

## Media Manipulating Allegiances: The Ibrahim Babangida Regime and the Politics of Loyalty, Propaganda, and Elite Control in Nigeria

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### Abstract

*The regime of Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (IBB), Nigeria's military ruler from 1985 to 1993, was marked by a sophisticated strategy of political manipulation designed to consolidate power, maintain elite loyalty, and control public perception. This study examines how Babangida's government deployed propaganda, patronage networks, and psychological tactics to shape political allegiances and suppress dissent. By leveraging state-controlled media, co-opting influential elites, and fostering a culture of political uncertainty, the regime engineered a system where loyalty was rewarded while opposition was systematically neutralized. Through an analysis of government policies, media narratives, and elite interactions during this period, the paper highlights how Babangida's administration blurred the lines between governance and manipulation. The institutionalization of prebendalism, coupled with calculated misinformation campaigns, allowed the regime to maintain a façade of democracy while orchestrating one of Nigeria's most prolonged transitions to civilian rule. Additionally, the annulment of the 1993 presidential election, widely regarded as free and fair, underscored the regime's ultimate reliance on deception and control to maintain its grip on power. This paper contributes to the broader discourse on authoritarian governance in postcolonial Africa by illustrating how Babangida's rule set a precedent for political maneuvering that continues to shape Nigeria's democratic trajectory. It also underscores the enduring impact of elite manipulation on political institutions and public trust in governance.*

### Keywords

Allegiances, Ibrahim Babangida, Manipulating, Politics and Propaganda



### I. Introduction

The Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (IBB) dictatorship (1985–1993) was marked by advanced propaganda, elite manipulation, and psychological control. As a military leader, Babangida used state authority not just by using force but also by establishing patron-client relationships, constructing political narratives, and using media tactics to affect public opinion. His government used gaslighting tactics, distorting facts, breaking political pledges, and fostering a climate of uncertainty, to control the ruling class and the people at large, while also mastering the art of propaganda to establish power. The regime's capacity to foster allegiance among political elites was firmly rooted in a patronage system, in which loyalists were rewarded and opposition was neutralized through the strategic use of state resources (Ojo, 2009). By ensuring that dissent was either co-opted or rendered ineffectual, this type of elite manipulation maintained Babangida's hold on power.

Furthermore, creating a political reality that suited the regime's objectives was made possible in large part by its control over media organizations. The government suppressed critical voices and promoted positive narratives through the use of private and state-controlled media sources (Adebanwi & Obadare, 2011). Babangida undermined popular confidence in democratic transitions and confounded the political elite with purposeful disinformation and shifting objectives, such as the 1993 presidential election's annulment. This methodical approach to administration shows how material and psychological incentives were used to foster political allegiance, guaranteeing the military elite's sustained control in Nigerian politics.

Babangida's strategies are still in use in modern Nigerian politics, where aspects of elite patronage, propaganda, and gaslighting continue to influence political discourse and government. His rule established a standard for succeeding governments, showing how narrative control and the calculated application of state power can be crucial for establishing authority and affecting political results. Gaining knowledge of these processes helps one better understand Nigeria's political development and the long-term impacts of military control on democratic government.

A variety of propaganda and gaslighting techniques were used by the Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (IBB) dictatorship (1985–1993) to keep control of Nigeria's political environment, stifle opposition, and alter public opinion. These tactics included psychological manipulation, historical revisionism, media control, patronage-driven loyalty, and the deliberate spread of false information to engender political paralysis and uncertainty (Kurfi & Msughter, 2023).

Controlling the state media was one of Babangida's most notable propaganda strategies. State-owned media and the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) were converted into vehicles for spreading narratives that supported the dictatorship (Aondover et al., 2022). Even if his policies, such as the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), caused economic suffering, Babangida used these forums to portray himself as a reformer leader dedicated to economic transformation and national unity (Olayiwola, 1991). A biased national narrative that delegitimized criticism and justified the regime's conduct was produced by the media's systematic silencing or misrepresentation of opposition voices.

Revisionism of history was another important propaganda tactic. Babangida's government manipulated historical accounts to support its claim that his leadership was essential to Nigeria's development and stability. (Aondover et al., 2024). In order to defend extended military authority, his regime highlighted the shortcomings of earlier civilian administrations, especially the corruption and ineffectiveness of the Second Republic (1979–1983). He established himself as a stabilizing influence in this way, presenting military rule as a better option than civilian democracy (Ihonvbere, 1997).

A lot of gaslighting was done by reversing policies and changing political narratives. It was well known that Babangida would make lofty pledges, like a commitment to a democratic transition, only to postpone or completely undermine them. An example of this strategy was his annulment of the 1993 presidential election, which is generally considered to be the most free and fair in Nigeria. Citing nebulous dangers to national security, he later revoked the election results after first promising the public and political elites that he would resign following the election. Because of this, there was a great deal of confusion, leading

both elites and citizens to doubt the legitimacy of the regime and their comprehension of political developments (Agbese, 1996).

Gaslighting also included using contradicting policies and remarks to confuse opposition leaders. Political structures were regularly altered by Babangida, who also dissolved government agencies, revised transition schedules, and banned and unbanned political parties. Because they had to constantly adapt to a shifting political environment, opposition groups found it challenging to effectively organize due to this unpredictability (Osaghae, 1998). It was difficult for elites and regular Nigerians to discern between real reforms and political fraud because of the regime's shifting objectives in electoral procedures and governance reforms.

Another important tactic was patronage-driven loyalty. The dictatorship marginalized dissenters and rewarded supporters with public resources. By promising them lucrative government contracts, appointments, and financial incentives, Babangida was able to co-opt political and economic elites and win their loyalty. People who opposed the government or defected were either repressed by the state, portrayed as opponents of progress, or tarnished in the media (Momoh & Adejumobi, 1999). Political elites were kept apart and reluctant to publicly oppose the dictatorship by this system of selective incentives and penalties.

The political culture of Nigeria was impacted for a long time by these gaslighting and propaganda techniques. Babangida's deliberate manipulation of political processes, media, and narratives established a standard for succeeding regimes, many of which have persisted in employing comparable strategies to stifle criticism and hold onto power (Kurfi et al., 2023). His legacy lives on in the ongoing use of patronage, disinformation, and media control as means of preserving political power and consolidating the elite.

#### Theoretical Context of the Paper

The theoretical tenets of framing theory and elite theory were adopted in this work. These ideas offer a framework for comprehending how Babangida's government consolidated power, managed political elites, and influenced public opinion through psychological manipulation and propaganda. According to the theory of elites, which was developed by scholars like Vilfredo Pareto (1935), Gaetano Mosca (1939), and Wright Mills (1956), a small, privileged group, whether it be military, political, or economic, controls society's governance and decision-making. This theory holds that elites control a large portion of the power and alter political and economic systems to stay in power, frequently at the expense of democratic accountability and participation (Mojaye & Aondover, 2022).

The way Babangida's government maintained the allegiance of political and economic elites through a well-managed patronage system makes it consistent with the framework of elite theory. Babangida maintained elites' reliance on his government for survival by limiting their access to government contracts, state resources, and important political appointments (Okoosi-Simbine, 2003). Those who opposed him faced systematic political exclusion or were delegitimized through state-controlled propaganda. This aligns with the core assumption of Elite Theory, that elites act in their own self-interest to perpetuate their power and limit the ability of non-elites to challenge them.

Babangida's manipulation of democratic transitions and elections also illustrates how elites can use institutional mechanisms to maintain power while feigning inclusivity. Under the guise of democratic governance, he repeatedly delayed Nigeria's return to civilian rule, which ultimately resulted in the 1993 election being canceled. This shows how ruling elites manipulate political structures to maintain their hold on power (Suberu, 2007).

Similarly, Erving Goffman's (1974) and Robert Entman's (1993) Framing Theory looks at how political actors use discourse and the media to create and promote specific narratives that influence public opinion. This idea holds that governments and leaders

deliberately frame issues to influence the public's perception of political events, frequently highlighting some while downplaying or misrepresenting others (Hile et al., 2023).

By regulating state media and influencing political narratives, Babangida's government made considerable use of framing theory. His government continuously presented his reign as essential to maintaining national stability and portrayed opponents as dangers to Nigeria's prosperity and unity (Olayiwola, 1991). Babangida changed public opinion to support ongoing military rule by emphasizing the shortcomings of previous civilian governments and portraying the military as the only institution capable of upholding law and order.

The psychological manipulation method known as "gaslighting," in which the offender manipulates reality to cause people to doubt their own perceptions, falls under the larger framework of framing theory. In order to confuse the people and political elites, Babangida regularly changed the narrative, promising a democratic transition while nevertheless maintaining military authority. Many saw his 1993 election annulment as an attempt to hold onto power, although it was presented as a national security necessity (Agbese, 1996). It was challenging for opposition leaders and the general public to organize against the dictatorship because of this ongoing reinterpretation of political facts.

In order to preserve political loyalty and crush opposition, Babangida's regime used psychological and strategic communication tactics in addition to force, as can be seen by combining Elite Theory and Framing Theory. His government's ability to sway public opinion through media framing and influence elite behavior through patronage and propaganda demonstrates how authoritarian regimes use sophisticated control strategies in addition to brutal repression.

## **II. Research Methods**

This paper is exploratory because it applies the descriptive research technique, which involves consulting and analyzing pertinent records, documents, and literature in light of the body of knowledge already available on media ethics and power in multicultural Nigeria. Information from secondary sources, including pertinent texts, periodicals, government publications, historical documents, and the Internet, which provided concrete sources of insight into the analysis based on topic areas. For the purpose of data interpretation, secondary data was conducted, which made it possible to assess current information for consistency, relevance, replication, and rebuttal.

### **2.1 Use of Propaganda and Gaslighting in Ibrahim Babangida Regime: How State-controlled Media Shape Political Loyalty and Suppress Elite Defections in Nigeria**

Propaganda and gaslighting through state-run media were successfully used by the Ibrahim Babangida government (1985–1993) to stifle elite defections and mold political allegiance in Nigeria. The government carefully crafted narratives that discredited opposing voices and presented Babangida as a visionary leader dedicated to economic development and national unity by regulating the flow of information. Government-controlled media and the state-owned Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) played a key role in stifling opposing viewpoints and promoting pro-regime discourse (Olayiwola, 1991). Because of this strategy, the dictatorship was able to maintain control over public opinion, making it difficult for elites to question its authority without suffering political isolation or harm to their reputation.

Another crucial instrument in Babangida's media strategy was gaslighting, in which the government regularly changed narratives and broke political pledges to confuse the public and elites alike. This strategy was demonstrated, for example, by the several delays in the shift to civilian governance and the final cancellation of the 1993 presidential election. Because the dictatorship was constantly manipulating expectations and redefining political realities, these acts generated an atmosphere of ambiguity that made it difficult for political elites to organize effective resistance (Agbese, 1996). Babangida made sure that elite allegiance remained transactional by constantly changing the terms of engagement because political survival hinged on conforming to the administration's changing policies.

The dictatorship also used media control and patronage to counter elite defections. Defectors were frequently framed as corrupt or disloyal by state-run media sources, which used targeted propaganda to undermine their complaints and support the idea that opposition leaders were doing more for their own interests than for the good of the country (Momoh & Adejumobi, 1999). This tactic deterred open rebellion among the political elite because possible defectors were afraid of being excluded from the allocation of state resources and having their character assassinated. The administration was able to establish a political climate in which allegiance was not only rewarded but also required for political survival by combining media control with psychological manipulation.

Babangida's use of gaslighting and propaganda established a standard for succeeding governments, showing how media dominance can be used as a weapon to stifle elite dissent, influence political narratives, and uphold authoritarian power while claiming a democratic transition (Msughter, 2019). His legacy still has an impact on Nigerian politics, where individuals in positions of authority continue to use media manipulation as a vital tactic.

## **2.2 Rhetorical and Discursive Strategies Employed to Delegitimize Defectors and Opposition in Ibrahim Babangida Regime**

A variety of rhetorical and discursive techniques were used by the Ibrahim Babangida dictatorship to discredit opposition leaders and defectors, influencing public opinion in ways that strengthened its hold on power. These tactics included the deliberate use of ambiguity to influence political discourse, nationalistic rhetoric, and character assassination. The regime successfully discredited dissent and deterred elite defections by portraying opposition leaders as risks to national stability, opportunistic schemers, or adversaries of progress.

State-controlled media employed ad hominem assaults as one of the main rhetorical devices, portraying defectors as dishonest, self-serving, or hostile to national unity. Reports that connected opposition leaders to suspected financial malfeasance, ethnic division, or betrayal of national interests were frequently published in newspapers, radio shows, and television shows (Agbaje, 1993; Msughter et al., 2021). In addition to undermining political rivals' credibility, this strategy made prospective defectors fearful of being publicly demonized. The dictatorship made sure that defectors' complaints were written off as personal goals rather than valid political issues by consistently linking them to undesirable characteristics.

Babangida's government also used nationalistic discourse as a potent weapon. By depicting opposition leaders as careless people whose acts could devastate the nation, the dictatorship continuously positioned itself as the defender of Nigeria's unity and stability. This story struck a chord with the populace and served as justification for crackdowns on political dissent, especially in light of Nigeria's history of ethnic and regional tensions. The administration regularly cited the necessity of "guided democracy," implying that opposition leaders were either naive or purposefully trying to destabilize the nation and that full

democratic participation was premature (Ihonvbere, 1997). Under the pretense of national interest, this linguistic framing made it simpler to stifle criticism while retaining public support.

The regime used ambiguity and disinformation in addition to direct attacks to confuse the populace and the opposition. Babangida was renowned for his capacity to develop several, frequently conflicting, political narratives around important problems. His administration, for instance, would prolong military rule while promising a democratic transition, casting doubt on the regime's actual goals. Opposition leaders found it challenging to effectively mobilize due to this discursive technique, which is frequently referred to as "political maradonicism," since it required them to continuously reevaluate their stances in light of the changing political environment (Osaghae, 1998). Babangida kept control of political discourse and made sure that opposition activities remained divided by leaving political opponents in the dark about the government's next line of action.

The public's perception was significantly impacted by these stories. Babangida's government was able to erode confidence in alternative political leadership by regulating the media and portraying opposition leaders as dangers to the peace. It was challenging for defectors to acquire momentum among the public because of the political culture that was produced by the regular reinforcement of these ideas, which fostered cynicism toward opposition activities. The legacy of Babangida's rhetorical tactics persisted in influencing Nigerian politics even after his departure, as succeeding administrations used comparable discursive measures to quell criticism and uphold power.

### **III. Result and Discussion**

#### **3.1 Long-Term Political Consequences of Babangida's Propaganda and Gaslighting Tactics on Elite Cohesion in Nigeria's Political Landscape**

The public's perception was significantly impacted by these stories. Babangida's government was able to erode confidence in alternative political leadership by regulating the media and portraying opposition leaders as dangers to the peace. It was challenging for defectors to acquire momentum among the public because of the political culture that was produced by the regular reinforcement of these ideas, which fostered cynicism toward opposition activities. The legacy of Babangida's rhetorical tactics persisted in influencing Nigerian politics even after his departure, as succeeding administrations used comparable discursive measures to quell criticism and uphold power.

The division and mistrust among political elites was one of the most important effects. Elites grew extremely wary of one another and state institutions as a result of Babangida's persistent manipulation of transition timelines, including his repeated delays of the return to civilian rule and the eventual annulment of the 1993 presidential election (Ihonvbere, 1997). Because of the unpredictable nature of his dictatorship, elite loyalty was based more on short-term personal gains than on enduring ideological commitments or party unity. Because Nigerian elites frequently put short-term benefits ahead of institutional stability, this legacy of political unpredictability has endured, undermining the consolidation of democracy.

The use of patronage by Babangida as a means of elite control solidified Nigerian politics' rent-seeking ethos. Through selective allocation of state resources to loyalists and the marginalization of dissenters through media narratives and propaganda, he strengthened the notion that political survival was dependent on individual access to state power rather than on public support or democratic legitimacy (Okoosi-Simbine, 2003). Since party loyalties are

usually erratic and elite coalitions are motivated more by access to financial gains than by ideological coherence, this strategy has persisted in influencing Nigeria's political environment. Because of this, political parties in Nigeria frequently lack internal unity, which results in frequent defections and realignments that are motivated more by changing power dynamics than by long-term policy resolve.

The decline in public confidence in governance and election procedures was another long-lasting effect of Babangida's strategies. His tactics of gaslighting, such as promising democratic transition while undermining it, led to a general lack of faith in political leaders' sincerity. According to Suberu (2007), this has led to a political culture where people view electoral promises with cynicism and frequently see political elites as manipulators rather than advocates for their interests. Low voter turnout, political indifference, and a lack of trust in democratic institutions have been the long-term effects of this mistrust, which has made it simpler for elites to keep power with little responsibility.

Babangida's control over the media and political narratives also set the standard for succeeding regimes, many of which have persisted in using disinformation and propaganda to influence elite relations and popular opinion. In order to preserve elite power and stifle political opposition, his government showed how state-run media might be utilized to create positive narratives while disparaging opposition individuals (Olawale, 2010). Subsequent governments have since adopted this tactic. Because of this history, media independence has remained a problem in Nigeria, where administrations have attempted to regulate public opinion by exerting control over important news organizations.

In this regard, Babangida's gaslighting and propaganda strategies created a culture of mistrust, opportunism, and shaky institutional commitments that had a long-lasting effect on Nigerian elite cohesion. The policies of his dictatorship weakened public trust in government, strengthened a political economy based on patronage, furthered elite fragmentation, and codified the use of the media as a political control mechanism. Even after Babangida left office, these consequences still have an impact on elite conduct and governing methods in Nigeria.

### **3.2 Discourse Analysis of State-Controlled Media and Government Speeches in Babangida's Regime**

The Ibrahim Babangida dictatorship intentionally employed state-controlled media and government speeches to foster political loyalty, discredit defectors, and preserve elite unity. Discourse analysis offers a potent methodological framework for investigating these tactics. By examining language usage, rhetorical devices, and political story framing, we can learn how Babangida's government influenced elite conduct and popular opinion in order to maintain its hold on power.

### **3.3 Constructing Loyalty Through Political Narratives**

In order to portray the military government as a vital stabilizing influence in Nigeria's unstable political environment, Babangida's leadership meticulously selected political rhetoric. Government-owned newspapers like Daily Times and state-run media, especially the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), were instrumental in promoting this narrative.

Babangida positioned himself as a leader dedicated to national unity through the frequent use of unification rhetoric, which was one of the main language methods used. His speeches often referred to "nation-building," "transition to democracy," and "political stability," even though the regime had repeatedly delayed democratic elections (Olayiwola, 1991). By controlling the discourse surrounding governance, the regime presented opposition

leaders as dangers to Nigeria's advancement and positioned itself as a guardian of the country's future.

The administration also made use of arguments for moral legitimacy, portraying Babangida as a selfless leader who acted in the best interests of the populace. Words like “sacrifice,” “commitment,” and “responsibility” were used to highlight his alleged commitment to Nigeria's well-being despite the structural adjustment program (SAP) and other economic policies that caused widespread misery. Because of their moral stance, elites found it challenging to publicly criticize the regime without being portrayed as acting against the interests of the country (Ihonvbere, 1997).

### **3.4 Discrediting Defectors and Opposition Figures**

Additionally, the regime's rhetoric aimed to neutralize political threats by methodically denigrating opposition leaders and defectors. According to state-controlled narratives, loyalists were portrayed as patriots, while critics and defectors were labeled as saboteurs, opportunists, or adversaries of advancement.

Delegitimizing labels were widely employed in government speeches and media publications to discredit defectors. Political leaders who resisted Babangida's reign, such as Chief Moshood Abiola and General Mamman Vatsa, were described as “disruptive,” “power-hungry,” or “reckless” (Momoh & Adejumobi, 1999). By using this discursive technique, people who defected from the government were guaranteed to lose popular trust in addition to political isolation.

Historical revisionism, which selectively recalls past governance mistakes to justify repressing dissent, was also used by state-controlled media. The view that military administration was superior to democratic governance, for instance, was reinforced when civilian politicians who opposed Babangida were regularly reminded of the political and economic turmoil of the Second Republic (1979–1983) (Osaghae, 1998). The dictatorship positioned itself as the only feasible alternative by contrasting the military rule with earlier civilian regimes.

### **3.5 Preserving Elite Unity Through Controlled Discourse**

In addition to patronage, carefully chosen language that strengthened political allegiance was also used to preserve elite cohesion. Collective responsibility was emphasized in state-controlled narratives, which often referred to military leaders and government officials as “partners in governance” as opposed to merely appointees. By encouraging a feeling of unity among elites, this inclusive conversation deterred defection.

In order to keep elites unsure and reliant on Babangida's leadership, his administration also regularly employed ambiguity and contradictions in its political rhetoric. The dictatorship made sure that no one elite group could seize control or confidently challenge the government by varying transition schedules and changing political programs (Suberu, 2007). This tactic, which is closely linked to gaslighting, produced a psychological climate where elites were reluctant to act against Babangida's interests and stayed split.

Discourse analysis makes it clear that Babangida's leadership employed government speeches and state-run media as tactical instruments to foster political allegiance, stifle dissent, and preserve elite unity. Through the use of delegitimizing labels, unification rhetoric, moral legitimacy appeals, historical revisionism, and ambiguous messaging, the government made sure that both the general population and political elites continued to be influenced by it. These discursive techniques not only strengthened Babangida's hold on

power during his reign but also had a long-lasting effect on Nigerian politics, where elite division and media manipulation still influence administration.

#### IV. Conclusion

Through propaganda and gaslighting, the Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida administration (1985–1993) showed how authoritarian governments may successfully sway political allegiance and elite unity. Babangida made sure that the political elite and the general public continued to rely on his government by manipulating state media, skewing political narratives, and judiciously allocating patronage. His government deliberately painted opposition leaders as dangers to national cohesion while also sowing disarray with contradictory policies and vague democratic pledges. In addition to solidifying his grasp on power, these strategies strengthened the political climate of mistrust, opportunism, and elite division that still exists in Nigerian politics today.

Beyond his stint in office, Babangida's propaganda and gaslighting have had a lasting impact on succeeding administrations that have persisted in using disinformation, media manipulation, and politics based on patronage to stay in power. Notwithstanding prior promises of a democratic transition, his annulment of the 1993 presidential election established a precedent for political dishonesty that has reduced popular trust in the political system and government. Additionally, he contributed to the instability of Nigeria's party structure by using divide-and-rule methods among the elite, which created an atmosphere where political loyalty is frequently determined by short-term personal benefit rather than intellectual commitment.

In hindsight, Babangida left behind a legacy of both profound institutional harm and strategic genius. His government demonstrated the power of psychological and verbal manipulation, but it also showed how weak elite unity is in the absence of true democratic institutions. Knowing his strategies for political control helps one to better understand Nigeria's ongoing governance issues, emphasizing the need for more robust democratic institutions, independent media, and political accountability to combat the deceptive practices that continue to influence the country's political climate.

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