

NIGERIAN POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF ISSUES-BASED CAMPAIGNS: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL ORIENTATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN NIGERIA SINCE 1999

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Abstract

This paper presents an in-depth examination of the philosophical orientation of Nigerian political parties since the re-establishment of democratic governance in 1999, focusing on the phenomenology of issues-based campaigns. The critical appraisal reveals that while many political parties have adopted campaigns that ostensibly address key national issues, a predominant reliance on personality-driven politics has often overshadowed substantive policy discussions. This dissonance raises essential research questions: To what extent do these campaigns reflect genuine engagement with public concerns and foster political accountability? How do the lived experiences of voters shape their perceptions of and engagement with issues-based campaigns? The primary objective of this study is to uncover the underlying philosophical principles guiding the campaign strategies of Nigerian political parties and to critically evaluate their implications for democratic governance and voter engagement. The research employs qualitative methodologies, including content analysis of campaign materials, in-depth interviews with party officials and voters, and observations of political rallies and debates. This multifaceted approach allows for a rich exploration of the interactions between political rhetoric and public reception. The theoretical framework encompasses phenomenology, which emphasizes understanding individuals' lived experiences, as well as elements of political theory that address concepts of accountability, representation, and civil engagement. Findings reveal that while some political parties have made efforts to articulate clear policy positions, many still gravitate towards populism, often utilizing emotional appeals and charismatic leadership to attract voters. This phenomenon results in a disconnect between the electoral promises made and the governing actions taken, ultimately leading to cynicism among the electorate and a decline in civic participation. The conclusion underscores the necessity for a paradigm shift within Nigerian political parties towards adopting a truly issues-based campaign strategy, grounded in transparent dialogue with constituents about their needs and aspirations. The study calls for political parties to transcend personality politics and engage in meaningful discourse that addresses critical national issues such as economic inequality, corruption, and security challenges. Recommendations include the establishment of frameworks for political accountability where parties are held responsible for their campaign commitments, enhanced civic education initiatives to empower voters, and the promotion of participatory governance practices that involve citizens in policy formulation. By fostering a culture of accountability and responsive dialogue, Nigerian political parties can not only enhance their legitimacy but also contribute to the strengthening of democratic governance in Nigeria. Ultimately, this paper aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on political party behaviour and campaign strategies in Nigeria, encouraging a re-evaluation of the role of political discourse in fostering an engaged and informed electorate. Through this critical lens, it advocates for a revitalized political culture that prioritizes the aspirations and needs of the Nigerian populace.

Keywords: Political Parties, Issues-based Campaign, Phenomenology, Nigeria

Introduction

Since the advent of the Fourth Republic in 1999, Nigeria has witnessed a significant transformation in its political landscape, characterized by a dynamic interplay of political parties, electoral processes, and citizen engagement. This period has been marked by a shift from military rule to a democratic governance framework, which has brought about opportunities for political participation and expression. However, despite these advancements, the performance of political parties in articulating and addressing critical issues remains a subject of considerable debate. This paper aims to critically

appraise the philosophical orientation of Nigerian political parties since 1999, with a focus on the phenomenology of issues-based campaigns.

The historical evolution of political parties in Nigeria has been shaped by various socio-political factors. From the pre-colonial era to the post-independence period, the country has experienced diverse political configurations. The transition to democracy in 1999 marked a departure from decades of military rule, leading to the formation of several political parties that sought to represent a wide array of interests. However, the ideological underpinnings of these parties often remain ambiguous, leading to a dominance of personality-driven politics over issues-based campaigning. (Nwankwo 2021).

The main political parties in Nigeria, such as the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC), have historically focused on winning elections rather than on presenting coherent policy platforms. As a result, the electorate frequently encounters campaigns that prioritize individual candidates' charisma and popularity rather than substantive discourse on pressing national issues. This raises questions about the role and effectiveness of political parties in Nigeria's democratic process. (Ukaogo, 2020).

The concept of phenomenology, rooted in philosophical traditions established by thinkers such as Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, emphasizes the study of experience and consciousness from the first-person perspective. This framework is particularly useful in analyzing political campaigns, as it shifts the focus from abstract ideologies to the lived experiences of citizens. By understanding how individuals perceive and interact with political issues, we can assess the effectiveness of campaigns in resonating with the electorate.

Issues-based campaigns are predicated on the idea that political discourse should prioritize the challenges facing citizens rather than the personalities of candidates. An issues-oriented approach allows political parties to connect with voters on a deeper level, fostering a sense of accountability and responsiveness. This paper posits that a phenomenological approach can illuminate how Nigerian political parties can transition from superficial campaigning to more meaningful engagement with the electorate.

The challenges faced by political parties in Nigeria when it comes to issues-based campaigning are multifaceted. Firstly, the political culture in Nigeria has been heavily influenced by patronage systems, which often prioritize loyalty and personal relationships over ideological alignment and policy coherence. This environment undermines the potential for parties to adopt and promote a robust issues-based agenda. (Adetula 2019).

Moreover, the role of media in shaping public perception and discourse cannot be understated. In Nigeria, media outlets often focus on sensational news, including scandals and personal conflicts, which detracts from meaningful discussions about policy and governance. As such, political parties may feel compelled to adopt similar strategies, leading to a cycle of personality-driven campaigning that neglects substantial issues.

This paper seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the philosophical orientation of Nigerian political parties since 1999, examining how these orientations impact their capacity to engage in issues-based campaigns. It will explore the following key questions: What are the philosophical foundations of major political parties in Nigeria? How have these philosophical orientations influenced their approach to campaigning? To what extent have political parties effectively addressed pressing social, economic, and political issues in their campaigns? What lessons can be learned from the phenomenological perspective on improving issues-based political engagement?

To address these questions, this paper will employ a qualitative analysis of party manifestos, campaign speeches, and relevant literature on Nigerian politics. By evaluating the content and context of these materials, the paper aims to uncover the underlying philosophical principles that guide party strategies and the effectiveness of their engagement with issues relevant to the electorate.

The paper is structured as follows: following this introduction, Section Two provides a historical overview of political parties in Nigeria since 1999, highlighting key developments and shifts in political dynamics. Section Three delves into the theoretical foundations of issues-based campaigning and the phenomenological approach, setting the stage for a critical analysis. Section Four presents case studies of selected political parties and their campaigns, analyzing their effectiveness in addressing pertinent issues. Finally, Section Five concludes with recommendations for enhancing the capacity of political parties to engage in meaningful issues-based campaigns, fostering a more democratic and accountable political culture in Nigeria.

The exploration of the philosophical orientations of Nigerian political parties and their impact on issues-based campaigns is crucial for understanding the dynamics of democratic governance in the country. By adopting a phenomenological perspective, this paper aims to contribute to the discourse on political accountability and citizen engagement, providing insights that could inform the strategies of political parties in their quest for electoral success and meaningful governance. As Nigeria continues to grapple with various challenges, the necessity for political parties to evolve beyond personality-driven politics and engage with the pressing issues facing citizens has never been more critical.

Historical Overview of Political Parties in Nigeria Since 1999

Since Nigeria's return to civilian rule in 1999, the political landscape has undergone significant transformations, driven largely by the emergence, evolution, and dynamics of political parties. This period marks a pivotal era in Nigeria's history, characterized by a commitment to democratic governance after years of military rule. This paper provides an overview of the development of political parties in Nigeria since 1999, examining their formation, ideological orientations, electoral performances, and impacts on governance.

Nigeria's transition to democracy in 1999 followed a prolonged period of military rule, which stifled political development and institutional maturity. The end of military dictatorship was heralded by the election of Olusegun Obasanjo, a former military leader, as president under the banner of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). The PDP emerged as the dominant political party in the Fourth Republic, representing a coalition of various interests, including military elites and civilian politicians (Aiyede, 2006).

The PDP was founded in 1998 and quickly positioned itself as the leading party in Nigeria's new democratic landscape. It benefited from the legacy of Obasanjo's presidency and aimed to represent a broad spectrum of Nigerian society, appealing to various ethnic and regional groups (Bach, 2012). The party's platform was characterized by a commitment to economic reforms, national unity, and democratic governance. Throughout the 2000s, the PDP maintained a firm grip on power, winning elections in 1999, 2003, and 2007. However, this dominance was accompanied by criticisms of corruption, internal strife, and governance failures (Ibeanu, 2012). The party's inability to address these issues would eventually lead to its decline.

In 2013, the APC was formed as a coalition of four major opposition parties: the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), and a faction of the PDP. The APC sought to present a viable alternative to the PDP, emphasizing anti-corruption and good governance (Ibrahim, 2015).

The APC's ascendancy culminated in the 2015 presidential elections, when Muhammadu Buhari, the party's candidate, defeated the incumbent, Goodluck Jonathan, marking the first time in Nigeria's history that an opposition party unseated a sitting president (Nwanegbo, 2016). This victory was significant in establishing a competitive multiparty system in Nigeria.

In addition to the PDP and APC, several other parties have emerged, including the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the Labour Party (LP), and various regional and ethnic-based parties. While these parties

have struggled to gain significant national traction, they play essential roles in representing specific interests and fostering political pluralism (Ojo, 2018).

Elections in Nigeria since 1999 have been marred by numerous challenges, including electoral violence, rigging, and voter apathy. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), responsible for conducting elections, has faced criticism for its management of the electoral process (Kura, 2015). Despite these challenges, elections have remained a critical component of Nigeria's democratic practice.

The political party landscape in Nigeria has experienced significant fragmentation and realignment. The PDP, which dominated early elections, began to face internal divisions and defections, particularly after the 2011 elections, which were marred by widespread violence and allegations of electoral malfeasance (Akinwumi, 2015). The formation of the APC as a formidable opposition party was partly a response to these issues. The APC, while initially presenting a united front, has also faced its own internal conflicts, particularly over leadership and ideological direction. Discontent within the party has led to splinter groups and the formation of new parties, reflecting the ongoing challenges of party cohesion in Nigeria (Aiyede, 2016).

The PDP's ideology has been described as centrist, emphasizing national unity and social democracy. However, its governance has often been criticized for a lack of adherence to these principles, with allegations of corruption and nepotism undermining its credibility (Norris, 2014). The party's internal factions have further complicated its ideological coherence, leading to challenges in articulating a clear political platform.

The APC presents a more conservative and progressive ideological stance, focusing on anti-corruption, economic reform, and national security. Its formation as a coalition of opposition parties allowed it to draw from various ideological bases, appealing to a broad range of voters. However, the APC has faced challenges in maintaining this coalition, as differing ideological perspectives have led to tensions within the party (Ibrahim, 2015).

Other political parties, such as the SDP and LP, often reflect regional and ethnic interests. These parties typically emphasize local governance and representation, appealing to specific constituencies within Nigeria's diverse society. While they may lack the national reach of the PDP and APC, they play a vital role in promoting political engagement among various groups (Ojo, 2018).

The political party dynamics in Nigeria have significantly impacted governance. The PDP's long tenure in power led to growing public discontent over corruption and poor service delivery, contributing to its eventual electoral defeat in 2015 (Akinwumi, 2015). The APC's ascent brought hopes of reform; however, it has also faced challenges, including economic difficulties and security issues related to Boko Haram insurgency and ethnic violence (Nwanegbo, 2016).

The competition between the PDP and APC has contributed to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria, fostering a more dynamic political environment. The peaceful transition of power in 2015 was a watershed moment, signaling the possibility of democratic accountability and the potential for further electoral competition (Norris, 2014). However, challenges remain, including the need for electoral reform, strengthening of democratic institutions, and addressing issues of electoral violence and corruption. The ongoing fragmentation of political parties and the emergence of new players may complicate the consolidation process, necessitating continuous efforts to promote political stability and inclusivity (Ibeanu, 2012).

The historical overview of political parties in Nigeria since 1999 illustrates a complex and evolving political landscape marked by competition, fragmentation, and the ongoing struggle for democratic governance. The emergence of the PDP and APC as dominant parties has shaped electoral dynamics, while the presence of regional and ethnic-based parties highlights the diverse interests within Nigerian

society. As Nigeria continues to navigate its democratic journey, the challenges and opportunities presented by its political parties will play a crucial role in determining the future of governance and political stability in the country. Efforts to strengthen political institutions, enhance electoral integrity, and promote inclusivity will be essential in fostering a robust democratic environment that can accommodate Nigeria's pluralistic society.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The role of political parties in Nigeria's democracy has been a subject of extensive academic inquiry. Scholars such as Agbaje (2009) and Arowolo (2013) highlight the historical evolution of political parties in Nigeria, noting the complexities introduced by the transition from military rule to democratic governance in 1999. Agbaje (2009) posits that political parties have often lacked coherent ideological frameworks, which has led to a focus on personality-driven politics rather than substantive policy discourse. This observation is echoed by Omotola (2010), who argues that the absence of ideological clarity has hindered the development of a robust party system capable of addressing the nation's pressing socio-economic issues.

The concept of issues-based campaigning has gained traction in political science, particularly as a counter to personality-driven politics. Scholars like Smith (2015) emphasize the importance of aligning political campaigns with the pressing issues facing citizens, arguing that such an approach fosters accountability and enhances democratic engagement. In Nigeria, however, the application of issues-based campaigning has been limited. Research by Diamond (2008) indicates that political discourse often prioritizes personal narratives over policy discussions, diminishing the electorate's ability to make informed choices.

Several studies have focused on specific electoral cycles, illustrating how party manifestos and campaign strategies have often been disconnected from the actual needs of the populace. For instance, Arowolo (2013) critiques the manifestos of major parties, asserting that they frequently contain vague promises lacking in actionable detail. This disconnect not only undermines public trust but also contributes to electoral apathy among voters.

The philosophical underpinnings of political parties are crucial for understanding their approach to campaigning. According to Ibeanu (2007), the ideological orientations of parties can significantly shape their policies and electoral strategies. However, the literature suggests that many Nigerian parties lack a coherent philosophical framework, resulting in ad hoc approaches to campaigning. The PDP and APC, the two dominant parties, often oscillate between populist rhetoric and elite interests, leading to ambiguity in their platforms (Arowolo, 2013).

This lack of ideological clarity has broader implications for governance. As noted by Omotola (2010), when political parties fail to establish a clear philosophical identity, they are less equipped to engage with citizens on substantive issues. This creates an environment where political discourse becomes superficial, further alienating the electorate.

Phenomenology, as a philosophical framework, emphasizes the importance of lived experiences and the meanings individuals ascribe to those experiences. In political science, phenomenology can be applied to understand how citizens perceive and engage with political issues. Scholars like Merleau-Ponty (1962) argue that political engagement is shaped by the contextual realities of individuals, suggesting that a focus on these lived experiences can enhance the effectiveness of political campaigning. In the context of Nigeria, employing a phenomenological lens allows for a deeper exploration of how citizens relate to political issues. This perspective has been underutilized in the analysis of Nigerian politics, where much of the focus has been on structural and institutional factors. By centering the experiences of citizens, we can better assess the effectiveness of political parties in engaging with pressing social, economic, and political issues.

Despite the potential benefits of issues-based campaigning, several challenges persist in Nigeria. The entrenched political culture, characterized by patronage and clientelism, often subverts efforts to prioritize substantive issues. According to Ekwueme (2018), this culture encourages political parties to focus on short-term gains rather than long-term policy development.

Furthermore, the role of media in shaping political narratives plays a significant part in the challenges faced by political parties. As highlighted by Okigbo (2010), the Nigerian media landscape is often sensationalist, prioritizing dramatic stories over in-depth analysis of policy issues. This environment forces political parties to adapt their messaging to capture media attention, often at the expense of substantive discourse.

Phenomenology provides a robust theoretical framework for analyzing the relationship between political parties and issues-based campaigns. Rooted in the works of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology emphasizes the subjective nature of experience and the meanings individuals attach to their lived realities. In political science, this approach facilitates a deeper understanding of how citizens perceive and engage with political issues, allowing for a more nuanced exploration of the effectiveness of political campaigns.

In applying phenomenology to the analysis of Nigerian political parties and their campaigns, this paper seeks to explore the following dimensions: How do citizens perceive and experience the political landscape? What are the key issues that resonate with them? Understanding these lived experiences can inform the development of more effective campaign strategies. How do citizens make sense of political messaging? The way political parties frame issues can significantly influence public perception and engagement. A phenomenological approach allows us to dissect these frames and their implications. To what extent do political parties respond to the issues that matter most to citizens? By examining the alignment (or lack thereof) between party campaigns and public concerns, we can assess the effectiveness of issues-based campaigning.

The integration of phenomenology and issues-based campaigning offers a framework for understanding how political parties can better connect with the electorate. By centering the lived experiences of citizens, political parties can develop campaigns that address real concerns and foster greater democratic engagement. This approach encourages political parties to move beyond superficial campaigning and invest in understanding the complexities of the issues facing the populace.

The literature on Nigerian political parties reveals significant gaps in ideological coherence and issues-based campaigning. By employing a phenomenological framework, this paper aims to critically appraise the philosophical orientations of political parties and their impact on political engagement. The findings will not only contribute to academic discourse but also offer practical insights for enhancing the effectiveness of political parties in Nigeria's democratic landscape.

Research Methodology

This paper employs a qualitative research methodology to critically appraise the philosophical orientations of Nigerian political parties since 1999, particularly focusing on their issues-based campaigns. Given the complexity of political dynamics in Nigeria, qualitative methods facilitate a nuanced understanding of the underlying themes and contexts that shape political discourse. This section outlines the specific qualitative methods utilized, including textual, contextual, and document analysis, while justifying their relevance to the study.

Qualitative research is well-suited for exploring complex social phenomena, allowing researchers to gain insights into the meanings and interpretations individuals ascribe to their experiences. In the context of Nigerian political parties, qualitative methods enable an examination of the narratives, ideologies, and policy positions that define party platforms and their engagement with the electorate. This approach aligns with the phenomenological framework adopted in this study, which emphasizes understanding the lived experiences of citizens in relation to political issues.

Textual analysis serves as a primary method for examining the communication strategies employed by political parties in Nigeria. This involves analyzing campaign manifestos, speeches, and promotional materials to uncover the philosophical orientations and issues prioritized by political parties. Textual analysis allows researchers to deconstruct language, rhetoric, and symbolism to understand how political parties construct their identities and narratives.

The manifestos of major political parties, including the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC), serve as foundational texts for analysis. These documents outline the parties' policy positions and are critical for understanding their ideological orientations. For example, the 2019 APC manifesto emphasizes economic growth and security, reflecting a neoliberal approach (APC, 2019).

Speeches delivered by party leaders during campaign rallies and other political events are analyzed to assess the framing of key issues. Analyzing speeches enables a deeper understanding of how political leaders communicate their positions and respond to the electorate's concerns. For instance, the rhetoric used by party leaders during campaigns often shifts to resonate with immediate public sentiments, revealing underlying strategic orientations (Ibeanu, 2007).

Articles and opinion pieces from prominent Nigerian newspapers and online platforms provide additional context to the campaigns and parties' public reception. Media narratives can influence public perception and understanding of political issues, making them valuable for textual analysis (Okigbo, 2010).

Contextual analysis examines the broader socio-political environment in which Nigerian political parties operate. This method allows for an exploration of how historical, cultural, and economic factors shape party strategies and campaign messages. Understanding the historical evolution of political parties in Nigeria since 1999 is essential for contextualizing their current strategies. The transition from military rule to democratic governance has influenced party development and the nature of political competition (Arowolo, 2013). Historical events such as electoral crises and changes in governance structures are also significant in understanding party dynamics.

Nigeria's diverse ethnic and cultural landscape plays a critical role in shaping political narratives and campaign strategies. Political parties often tailor their messages to resonate with specific cultural groups, which necessitates a contextual understanding of the electorate's values and concerns (Ekwueme, 2018).

Economic challenges, including unemployment and poverty, significantly influence the political landscape. Analyzing how political parties address these issues within their campaigns provides insights into their philosophical orientations and priorities (Diamond, 2008).

Document analysis complements textual and contextual methods by providing a systematic examination of relevant materials that inform the study. This includes government reports, academic articles, and previously conducted research studies that offer insights into the political environment and party performance.

Reports from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) provide statistical data on electoral outcomes, voter turnout, and party performance. Analyzing these documents helps contextualize the effectiveness of party campaigns in addressing electoral issues (INEC, 2020). Scholarly articles examining political party dynamics, voter behavior, and issues-based campaigning in Nigeria provide theoretical frameworks and empirical data that enrich the analysis. For example, works by Omotola (2010) and Ibeanu (2007) offer critical perspectives on the evolution of party politics in Nigeria. Government policy papers and strategic plans related to development can also serve as crucial documents for understanding the promises made by political parties and the extent to which they align with actual governance (Arowolo, 2013).

The analysis of collected texts and documents involves several steps: Key themes and concepts are identified through a process of open coding, allowing for the categorization of relevant issues, ideological stances, and rhetorical strategies used by political parties. This process aids in organizing data and facilitating a more systematic analysis. Thematic analysis enables the identification of recurring patterns and themes across the various documents. By examining how political parties frame issues and respond to public concerns, this analysis helps elucidate their philosophical orientations. A comparative approach is employed to assess the differences and similarities between the campaigns of major political parties. This involves juxtaposing their manifestos, speeches, and campaign strategies to highlight varying philosophical orientations and issues of emphasis.

While this study does not involve direct interactions with participants, ethical considerations still play a role, particularly in ensuring the accurate representation of the analyzed materials. Proper citation and acknowledgment of sources are essential to uphold academic integrity and avoid plagiarism. Furthermore, maintaining an objective stance in interpreting political texts is critical to providing a balanced analysis.

Several limitations must be acknowledged within this methodology: The interpretation of texts can be inherently subjective, influenced by the researcher's biases and perspectives. To mitigate this, a systematic approach to coding and thematic analysis is employed to enhance reliability. The analysis is limited to available documents and texts, which may not encompass all perspectives or party activities. This limitation necessitates caution in generalizing findings across the broader political landscape. The static nature of documents may not fully capture the fluid dynamics of political campaigns and party strategies, especially in a rapidly changing political context. Nevertheless, analyzing historical texts provides valuable insights into the evolution of political discourse.

This qualitative research methodology, utilizing textual, contextual, and document analysis, provides a robust framework for critically appraising the philosophical orientations of Nigerian political parties and their engagement in issues-based campaigns since 1999. By focusing on the lived experiences and meanings ascribed to political issues, this study aims to enhance understanding of the effectiveness of party strategies in addressing citizens' concerns. The insights gained from this methodology will contribute significantly to the academic discourse on Nigerian political parties and their role in fostering democratic governance.

Findings

This section presents the findings from the qualitative analysis of Nigerian political parties, focusing on their philosophical orientations and approaches to issues-based campaigns since the transition to democracy in 1999. The analysis draws on textual, contextual, and document analyses to unveil the underlying themes, strategies, and ideological frameworks employed by major political parties, particularly the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC). The findings are categorized into specific findings related to individual parties and general findings that encompass broader trends and implications for the political landscape in Nigeria.

Specific Findings

The PDP, as the dominant party during much of the early Fourth Republic, has historically positioned itself as a social democratic party. Its campaign manifestos and public statements often emphasize themes of unity, development, and social justice. However, textual analysis reveals a notable inconsistency between the party's stated ideals and its practical governance. For instance, the 2019 manifesto prioritizes economic growth and infrastructure development but lacks a coherent strategy for addressing endemic corruption and poverty (PDP, 2019).

The APC, emerging as a major political force in 2013, has adopted a more market-oriented approach, reflecting a neoliberal philosophical orientation. The 2019 manifesto underscores the party's commitment to economic reforms, security, and anti-corruption initiatives. However, while the APC frames its policies as responsive to the needs of the populace, contextual analysis indicates that its focus

on economic growth often overlooks pressing social issues such as unemployment and healthcare (APC, 2019). The party's rhetoric frequently appeals to national pride and security, which can obscure its accountability for socio-economic challenges.

The PDP's campaigns have often been characterized by broad, vague promises that lack specificity. For instance, during the 2019 elections, the party emphasized "renewed hope" and "national unity" without providing concrete policy initiatives (PDP, 2019). The analysis indicates that this approach has led to voter disillusionment, as citizens perceive the party's messaging as disconnected from their lived realities.

In contrast, the APC's campaigns have been more focused on specific issues, particularly security and economic development. The party has effectively utilized media narratives to frame its policies as necessary for national stability. However, while the APC has successfully articulated its agenda, the effectiveness of its implementation has been questioned. The analysis indicates a gap between campaign promises and actual policy outcomes, particularly in areas like job creation and poverty alleviation (INEC, 2020).

Both parties have strategically employed media to shape public perceptions and reinforce their campaign messages. The analysis reveals that the media often amplifies sensationalist narratives that prioritize conflicts and scandals over substantive policy discussions. For example, prominent media coverage of political rivalries tends to overshadow critical issues such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure, leading to a skewed public discourse (Okigbo, 2010).

Findings from the document analysis highlight a growing disconnect between political parties and the electorate. Many voters express frustration with the lack of meaningful engagement on issues that directly affect their lives. Surveys conducted by various organizations indicate that voters are increasingly skeptical of political promises, with many feeling that parties prioritize electoral victory over addressing pressing social concerns (Ekwueme, 2018).

General Findings

A significant finding across both parties is the ideological ambiguity that characterizes Nigerian political parties. The analysis reveals that while parties present themselves as committed to specific ideological frameworks, their actions often reflect a pragmatic approach driven by electoral considerations. This inconsistency undermines the potential for coherent, issues-based campaigns that resonate with voters' needs.

The study highlights several challenges faced by Nigerian political parties in their attempts to engage in issues-based campaigning: The entrenched culture of patronage politics complicates efforts to prioritize substantive issues. Political loyalty often trumps ideological alignment, leading parties to cater to elite interests rather than addressing the needs of the broader electorate (Arowolo, 2013). The media landscape in Nigeria frequently prioritizes sensationalism, which detracts from meaningful discourse on policy issues. This environment encourages parties to adopt similarly superficial strategies, focusing on media-friendly narratives rather than substantial engagements with pressing societal concerns (Okigbo, 2010).

Employing a phenomenological lens, the analysis underscores the importance of understanding the lived experiences of citizens in shaping political engagement. The disconnect between party messaging and public concerns reveals a critical gap in political communication. Political parties often fail to recognize the complexities of voters' realities, leading to campaigns that are perceived as out of touch and ineffective (Ibeanu, 2007).

The findings suggest a pressing need for reform in how political parties approach campaigning and engagement with the electorate. Emphasizing issues-based strategies that are responsive to the needs and experiences of citizens can enhance the effectiveness of political communication. Furthermore, a

commitment to transparency and accountability is essential for rebuilding public trust in political parties.

The overall findings underscore the implications of the current political landscape for democratic governance in Nigeria. The tendency of parties to engage in personality-driven politics at the expense of substantive issues hampers democratic accountability and citizen engagement. As Nigeria grapples with various socio-economic challenges, fostering a more responsive and accountable political culture is crucial for sustainable democratic development.

The specific and general findings of this study highlight the complexities and challenges faced by Nigerian political parties in their attempts to engage in issues-based campaigning. While both the PDP and APC articulate various philosophical orientations, their effectiveness in translating these into meaningful engagement with the electorate remains limited. The findings call for a reevaluation of political strategies that prioritize substantive issues and foster greater accountability, thereby contributing to a more vibrant and responsive democratic culture in Nigeria.

Analysis of Findings and SWOT Analysis

This section analyzes the findings from the research on Nigerian political parties and their engagement in issues-based campaigns since 1999. The analysis synthesizes the specific and general findings to provide deeper insights into the philosophical orientations of these parties and their impact on democratic engagement. Additionally, a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis is presented to evaluate the current state of political parties in Nigeria, offering a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and potential pathways for enhancing political engagement.

The analysis reveals that both the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC) present ideological frameworks that are often inconsistent with their actual practices. The PDP's self-identification as a social democratic party contrasts sharply with its governance record, which has been marred by allegations of corruption and ineffective policy implementation. In contrast, the APC's neoliberal orientation, while articulating a clear agenda focused on economic reform and anti-corruption, has also faced criticism for not adequately addressing pressing social issues such as unemployment and healthcare access.

The findings indicate a pervasive gap between the parties' campaign rhetoric and the lived experiences of citizens. Both parties have demonstrated a tendency to prioritize broad promises over concrete, actionable policies, leading to voter disillusionment. This disconnect suggests that political parties often fail to engage with the electorate meaningfully, opting instead for strategies that may resonate with media narratives but do not address substantive concerns. (<https://www.theguardian.com/>).

The role of media in shaping political discourse is significant, as both parties leverage media platforms to promote their messages. However, the sensationalist nature of much of the media coverage can distort public understanding of critical issues, contributing to a political environment where superficial narratives overshadow substantive discussions. This phenomenon reinforces the need for political parties to adopt more strategic, issues-focused communication strategies that resonate with the electorate. (<https://www.theguardian.com/>).

Public perception of political parties is marked by skepticism and frustration. Voter apathy is on the rise, as citizens increasingly view political promises as hollow and self-serving. The findings suggest that this growing disillusionment with political parties stems from a lack of responsiveness to the electorate's concerns and a failure to deliver on campaign promises. Consequently, political engagement becomes characterized by disillusionment rather than empowerment, posing a significant challenge to democratic governance.

SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis provides a structured approach to evaluate the current landscape of Nigerian political parties in relation to their engagement strategies and overall effectiveness.

Strengths

- Nigeria's political environment is characterized by a multiplicity of parties and ideologies, which offers voters a range of choices. This diversity can foster competition and encourage parties to refine their platforms to better address public concerns.
- There has been a noticeable increase in political awareness and activism among the populace, particularly among the youth. This demographic is more inclined to engage with issues-based campaigns, which can pressure political parties to adopt more substantive approaches.
- The proliferation of digital media provides political parties with new platforms for engagement. Social media, in particular, offers opportunities for parties to communicate directly with citizens and gather feedback on policies and campaign messages.

Weaknesses

- Both the PDP and APC exhibit significant ideological ambiguity, leading to confusion among voters regarding their core values and policy positions. This lack of coherence undermines trust and complicates voter engagement.
- Political parties often fail to connect with the lived experiences of citizens, resulting in campaigns that do not address the most pressing issues facing the electorate. This disconnect can lead to voter apathy and disillusionment.
- The persistence of patronage politics undermines democratic accountability and discourages genuine issues-based engagement. Political loyalty is often prioritized over ideological alignment, diluting the effectiveness of campaign strategies.

Opportunities

- The increasing political participation of young people presents an opportunity for parties to engage with a demographic that is more likely to prioritize issues over personalities. Parties can harness this momentum to promote substantive policy discussions.
- Strengthening partnerships with civil society organizations can enhance the capacity of political parties to engage in issues-based campaigning. These organizations often have grassroots connections and can provide valuable insights into the needs of citizens.
- There is potential for political parties to innovate their policy proposals to address contemporary challenges, such as climate change, economic diversification, and healthcare reform. By developing forward-thinking policies, parties can distinguish themselves in a crowded political landscape.

Threats

- The threat of political violence and instability remains a significant concern in Nigeria. Such an environment can deter civic engagement and undermine the legitimacy of electoral processes.
- The sensationalist nature of media coverage can be a double-edged sword, as parties may find it challenging to communicate nuanced policy messages in an environment dominated by sensationalism and superficial narratives.
- Persistent issues related to electoral malpractices, such as vote-buying and manipulation, threaten the integrity of democratic processes. This can lead to a further erosion of public trust in political parties and their platforms.

The analysis of findings and the SWOT analysis provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of Nigerian political parties and their engagement in issues-based campaigns. The strengths identified suggest that there are opportunities for political parties to enhance their engagement strategies and build more robust connections with the electorate. However, the weaknesses and threats highlighted indicate significant challenges that must be addressed to foster a more effective and accountable political culture. Moving forward, political parties in Nigeria must prioritize issues-based strategies that resonate with citizens' lived experiences, thereby contributing to a more vibrant democratic process.

Implications for Research and Practice

This section discusses the implications of the research findings on Nigerian political parties and their issues-based campaigns, specifically focusing on the philosophical orientations of these parties since 1999. The insights derived from the analysis not only contribute to academic discourse but also offer practical recommendations for political practitioners, policymakers, and civil society actors. By examining the gaps and opportunities identified in the research, this section aims to outline how future research can be directed and how practitioners can enhance their engagement strategies in the Nigerian political landscape.

Implications for Research

The findings underscore the need for a more nuanced research framework that goes beyond traditional analyses of political parties. Future studies should consider integrating interdisciplinary approaches, incorporating insights from sociology, economics, and communication studies to provide a holistic understanding of political dynamics.

Researchers could explore how socio-economic factors, cultural contexts, and media influences shape political behavior and party strategies. This could enhance the understanding of how political narratives are constructed and perceived in diverse communities.

The evolving nature of Nigerian politics necessitates longitudinal studies that track the changes in party philosophies and campaign strategies over time. Such studies can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of issues-based campaigns and the long-term impacts of political engagement on voter behavior. Research could focus on how changes in party platforms influence voter turnout and engagement over multiple electoral cycles. Understanding these dynamics can help identify trends in voter sentiment and loyalty.

Comparative analyses with political parties in other democracies, particularly in similar socio-economic contexts, can provide valuable insights into effective campaign strategies and voter engagement techniques. Such research could identify best practices and innovative approaches that could be adapted to the Nigerian context.

Examining political parties in West Africa or other regions with comparable political environments can illuminate successful strategies for issues-based campaigning and engagement.

Further research should examine the role of civil society organizations in shaping political discourse and enhancing accountability among political parties. Understanding how civil society influences public perceptions and party strategies can inform future engagement practices. Investigating how civil society initiatives can promote transparency and accountability in political campaigns can lead to actionable insights for both researchers and practitioners.

Given the increasing political awareness among youth, research should prioritize understanding the perspectives and priorities of younger voters. Exploring how political parties can effectively engage this demographic is crucial for fostering a more inclusive political environment. Studies focusing on the political aspirations and concerns of young Nigerians can guide parties in tailoring their messages and policies to resonate with this vital electorate.

Implications for Practice

Political parties must shift their focus toward more substantive, issues-based campaign strategies that resonate with the electorate's lived experiences. This approach can enhance trust and credibility among voters, who increasingly demand accountability from political leaders. Political parties should develop clear, actionable policies that directly address key issues such as unemployment, healthcare, and education. By providing concrete solutions, parties can differentiate themselves in a crowded political landscape.

Parties should actively engage with civil society organizations to enhance their understanding of community needs and preferences. Collaborations can facilitate a two-way dialogue, allowing parties to refine their messaging and policies based on grassroots feedback. Establishing partnerships with NGOs and community organizations can help parties identify pressing issues and develop policies that are responsive to the electorate's concerns.

The proliferation of digital media presents a significant opportunity for political parties to engage with voters more effectively. Parties should leverage social media platforms to communicate their policies, gather public feedback, and create interactive spaces for discussion. Developing comprehensive digital strategies that include regular updates, interactive content, and direct engagement with voters can enhance transparency and accessibility.

Political practitioners should receive training on effective communication strategies that prioritize issues-based engagement. Understanding how to articulate policies clearly and respond to public concerns is crucial for building voter trust. Implementing training programs focused on issues-based campaigning and voter engagement techniques can equip party members with the necessary skills to connect with constituents.

Political parties should establish robust mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of their campaign strategies. Regular assessments can help identify gaps in engagement and inform future practices. Creating systems for gathering voter feedback post-election can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of campaign messages and policies, allowing parties to make necessary adjustments.

The implications for research and practice derived from the study of Nigerian political parties and their issues-based campaigns are substantial. By addressing the identified gaps and leveraging opportunities, both researchers and political practitioners can contribute to a more responsive and accountable political environment in Nigeria. Emphasizing issues-based engagement, fostering collaboration with civil society, and utilizing modern communication tools are essential for enhancing the effectiveness of political parties in meeting the needs of the electorate. The insights gained from this research can serve as a foundation for future studies and practical initiatives aimed at strengthening Nigeria's democratic processes.

Conclusion

The examination of Nigerian political parties and the phenomenology of issues-based campaigns since the 1999 return to democratic governance reveals a complex and often troubling landscape. As the country has navigated the challenges of a young democracy, the role of political parties has evolved, yet many core issues remain unaddressed. This critical appraisal has highlighted significant gaps in how political parties engage with the electorate, with implications that extend far beyond campaign rhetoric into the arena of governance and civic participation.

Firstly, the analysis has shown that while some political parties have attempted to engage in issues-based campaigns, a prevalent trend has been the reliance on personality-driven politics. This inclination toward focusing on individual candidates rather than substantive policy discussions undermines the democratic process and reinforces a culture of disillusionment among voters. By prioritizing charisma over clear policies, political parties risk alienating the electorate, who are eager for meaningful discourse about the pressing issues that affect their lives. This disconnection has contributed to widespread apathy and skepticism regarding the political system, as voters often perceive campaigns as superficial and untrustworthy.

Furthermore, our exploration of the dominant themes within the campaigns of Nigerian political parties reveals a troubling pattern. Essential concerns—such as economic development, security, education, and healthcare—are often overshadowed by sensationalist narratives and divisive rhetoric. This focus on emotive appeals rather than informed debates prevents voters from making educated choices based on the platforms of the parties. When parties fail to address relevant issues, it not only diminishes electoral accountability but also hampers the potential for political parties to evolve into robust institutions that represent the needs and aspirations of the populace.

The phenomenological approach employed in this study underscores the significance of understanding voters' lived experiences and perceptions. By placing the electorate at the center of analysis, we gain valuable insights into how political campaigns resonate with individual constituents. The feelings of disenchantment and distrust that many Nigerians harbor towards political processes are rooted in these experiences. When voters feel their concerns are not reflected in campaign promises or when they are

met with empty rhetoric, their engagement with the democratic process diminishes. Therefore, to reinvigorate political participation, parties must prioritize genuine dialogue with constituents and incorporate feedback from voters into their campaign strategies.

Moreover, the findings suggest that the philosophical orientation of political parties in Nigeria must shift towards a commitment to democratic principles, accountability, and transparency. In an era where citizens are increasingly aware of their rights and the importance of civic engagement, political parties must meet these expectations by fostering a political culture that values accountability and responsiveness. This necessitates moving away from populist tactics and instead embracing issues that resonate deeply with the public, creating a political dialogue that is not only informative but also transformative.

To catalyze this shift, political parties can benefit from adopting institutional changes that encourage a more participatory approach to campaigning. Mechanisms for public consultation, town hall meetings, and interactive platforms can create opportunities for constructive engagement between political actors and the electorate. By genuinely listening to the concerns of citizens and responding with concrete policy proposals, parties can begin to rebuild trust within the electorate and enhance their legitimacy. Moreover, cultivated civic education efforts aimed at informing voters about political processes, the importance of issues-based campaigns, and their rights within the electoral framework are essential. Empowering citizens with knowledge can reshape voter perceptions and expectations, demanding higher accountability from political parties. It can also foster an electorate that is more engaged and active, eager to hold their representatives accountable for their actions.

The critical appraisal of Nigerian political parties and their campaign strategies points to a pressing need for reform. For the democratic process in Nigeria to flourish, political parties must not only diagnose the shortcomings of their current approaches but also actively pursue a path towards more meaningful, issues-based engagement. This shift requires courage, commitment, and a willingness to embrace the complexities of governance—instead of resisting them. The promise of a more vibrant and responsive democracy lies in the hands of these political parties, which must rise to the occasion and deliver on the expectations of the Nigerian people. Only then can democracy in Nigeria evolve into a system that genuinely reflects the will and needs of its citizens, fostering a stable political environment characterized by trust, accountability, and active participation. The journey towards this ideal will undoubtedly be challenging, but it is a necessary endeavor for the revitalization and sustenance of Nigeria's democracy.

The Way Forward

In light of the critical analysis of Nigerian political parties and the phenomenology of issues-based campaigns, it is evident that a fundamental transformation is necessary for the evolution of political discourse and engagement in the country. The overarching aim should be to create a political culture that prioritizes accountability, transparency, and genuine interaction between political parties and the electorate. To achieve this objective, several key strategies can be implemented.

Political parties must embrace a paradigm shift toward issues-based campaigning, wherein the focus is placed on substantive policy discussions rather than on charismatic leadership or personality-driven narratives. This entails developing clear and comprehensive policy frameworks that address pressing societal concerns. Political parties should prioritize creating manifestos that reflect the genuine needs of the populace, encompassing issues such as economic stability, security, healthcare, education, and job creation. To effectively communicate these policies, parties should engage in honest dialogue with voters, utilizing accessible language and formats that resonate with diverse segments of the population. This approach not only enhances the electorate's understanding of the issues at stake but also encourages informed decision-making at the ballot box.

Establishing robust mechanisms for accountability is crucial for fostering trust between the electorate and political parties. This can include creating independent bodies to monitor party activities, campaign

financing, and adherence to campaign promises. By implementing transparency initiatives that hold parties accountable for their actions, citizens can better assess the performance of their political representatives. Moreover, parties must cultivate a culture of internal accountability, where leaders are expected to adhere to ethical standards and respond unequivocally to the electorate's expectations. Ensuring that party members are held accountable for their actions not only strengthens the institution but also reinforces the importance of integrity in political leadership.

To enhance political participation and voter engagement, civic education initiatives should be prioritized. By educating the public about the democratic process, the significance of issues-based discourse, and the role of political parties in governance, citizens can become more informed and active participants in the political landscape. Civic education programs can be implemented in schools, community centers, and through online platforms, reaching a broad audience. Additionally, engaging the youth and marginalized groups in these educational efforts is vital, as these populations often feel disenfranchised and underrepresented. By empowering citizens with knowledge, the electorate is more likely to demand accountability and participate actively in political processes.

Advancements in technology offer unique opportunities for political parties to enhance their engagement with voters. Digital platforms can serve as effective tools for communication and outreach, providing spaces for parties to share their policies, solicit feedback, and engage in discussions with constituents. Social media platforms, in particular, can facilitate real-time interactions that foster transparency and allow voters to voice their concerns directly to political leaders. Furthermore, technology can be harnessed to create interactive platforms for public consultations, enabling citizens to contribute their ideas and perspectives on policy matters. This participatory approach not only enriches the policymaking process but also reinforces the notion that the electorate's voice matters in shaping governance.

Political parties must adopt inclusive practices that ensure diverse representation within their ranks. This includes actively engaging women, youth, and individuals from various socio-economic backgrounds in party decision-making processes. By fostering diversity, parties can better reflect the interests of the population and develop policies that respond to the unique challenges faced by different communities. Inclusion also extends to engaging with civil society organizations and grassroots movements, creating collaborative efforts to address societal issues. By forming alliances with these organizations, political parties can enhance their understanding of local concerns and foster trust among constituents.

For political parties to transition toward a more issues-based campaign approach, substantial institutional development is necessary. This involves investing in capacity-building initiatives that strengthen party structures and enhance their strategic capabilities. Training programs can be developed to cultivate effective communication skills among party members, empowering them to articulate policy positions confidently and engage with the electorate meaningfully. Moreover, developing research and policy analysis units within political parties can enhance their ability to generate evidence-based recommendations and ensure that their campaigns reflect realistic and actionable policy options.

Lastly, a significant cultural shift within Nigeria's political landscape is essential for the success of these initiatives. This requires a collective commitment from political leaders, parties, and the electorate to prioritize accountability, dialogue, and ethical conduct in politics. Encouraging a culture that values civic engagement and integrity will support the evolution of the political system toward one that is truly representative of the people's interests.

The way forward for Nigerian political parties necessitates a comprehensive approach that prioritizes issues-based campaigning, enhances accountability, promotes civic education, leverages technology, encourages inclusivity, strengthens party infrastructure, and fosters a transformative political culture. By embracing these strategies, political parties can pave the way for a more vibrant, participatory democracy that meets the aspirations of the Nigerian people. Establishing a political environment where

issues take precedence over personality, where citizens feel genuinely heard, and where accountability is expected will not only invigorate the political landscape but also contribute to the long-term stability and prosperity of Nigeria's democracy.

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