

THE FORMULATION AND RELEVANCE OF POLITICAL PARTIES' MANIFESTOS IN GHANA: A CASE STUDY OF NPP AND NDC

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1. Introduction

Manifestos are documents that outline the policies and programs a political party intends to pursue if elected into office. They can be used to depict proposals that a party is advocating for or portrays a party's stand on a particular issue. As postulated by Bara (2005:585) "manifestos consist of statements connoting intentions, emphases, promises, pledges, policies or goals to be activated should that party be elected into office". They provide metrics by which citizens can hold their governments accountable and serve as a social contract between the political parties and the electorate (Ray, 2007). According to Harmel (2018), the ultimate purpose of a manifesto is to appeal to voters and form the basis upon which parties implement their electoral promises when elected into power.

Since the inception of Ghana's Fourth Republic, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC), which are two major parties have produced more than six manifestos for the eight presidential elections. With barely three months to the December 2020 presidential election, the major contenders have all launched their manifestos in their bid to woo voters. However, the processes leading to drafting manifesto have not been properly scrutinized by the public before elections. They are usually perceived to be the creation of the small elite caucus within the parties instead of reflecting the general views of the rank and file of the parties (Ayee, 2016). Indeed, until recently most key party officials did not even know the content of their own manifesto. Aside this, politicians have not unanimously agreed on the relevance of manifesto to the Ghanaian electorate. In line with these, this paper seeks to analyse the manifesto formulation of the two major parties (NDC and NPP), and its relevance to the electorate.

2. Formulation Process

Manifestos in Ghana are generally formulated for political parties by a number of significant actors. Prominent among these are the national executives, presidential candidates, manifesto committees and other relevant stakeholders. Each of these stakeholders have unique roles they play to ensure the smooth formulation of the manifesto. The leadership of the party is responsible for the entire administrative process for manifesto formulation. They begin the process by setting up the Manifesto Formulation Committee, which works together with various sub-committees that have been uniquely established to engage in background studies that will inform manifesto decisions [Amankwah, 2019]. These sub-committees are mostly formed to reflect key sectors of the economy, and committee members are selected based on their expertise in the relevant area.

For instance, the NPP 10-member manifesto committee for the 2020 election represents different sector-ministries with the exception of the Chairman who is the vice president. Similarly, the NDC members also comprise individuals with expertise from different sectors of the economy. Aside the committee, the presidential candidates of the parties also contribute to the draft manifesto by gathering information on the concerns of the electorate as they tour the country. Maisel (1993) indicated that in a presidential system, these candidates play a more significant role in the formulation of a party manifesto. Additionally, external stakeholders like interest groups, international institutions such as international associations which the parties join, and CSOs through often-indirect advocacy programs provide information that ultimately feed into the manifestos of political parties in Ghana.

In terms of approval processes, usually the various sub-committees submit their reports to the Manifesto Formulation Committee which in turn compiles them into a final report and submits it to the national

leadership of the party for review and approval. Accordingly, the final document of the NDC is approved by the National Executive Committee whilst that of the NPP is approved by the National Council.

3. Inclusiveness of the Formulation Process

A significant factor influencing the inclusiveness or otherwise of parties' manifesto formulation process in Ghana is the party's relation to political power, i.e., whether in government or in opposition. Usually, opposition parties tend to be more inclusive in their formulation process than the governing party. This is reflected in their method of engagement and the number of people appointed to the drafting committee. With respect to the method of engagement, opposition parties mostly embark on broad based consultation either through their presidential candidate or the members of the committee. The presidential candidate tours the entire country as a way of listening to the plight of citizens and soliciting for opinions on how to develop the country. This activity helps incorporate the feedback into their manifesto.

For instance, the NDC noted that its 2008 manifesto "*was created by Ghanaians of all walks of life and regions who spoke to Prof. Mills on the door-to-door tours and the policies and pledges contained are built upon the difficulties and challenges Ghanaians find most important*" (NDC Manifesto 2008:5). Similarly, in 2011, the then presidential candidate of the NPP also embarked on what they termed as 'listening tour' to know the needs of the electorate and respond appropriately if elected, which eventually informed their 2012 manifesto.¹

Approaching 2020, the NDC during the launch of its 2020 manifesto committee informed the public that the committee will engage with all stakeholders. As noted by the Chairman, "the committee will engage market women, farmers, fishermen, drivers and security agencies in its bid to design the right working manifesto that will redeem Ghana from its present economic headache". In addition, the presidential candidate in acknowledging that the party's manifesto for the last election was not inclusive stated that "this time around, we will make sure that the ordinary Ghanaian gets the opportunity to add his voice and inputs so that our document will be by the people, for the people and designed to serve the people".

Consequently, the party outlined a number of steps to ensure that the manifesto formulation process was inclusive of all stakeholders. In a statement released on 3rd November 2019, the NDC requested for policy memoranda from the general public, civil society organizations, trade unions, associations and other identifiable groups as part of the process to develop what they refer to as "grassroots manifesto". Aside this, the presidential candidate also embarked on a 'SpeakOut' tour to enable him appreciate the challenges of the electorate and listen to the concerns of the grassroots in order to incorporate them into the party's 2020 Manifesto. The product/outcome of these consultations is what has become known as the *People's Manifesto*.

Moreover, when the parties are in opposition, they tend to have larger manifesto committee membership than when they are in government. As noted by Zuniga and Jenkins (2018), committees with large members are likely to satisfy diverse interest of the party. The NPP in the lead up to the 2016 elections inaugurated a 19 sector-member manifesto committee comprising a total of 150 members as compared to the 2020 manifesto committee which comprises of only 10 members. Similarly, the NDC has inaugurated

¹ <https://www.modernghana.com/news/345573/my-listening-tour-is-vital-says-nana-addo.html>

a 21-member manifesto committee for elections 2020 with broad based membership reflecting various sectors.

4. Contents

The content of political party manifestos can vary depending on the emphasis, type, and formulation of different principles and policies. A political manifesto represents firm commitments to particular policies; however, these are often complemented by other kinds of text such as rhetoric, a description of the party's achievements, financial statements, information about the party's candidates, etc. (Royed, 1996; Van der Does and Statsch, 2016). In well-established democracies, research suggests that manifesto contents are more focused on delivering specific content relevant to their economic, social, and foreign policies as a political party (see Thomson, 1999; Lederman, 1980; Mansergh & Thomson, 2007). However, in incipient democracies, the content of a political party's manifesto is less concentrated and more subject to change (España-Najera, 2018; Harmel, 2018).

In attempting to explain this disparity in specificity, Harmel (2018) outlines two underlying reasons. Firstly, he posits that political parties in democratic systems where elections are contested over general themes rather than concrete policy positions, can afford manifestos that are hazy on their stance to specific issues because the electorate pays more attention to general issues. Additionally, in regions where elections are contested over 'valence issues', such as corruption or government incompetence, political parties may gear their manifestos toward promises on such issues rather than being forced to focus and develop specific and consistent policy leanings on various issues. The outcome of either situation, of course, is that political parties escape the demand to think out and produce specific policy areas that will contribute to the development of these nations.

In the same vein, manifestos of developing countries are usually filled with promises of providing social amenities, freebies, undertaking infrastructural projects among others. Meanwhile, the manifestos of advanced economies are dominated with policies targeted at addressing systemic issues associated with human and social development. This can be attributed to the level of development in each economy as well as the needs and priorities of citizens. In Ghana, although the manifestos are usually formulated to reflect various sectors, it is drafted to reveal topical issues in the country as well. Traditionally, the NPP manifestos over the years have been organized around sectors of the economy whilst NDC manifestos are usually organized around broad themes. For instance, the 2016 and 2020 manifestos of the NPP is grouped under 18 and 15 sectors respectively whilst the NDC 2016 and 2020 manifesto was formulated around 4 and 6 thematic areas respectively.

Dolezal et al., (2012) also noted that in emerging democracies, opposition parties often dedicate their manifestos to criticism of the ruling party. In Ghana, for instance, the manifestos of the two main parties are consistently filled with deliberate castigation of policies and programs of the ruling party by the opposition party. The NDC's "Better Ghana Manifesto" for the 2008 election in the foreword address by the presidential candidate noted that "*The current rulers have failed us miserably. In the areas of the economy, employment, the environment, health, education, the utilities – you name it – failure is the best mark that can be given to the NPP Government*" (NDC 2008:2).

In the same vein, the NPP's "Manifesto for Change, An Agenda for Jobs" for the 2016 elections also made similar remarks about the performance of the NDC "*Our nation is in crisis: a crisis created and sustained by*

the mismanagement, incompetence and corruption of the Mahama-led National Democratic Congress (NDC) government. Economic conditions are worsening by the day and there is so much suffering in the land. But Ghana does not have to be like this. Ghana deserves the best!" (NPP, 2016; v). During the launch of the 2020 NDC manifesto committee, their presidential candidate described the current government as a sinking ship that needs to be rescued to save Ghanaians from the hardship brought about by the current administration.²

On the other hand, governing parties also dedicate the first part of their manifestos trumpeting their achievements. For instance, in 2008, the governing NPP in its manifesto stated that *"the record of achievements has been tremendous over the range of expectations – from peace and freedoms enjoyed by the citizenry as a result of good governance, the prudent management of the national economy leading to the discovery of oil and the far reaching social interventions in education and health in the frontline of efforts to modernise our society"* (NPP, 2008:1). Likewise, the NDC also in its 2016 manifesto touted some of its achievements as follows *"As leader of the NDC and Government, our policies, programmes and projects have been directed at putting people first, building a strong and resilient economy, expanding infrastructure for accelerated growth and jobs, and advancing transparent and accountable governance. We have been vindicated, as we have seen huge payoffs in terms of access to education, health care and other social services. This has led to improved educational outcomes and favourable health indices for our people"* (NDC, 2016:4).

Dolezal et al., (2012) further argued that incumbent parties tend to shy away from firm policy commitments in their manifestos, deliberately to pre-empt inquiries about why they did not carry out such promises during their term of office, and to avoid any specific obligations during their next term, should they win again. It is therefore unmistakable that the then opposition party, NPP, during the 2016 elections made juicier promises such as free SHS, creation of new regions, 1 district 1 factory, 1 village 1 dam, 1 constituency 1 million dollars, 1 constituency 1 ambulance in their manifesto than the governing NDC party. Similarly, the NDC's 2020 manifesto makes enticing promises such as free primary health care, abolishing of double track, free technical and vocational education, 10 billion big push infrastructure project, creation of 1 million jobs, legalization of Okada among others.

A key thing that is missing from the parties' manifesto is the proposed expenditure and the source of funding for their intended policies and programs. As noted by Ayee (2016), little emphasis is placed on how these promises are funded which tend to portray these promises as more of a wish list than real policy alternatives. This has influenced the electorate to see manifestos as mere slogans and promises instead of policy initiatives meant to be implemented within the 4-year mandate of governments. This is partly because the parties do not cost their manifestos to translate the policies into programs.

The costing of manifestos is important as it does not only give the total amount a party intends to spend, but it also reveals how realistic the promises can be attained within the four-year mandate period of government. During the 2019 UK general elections, the Labour Party proposed an increased in day to day spending by 97.8 billion and 55 billion investment spending whilst estimating to raise additional 77.9 billion in tax. The Liberal Democrats also planned to increase tax revenue by 35.6 billion whilst planned day to day and investment spending was to be increased by 36.8 and 26 billion respectively. On the other hand, the Conservative Party's proposed increase in day to day expenditure and tax revenue was 2.9 billion pounds whilst investment spending was to increase by 8.1 billion pounds by the end of 2024 (IFS, 2019). These provided the opportunity for effective analysis of the viability of their manifestos.

² <https://www.myjoyonline.com/politics/2019/October-23rd/lets-rescue-ghana-from-akufo-addo-sinking-ship-mahama-charges-ndc-manifesto-cttee.php>

5. Manifesto Launch

Almost all the parties in the country launch and publish their manifestos in the last quarter of the election year. This late publication of manifesto inhibits the electorate's ability to effectively scrutinize the manifesto to make informed decision before going to the polls. The late launch and publication of manifesto can be attributed to fear of plagiarization or theft of ideas. Manifesto launching is characterized by accusation and counter accusation of plagiarism against each other. As noted by Ayee (2016),” both parties have levelled accusations against each other over the authenticity of their manifestos”. The NDC in November 2000, in a 56-page document accused the NPP of stealing its ideas on issues such as tax identification numbers, ECOWAS monetary union, government partnership with the private sector among others (Ayee, 2016). Likewise, the NPP also in 2016 accused the NDC of plagiarism for stealing the central ideas in the NPP manifesto without acknowledging them.

6. Manifesto Delivery

In Ghana, where there is no universally accepted long term national development plan to guide parties in policy programs, the manifestos of the parties ultimately become the short term development plan of the country. Therefore, the delivery of manifesto promises has ranged from “bread and butter” issues, “brick and mortar”, to broad economic transformational issues. In the lead up to the 2016 elections, the then NDC government published the Green Book detailing its achievements as a justification for its re-election. Recently in February 2020, the NPP government led by the Vice President held a Results Fair to account to the people of Ghana on what has been fulfilled per its manifesto promises. The government stated that, it has delivered or is in the process of delivering about 78% of all its manifesto promises. This rating is in contrast to an earlier assessment by Imani Africa which stated that the government had only delivered about 49% of its promises³.

As usual, the opposition disagreed with the assertion by the government that it has delivered 78% of its promises and refuted that the methodology adopted by the government was flawed, opaque and lacked clarity. The NDC in its own assessment of the NPP government stated that, the government has delivered only 14% of its manifesto promises. The difference in scoring largely emanated from the disagreement on the number of promises made. Whilst the NPP insisted that it made only 388 promises, the NDC on the hand contended that the NPP made 631 promises and that the government deliberately omitted the 235 promises. The disparity even in the number of promises made reveals the ambiguity in Ghanaian manifestos.

The assessment of deliverables in their manifesto by the ruling government is historic in nature as no government since independence has held a Results Fair to account to the people based on its manifesto promises. Whilst previous governments have trumpeted their achievement during elections (NDC published the Green Book whilst the NPP published the “so far so good” book in 2004), none of the previous governments were able to judge its own manifesto promises. Indeed, the government has taken a step further by creating a web portal for tracking its manifesto promises and the delivery⁴. In response, the NDC also launched a website to fact check what it terms as the failed promises of the NPP⁵.

³ <https://citinewsroom.com/2019/12/imani-rates-npp-govt-48-78-for-delivery-on-2016-manifesto-promises/>

⁴ <https://www.deliverytracker.gov.gh/>

⁵ www.nppfailedpromises.com,

It has also become evident that none of the parties when elected is able to deliver on all of its manifesto promises and usually recycle into the next elections (Ayee, 2016). For instance, the NDC could not deliver all its 2012 manifesto promises such as the building of the 200 community day schools before the 2016 elections and has promised to continue them should it regain power in 2021. Similarly, the NPP during the Results Fair admitted that some of its promises are still pending and, have hence repeated some its key flagship programmes in the 2016 manifesto in the 2020 manifesto.

7. Manifestos and Relevance for Elections in Ghana

Scholars have not unanimously agreed on the impact of manifesto on election outcome. Whilst some studies have posited that manifestos have little influence on the electorate in Ghana (Frempong 2001; Asante 2006; Gyimah-Boadi & Debrah 2008), others acknowledge the importance of manifestos on the Ghanaian electorate (Ayee 2002, 2008; Boafo-Arthur 2006). According to the latter, the Ghanaian electorate base their decision of whom to vote for on other factors such as ethnicity, personality of the individual, party origin among others. Whereas these factors may contribute to the dynamics of electoral results in the country, one cannot dismiss entirely the impact of manifestos on voters' decision (see Alabi, 2007) especially in recent years. Indeed, the fact that the current NPP government (2017-2021) created special ministries – to fulfil its manifesto promises – to spearhead some of its flagship programs bring to the fore the growing interest in manifestos.

Manifestos have become the plan of the government or the winning party's plan for work. They usually serve as the 4-year development plan of the government since the National Development Planning relies on the manifestos to develop the medium term plan for the government. Therefore, even if the electorate do not consider them before voting, they become the standard by which the public assesses the government after elections. Citizens use manifestos as a tool for holding political parties accountable when they neglect to fulfil these promises, likewise for re-election when promises are fulfilled.

The dynamics of the 2020 presidential elections itself present a unique opportunity for comparing the manifestos of the two main parties. Unlike previous elections, the 2020 elections are the only elections where the two presidential candidates have contested and won against each other in the past. Usually in previous elections, the opposition presidential candidate has not been in government before and therefore does not have any track record (except his party's track record) to campaign on.

In this scenario, both candidates have an equal opportunity and limitation on what they can do for the country. It is no longer about what the victorious candidate can do but what that candidate did in the past. Already, functionaries from both parties have served notice that their leaders will win the 2020 elections based on their solid track record. Based on this, the flagbearer of the NDC has called for a debate with the main contender i.e. the sitting president on their track record. Comparison of the performance of the two leaders on infrastructure, macroeconomic stability, exchange rate stability, education, health, corruption, security has already set the tone for the campaign. All these developments suggest the growing recognition and influence of the role of manifesto in election by the masses.

8. Conclusion

Manifestos have become an integral part of Ghana's electioneering process. Four main lessons can be distilled from this analysis. First, in terms of formulating the manifesto, opposition parties appear to be more inclusive in their manifesto preparation than the ruling party. Second, the inability of parties to cost

their manifestos and indicate the source of revenue for the intended programs is a major gap in Ghanaian political party manifestos. Third, the late launch of manifestos by the parties for fear of plagiarization has hindered an effective scrutiny by the parties. Finally, the electorate has demonstrated an interest in these manifestos even if they do not read the documents from cover to cover as they assess the performance of the government.

These observations consequently provide clear justifications as to why civil society organizations, relevant stakeholders and the electorate must influence the manifesto formulation process in order to ensure that their aspirations for a developed, peaceful and just nation are reflected. Also, stakeholders must advocate for the early publication of manifestos by at least, six months to the elections to enable the public to effectively scrutinize them. Political parties must further be required to cost their manifestos and indicate the source of funding for their intended programmes.

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