unified Manifesto

The manifesto is an action plan that guides the course of action in a political party. It is a programme that permeates all levels and structure within a political party. According to Nwinya (2015), a manifesto is generally taken to be a written statement in which a political party says what its aims and policies are. As the definitions goes, it is the policy of the political party and not the policy of candidates of the political party where any candidate can formulate programmes of action according to whims and practices without recourse to the philosophy and development agenda of the political party. Such action and practice does not exemplify cohesion within the party. It represents a party with fragmented plans of development. It is important to rally party members behind the policy programme of the party.

After a clearly spelt out manifesto is adopted and it is embraced by all members and at all levels of the political party. There is a need to persist along the line of implementation and execution. This persistence and consistency create an impression and philosophical leaning of the political party. Abonyi (2005) argues that manifesto is stepped down ideology, which constitutes the big and long-term programme of party. By such practice, political parties will organically create an ideological framework for party identity. This implies that the question that has often exposed the weakness inherent in the operation of political parties in Nigeria, which is lack of ideology would have been considerably addressed.

Through a consistency of pattern, a culture is evolved. Political party must begin to influence the political culture in the country through its discipline and organization within the party internal politics. According to Chukwumerije (2009) political parties are both the producers and conveyor belts of political values. It requires the persistence of ideologically committed political parties to articulate these values and through their consistency transform them into integral components of our democratic culture. The democratic space is currently suffused with practices that undermine the potentials of the development of the polity. Political parties must take the lead as we attempt to build a decent and respected democratic atmosphere.

At the current stage our development; the problems bedeviling Nigeria are the problems of poverty, unemployment, insecurity, endemic corruption, severe infrastructural decay, and a reliance on oil that hampers economic diversification (Elaigwu, 2015). The problems are almost the same from the North to the South and from the East to the West. Therefore, what is required is a coordinated policy action to tackle this problem headlong and not fragment of ideas and scattered implementation approach. With a unified party manifesto, the political party is able to systematically take on the current challenges of the country and confront it from a multidimensional approach. Chief Obafemi Awolowos UPN remains a reference point as a development paradigm for the country. The four cardinal point of the UPN was simultaneously implemented in the UPN controlled states in Nigeria. And after over 40 years of the second republic, the legacies are still enduring.

One of the commendations of the Obasanjo Government is the attempt to bring broad planning back to the forefront of Nigeria's political economy (Blum, 2020). This is due to the introduction of the NEEDS document with collaborative implementation framework at both the state and a local government levels. The NEEDS policy had some setback in implementation which affected its objectives. In as much as there were setbacks there were also gains with the implementation of the policy. An IMF report had it that the implementation of NEEDS contributed to strong macroeconomic stability, including GDP growth averaging nearly 7% during the period of its implementation (IMF, 2005). This is one of the highest growth rates the country attained in the recent time. This is a proof that a well-coordinated programme of action faithfully monitored and implemented is an antidote to myriads of development challenges confronting the country.

Conclusion

The study concluded that the operation of political parties in Nigeria must be conducted in compliance with the principle guiding the existence of political parties. Political parties are association of people who subscribed to a common principle, beliefs and conviction. This should guide the actions and inactions of such members at the assumption of power. The programme of action of the political party must be respected by all levels authority of the political party irrespective of individual's genuine convictions.

Recommendations

1. The study therefore recommended that political parties in Nigeria should operate a unified party manifesto, so as to confront the challenges of the country from multi-pronged approach. This implies that all effort at the federal, State and the Local level will be simultaneously addressing similar problems at the same time
2. The study also recommends that there is a need for political parties to set up mechanism to monitor discipline and coherence among party faithful. This is necessary to ensure there is compliance with party stance and philosophy
3. Lastly, there is a need to regularly engage the electorate to build trust by aligning party actions with the manifesto. This will further erase the trust deficit between the government and the governed in Nigeria.

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