

THE EXECUTIVE IN NIGERIA: FOCUS ON THE WANING PUBLIC TRUST IN THE BUHARI'S APC GOVERNMENT

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Abstract

A study of the executive in Nigeria, especially at the instance of the post 2019 presidential election where the Buhari-led All Progressives Congress (hereinafter APC) government transited to another four-year term is justified in that it contributes to an understanding of the character of the government in power. This is because the executive remains a superstructure that reflects the character of the society in which it operates. However, in Africa and Nigeria in particular, the executive does not reflect their respective societies. They are rather superimpositions on their societies they intend to transform. Recalling APC's change mantra that enabled the party to win the 2015 presidential election vis-à-vis the in-between elections character and conduct of the Buhari-led APC Government; the change mantra was at best a smoke-screen that concealed the realities of the government. Thus, rather than the proclaimed change, it was a perpetuation of deeds similar to past governments in Nigeria. Little wonder, the party replaced the change mantra with 'The Next Level Mantra'. This paper, relying on Public Trust and Confidence Theories as its theoretical handle, makes an assessment of public trust and confidence on the executive under President Buhari. The paper is dependent on secondary sources of information. The paper concludes that public trust and confidence of Nigerians on the Buhari led executive has greatly waned. This

conclusion is hinged on account that public institutions in Nigeria such as the INEC, the EFCC, security agencies and the judiciary has been observed as being most subservient to the ruling APC government vis-à-vis previous governments. The paper recommends that the Buhari/APC Government revert to the visions of the 2015 Change Mantra that enabled the party to clinch the 2015 presidential victory.

Keywords: *Nigeria, Executive, Public Trust, Confidence, APC, PDP, Government*

In political and social science, hardly any other term has been carried to market as often as crisis: crisis of the welfare state, of political parties, and of parliament; performance crisis; governance, structural, rationality, legitimation, integration, and motivation crises; the Euro crisis; crisis in the Middle East; crisis of dictatorships; and, over and over again, crisis of democracy (Merkel 2018, p.1).

Introduction

The executive is the organ of government charged with the sacred responsibility of law and policy implementation in any democracy. It is usually an embodiment of all institutions that enables the government in carrying out the day-to-day activities of governance in a state. According to Haywood (2007, p.357), the executive is the irreducible core of government. Political systems can operate without constitutions, assemblies, judiciaries and even parties, but they cannot survive without an executive branch to formulate government policy and ensure that it is implemented...political executives and particularly chief executives, are certainly the face of politics with

which the general public is most familiar. This is because the executive is the source of political leadership.

As an organ, it is comprised of such institutions as the various security formations, anti-graft agencies, among others. The executive stands out as a colossus vis-à-vis the other arms of government in impacting on the lives of ordinary citizens.

Despite this enviable position, the executive has attracted enormous scrutiny over the years. The Trilateral Commission on ‘*The Crisis of Democracy*’ in 1975, for example, noted with dismay that “dissatisfaction with, and lack of confidence in the functioning of the institutions of democratic government have thus now become widespread...” (Crozier, Huntington, & Watanuki, 1975, p.158-59). Ever since, even as Merkel’s (2018) epigraph noted above, scholarship has echoed and re-echoed the lack of public trust and confidence, dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the central institutions of representative democracy (the executive, electoral umpires, political parties, the judiciary, among others) in both developed and developing countries (Miller, 1974; Niemi, Mueller, & Smith, 1989; Dogan, 1994; Dalton, 1996, 1999; Nye, 1997a&b; Nye & Zelikow, 1997; Norris, 1999; McGrath, 2017).

Political trust and confidence on the executive, as implied here, is the overwhelming concerns for trends—is public trust on the executive waning or not? Whereas public trust is necessary for government to succeed without coercion, a modicum of erosion in public trust and confidence in the actions of a government is healthy for a fledgling

democracy (Chanley, Rudolph & Rahn, 2000). However, the dilemma is that most African states are democratic-autocracies that never see erosion of public trust on government as healthy but an expendable opposition.

In Nigeria, public confidence in the executive has become highly waned. Recalling that Nigeria's Fourth Republic commenced in May 29, 1999 with the People's Democratic Party (hereinafter PDP) saddled with the responsibility of governance. However, at the 2015 presidential elections, the PDP after sixteen years lost power to a rival political party, the All Progressives Congress (hereafter APC). The APC came with much fanfare with momentous support from the Nigerian people, especially the party's populist slogan—the "Change Mantra" which attracted Nigerians to the party. However, while APC's adoption of populism¹ indeed endeared Nigerians to the party, it undermined the anti-democracy properties of populism: challenges on external checks on unrestrained state power, undermines human rights, curtails checks and balances, limits debates, dissent and political pluralism, among others. Thus, while populism greatly helped the President Buhari-led APC to power, has it helped the government to govern differently in Nigeria? Or instead it helped the government in strengthening democratic-autocracy?

The in-between election conducts and happenstances of the President Buhari government has caused waning public trust and confidence in the APC government. For example, under the APC public institutions such as the Independent Electoral Commission (hereinafter INEC), the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (hereinafter

EFCC), security agencies and even the judiciary has been cajoled by the executive to be subservient to do the biddings of the ruling APC government. However, the subservience of these institutions to the APC government is condemnable as it is beyond the normal because the very issues (cases of corruption, disobedience of court rulings, extra-judicial use of security agencies, judicial interference, etcetera) that were the alleged ‘sins’ of the PDP’s misadventure for sixteen years in power, are as well perpetrated by the Buhari-led APC government.

This paper assesses the causes of the deep erosion of public trust and confidence in the executive under the APC government in Nigeria. It is structured as follows. Following this introduction, the paper in Section II considers Theories of Public Trust and Confidence as its theoretical handle. Section III examines the causes of the waning public trust and confidence on the APC government. Section IV concludes the paper.

Theories of Public Trust and Confidence

Theories of trust and confidence in public institutions are commonly associated with Allport (1961), Cattell (1965), Newton (1999), among others. Scholarship into the study of the central institutions of representative democracy--the executive, the legislature and the judiciary--are worried by a sceptre that has hunted these institutions—the challenge of waning or eroding public confidence and trust. Though this challenge is not sui generis to any particular country; especially as it is evident elsewhere, it is most evident in

developing countries. Thus, what explains the unabating wane in public trust and confidence in the aforementioned institutions?

The search for causes has led scholarship to identify a number of explanatory models: (a) the “*Social-Psychological Model*” which is centred around individual characteristics (Easton, 1965; Gamson, 1968; Gabriel, 1995), (b) the “*Social and Cultural Model*” which is centred on the cultural environment of individuals, group and communities (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Coleman, 1990; Almond & Verba, 1963) and (c) the “*Institutional Performance Model*” which explains governmental performance (Newton, 1999).

In analysing these models, academicism has since located the challenge as a purely political and governmental one (Newton, & Norris, 1999). This identification, therefore, excludes the earlier two models and instead concentrate on the “*Institutional Performance Model*” as the explanatory model in discerning the erosion of public trust and confidence on public institutions such as the executive, legislature, judiciary, among others.

The “*Institutional Performance Model*” identifies the actual performance of government as the basis of understanding citizens’ trust in government. The model asserts that:

because all citizens are exposed to government actions, confidence in political institutions is likely to be randomly distributed among various personality types and different cultural and social types, government

institutions that perform well are likely to elicit the confidence of citizens; those that perform badly or ineffectively generate feelings of distrust and low confidence. The general public...recognises whether government or political institutions are performing well or poorly and reacts accordingly. (Newton & Norris, 1999, p.7)

Newton and Norris (1999) have exposed that governments that perform poorly receives waning public trust and confidence and vice versa. Thus, if governments receive erosion in trust and confidence, the remedy lies in lowering public expectations of performance by governments promising less or in improving government performance. Thus, trust in a government is the product of the set government's performance. While this point is well established, political institutions in most Third World countries are weak and which explains the huge unsatisfactory governmental performance in making and implementing policies (Newton & Norris, 1999).

In the light of this model, what is the extent of trust and confidence on the President Buhari-led APC government in Nigeria? Undoubtedly, there is dissatisfaction on Nigeria's executive under President Buhari who rose to power on a thunderous "Change Mantra" in 2015, but gradually being eroded by reasons of government policies, actions or government responses to happenstances. Rather than lowering the unmet expectations and hopes of Nigerians on account of the "Change Mantra" in 2015, the Buhari-led APC government made further promises with its "*The*

Next Level” agenda which of course negates the notions of the Institutional Performance Model.

The Waning President Buhari-led APC Executive in Nigeria

The sixteen years of PDP rule under the different presidents variously impacted on Nigerians. On account of the PDP’s long years in power, massive voter apathy and disillusion with the political process in Nigeria became ripe. Thus, there was clamour for change. Then the APC came around with the “Change Mantra” in 2015 general elections. It indeed did the expected in raising hopes of Nigerians for change in manner of governance. However, what is discernible is that the dividends of democracy as provided by the Buhari-led APC government in Nigeria are not commensurate with the high expectations Nigerians had on the President Buhari Government in 2015. Thus, trust and confidence on the ruling APC government is waning (Okolo, & Karimo, 2017). The danger herein is that no democracy survives for long without citizens’ support (Miller, 1974). This section examines the causes of erosion of trust and confidence on the President Buhari-led APC Government in Nigeria.

a. Unparalleled Engagement in Populism

Due to the unbridled use of populism by the APC, a brief discourse on populism may suffice here. Populism is an approach that thrives to appeal to ordinary people who feel that their concerns are disregarded by established elite groups (Mudde, & Kaltwasser, 2017; Eatwell, & Goodwin, 2018). Populism from an ideological perspective is “an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure

people' versus the corrupt elite, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people" (Mudde, 2004, p.543). Populism is not dependent on a given programme but instead structured around a technique which raises the people against others: against government, elites, rulers, political party, amongst others. It, thus, essentially subsists as a pretext to organise politics in a democratic manner (Pelinka, 2008). If populism is a pretext, it simply amounts to lying in politics which centres on the question of morality in governance (Coady, 2008). Scholarship is polarised on populism. Plato justify populism on the grounds that it is for the benefit of the citizens, whereas Kant (1949, p.349) and Montaigne (1991, p.35) condemn populism as an accursed vice. As hitherto asked above, has populism helped the APC to govern Nigeria differently?

The "Change Mantra" of the ruling APC government in Nigeria in 2015 secured electoral victory on account of its unparalleled deployment of populism. President Muhammadu Buhari is widely reported in different fora for his populist statements; in both local and foreign audiences. In the Royal Institute of International Affairs (RIAs), Chatham House, London, President Buhari on 21 February, 2015 made, among others, the following statement as reproduced verbatim here:

What is the difference between me and those who elected us to represent them? Absolutely nothing. Why should Nigerian president not fly with other Nigerian public? Why do I need to embark on a foreign trip as a president with huge crowd with public funds? Why do I need to go for foreign medical trip if we cannot make our hospitals functional? Why do we need to send

children to school abroad if we cannot develop our universities to compete with foreign ones? (Buhari, 2015a, p.3)

The President Buhari led APC government is into its second tenure, yet the government is guilty of most of the populist promises as mentioned above and has not given a thought to revisit these populist statements towards actualising them. For example, a major promise on health that it will **ensure that no Nigerian will have a reason to go outside of the country for medical treatment has not been achieved, let alone kept by even the president. Another** populist promise was to reduce the presidential air fleet if elected into power as a means of saving the Nigerian economy of avoidable waste. The administration has partially fulfilled this promise.

b. Contraction of the Democratic Space

Pro-democratic struggles in form of contentious politics are a global phenomenon today (Meckstroth, 2015). In Nigeria, the birth of the Fourth Republic in 1999 was greeted with expectations of upholding the sanctity of fundamental human rights, what Nigerians referred to as the dividends of democracy. This expectation was on account of the relief following Nigerians traumatising years under military dictatorship. However, against this expectation, the democratic space in Nigeria has continued to shrink with an unbridled high handedness in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Opposition parties under the sixteen years of PDP administration clamoured for democratic space and to a large extent got the space widened. For example, opposition groups protested in various cities

in Nigeria without police harassment on a number of incidents such as the demonstrations that marked the removal of fuel subsidy under President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan in 2012 (Lakemfa, 2015). This democratic space continued with President Goodluck Jonathan reportedly saying he was the most abused president in Nigeria's history. He noted, however, with certain caveats that: first it was healthy for Nigeria's fledgling democracy and second that Nigerians would only cherish it when it is eventually denied. This trend culminated in, for the first time, an opposition party unseating an incumbent president in Nigeria's political history.

The enthronement of the opposition APC government was expected to completely open-up the democratic space. This expectation was subsumed in the fact that President Buhari was a beneficiary of a widened civic space in the past. Hitherto, General Buhari and his deputy, Dr. Chuba Okadigbo, both leaders of the now defunct All Nigeria Peoples' Party (ANPP), undertook a protest in Kano in 2003 during which they suffered police teargas attack. Dr. Okadigbo died from complications arising from the teargas he suffered. General Buhari contacted Mr. Femi Falana (SAN) to help him seek redress in court on pro-bono. The court ruled in his favour stating that staging of protests do not need police permit but instead police protection with a 48 hours' notice as a precondition (Yesufu, 2019). As beneficiary of such court ruling, Gen. Buhari ought to be a promoter of the right to protest and to even widen it further. Sadly, the court ruling Gen. Muhammadu Buhari got has remained a far-cry under Muhammadu Buhari as president as evidenced below.

First, the right to protest under the APC government is grossly contracted. Protests from religious groups like Shiite Moslems, ethnic groups like the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOD) are presently branded as terrorist groups and proscribed in Nigeria; civil society groups like the Bring-Back-Our-Girls Movement and its membership including Dr. (Mrs.) Oby Ezekwesili, Aisha Yesufu, among others, are either attending to regular and frequent DSS invitations for questioning or are constantly met with stern police brutality during harmless protest sessions. Several Nigerians with the likes of Mr. Omoyele Sowore, the founder of *Sahara Reporters*, are under one form of detention or the other for phantom charges including a call to a revolution. However, reminiscing into the recent past brought to daylight the fervent call to a revolution Gen. Buhari made to Nigerians, following his defeat in the 2011 presidential election to the PDP, especially to emulate and prepare for Egypt's 2011 kind of revolution that claimed over 800 lives (Falana, 2019). Ironically, Nigerians Mr. Sowore calling for a revolution under President Buhari are cajoled into detention.

Second, the APC in its opposition days preceding the 2015 presidential election deployed, propagated and benefited from the space provided by the social media. In power, the APC government had introduced the draconian "Social Media Bill" to gag the freedom of speech enjoyed by Nigerians through the various social media platforms. There is widespread anger among Nigerians in opposition to the bill. For instance, Rev. Matthew Hassan Kukah said:

I have consistently tried to create levels of differentiation between democracy and dictatorship,

especially dictatorships of the military variant as we have had in our country. I have argued that Nigeria is still very far away from the goal posts of what could be called a democratic society. In my view, the environment does not as yet look anything democratic because the actors are largely strangers to the ethos and what is more, too many of them are tied to the old order, not to talk of the fact that the presence of General-presidents suggest that we are still in the thrall of militarism. Democracy thrives on debate, consensus building, negotiation, persuasion, argumentation, rule of law, process, and inclusion... The recent outrage by the Minister of Information, Mr. Lai Mohammed, over public reaction to the Social Media Bill, is illustrative of the point I am making that not all who call themselves democrats appreciate the enormous burden that goes with the claim today. The Minister has used some rather harsh and divisive words that suggest some contempt for the voices and views of those whose labours and sacrifices brought him and his government to where they are. His language is disrespectful, appalling and illustrative of the highhandedness that suggests that we are not in a democracy. The language is as intolerant as it is alienating. The Minister says that no amount of threat, blackmail etc. will dissuade the government from going ahead with the social media bill because it is borne out of patriotism. Really? (Kukah, 2019, para:1-5)

Third, an irony in most of these happenstances is their occurrence under Yemi Osinbajo, who is fortunately for the APC government a professor of law, a pastor and a Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN), who ordinarily ought to be the protector of human rights and the legal

eye of the APC administration. However, under the APC watch, the vice president, Prof. Yemi Osinbajo as acting president in 2017 mandated the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) to forcibly dispatch protesters from the Unity Fountain, Abuja—a place unanimously agreed to as a civic space. The police would have been instead instructed to prevent the protest from degenerating into chaos. It is gathered that the police are not anti-people in their actions during protest sessions when there are no orders from above to act in brutality (Yesufu, 2019). Oftentimes, the police escort protesters and even clandestinely act in solidarity with protesters. Whereas, the contraction of the democratic space under the APC may be excused on the grounds that “democratic practice is invariably a convenient product comprising some ingredients of both dictatorship and democracy” (Osabu-Kle, 2008, p.4), does it mean that the whole arsenals of law the vice president possesses are in comatose because he is in government?

This conscious contraction of the democratic space under President Buhari self-negates his personal description of himself at Chatham House, London, when he said:

Permit me to close this discussion on a personal note. I have heard and read references to me as a former dictator in many respected British newspapers including the well-regarded *The Economist*. Let me say without sounding defensive that dictatorship goes with military rule, though some might be less dictatorial than others. I take responsibility for whatever happened under my watch. I cannot change the past. But I can change the present and the future. So, before you is a former military ruler and a converted democrat who is

ready to operate under democratic norms and is subjecting himself to the rigours of democratic elections for the fourth time. (Buhari, 2015a, p.6)

c. Unpeopled Economic Policies

Though started in his first tenure, the second tenure of President Buhari has consolidated on previous unpopular policies some of which are traceable to Muhammadu Buhari as a former military head of state from 1983-1985. From the Single Treasury Account (STA), the ₦50 Stamp Duty Tax, removal of fuel subsidy which, as opposition party, the APC protested against in the PDP era, increase in the pump price of fuel, closure of land borders preventing specifically the importation of foreign rice, to the recent increase in Value Added Tax (VAT) rate from 5% to 7.5% to fund both the 2020 Appropriation Bill and the 30% minimum wage, the Finance Bill, among others, remain not only unpopular but has continued to inflict untold hardship on Nigerians.

These financial developments, especially the just passed Finance Bill (comprising of the Companies Income Tax, Value Added Tax, Customs and Excise Tariff, Capital Gains Tax Act, Petroleum Profit Tax, Personal Income Tax, and Stamp Duties Act) by the rubber stamp 9th National Assembly, have elicited mixed reactions (Akhigbe, & Ajibola, 2019). The 9th National Assembly is split along party affiliations with the APC in support whereas the opposition led by the PDP opposed it. The Executive Chairman of the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) and the Minister for Budget and Planning, in an address before the Senate Committee on Finance on the Federal Government 2019-2021 Medium Term Expenditure

Framework, stressed the need for an increment of VAT rate 5% to 6.5%-7.5%. They cited, amongst other reasons, the dwindling global oil price, and the weakness of the naira vis-à-vis the U.S. dollar, etc., accounts for the need for VAT rate increase. Thus, VAT (a general consumption tax imposed on a wide range of goods and services) is essentially a money machine (Keen, & Lockwood, 2010). However, VAT rate increment has attracted several criticisms.

First, its alleged adverse impacts on distributional equity, especially in Third World countries as Nigeria (Alavuotunki, Haapanen & Pirttila, 2019). Itriago (2011, p.1) stated that ‘tax policy in developing countries has been heavily influenced by the IMF and national elites. This has had a negative impact in many cases, with a focus on indirect regressive taxation like VAT, and extensive tax incentives for companies’. Second, the consequences of VAT rate increase on Nigeria’s economy especially “its reductive effects on consumers’ disposable income can lead to a contraction in general economic activities...the minimum wage of public servants will be increased...the increase in VAT rate will simply deplete the value of the increased minimum wage” (Maiye, & Isiadinso, 2019, p.3). Third, VAT rate increment is interpreted as bad timing because it is inconsistent with economic realities. To this, Oyedele (2019, para: 6) stresses that VAT increase will lead to higher inflation, interest rate hike, more unemployment and generally make people poorer...Trying to expand the VAT net while also increasing VAT rate at the same time is a faulty tax strategy. Nigeria can make twice as much from VAT at current rate by reforming the law, expanding

the net and ensuring robust administration rather than by increasing rate.

Against the backdrop of the Finance Bill (inclusive of VAT rate increase), requisite government authorities must explore other means of expanding the tax net by other legal measures, albeit an accountable and transparent VAT fund regime in place to stimulate taxpayers.

d. Obsession with National Security

The APC has been obsessed with insecurity concerns prior to and upon assumption of Nigeria's presidency. It may be recalled that the APC promised to handle insecurity in Nigeria; especially in North/East where Boko Haram terror, has had an unimpressive impact. President Buhari promised to **ensure that under his watch, no force, external or internal, occupy even an inch of Nigerian soil**. Recalling further, the APC as an opposition party derided the then ruling PDP government under President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan for seeking support from neighbouring republics of Niger, Chad, Mali and Cameroun to battle Boko Haram terror. For the APC, the PDP security strategy amounted to belittling Nigeria as a major power in sub-Saharan Africa. The APC promised to decimate Boko Haram with utmost expediency if voted into power.

However, the APC took a similar strategy like PDP in seeking international support from neighbouring African states when it assumed office. President Buhari's first foreign visits were trips to seek sister countries in alliance against Boko Haram insurgency. The

APC government is into its second tenure, yet insecurity pervades North/East. This of course has far reaching implications. For example, huge budgetary allocations have constantly been made to the defence sector; however, without commensurate gains in peace and security in North/East. There is also insecurity in other parts of Nigeria with kidnapping gaining unprecedented ascendancy; a scenario which has made road journeys unattractive.

e. Abysmal Budget Performance

Budget execution under the APC since 2015 when it took over power in Nigeria has remained abysmal. From June 2015 to November, 2018, the President Buhari Government had a total income of ₦11.99 trillion, while it spent ₦16.98 trillion; representing a deficit of ₦4.99 trillion (BudgIT, 2019).

Hitherto, members of the APC in the 7th National Assembly initiated impeachment proceedings against President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan for reasons of unsatisfactory budget performance. Following his strained relations with the 7th National Assembly, President Jonathan consciously avoided the National Assembly in the fall of his administration to avoid a planned embarrassment from the opposition dominated National Assembly and instead often delegated his Minister of Finance, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala to make annual budget presentations in the National Assembly.

Under the ruling APC government with APC controlled 8th National Assembly, the budget performance of President Buhari has not fared any better. In fact, analysis of Nigeria's budgets from 1999-2020

indicate that the PDP sixteen years in power had a total budget sum of ₦41.21 trillion whereas APC’s six years (2015-2020) has already attracted a budget sum of ₦46.295 trillion as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: PDP/APC Respective Budgets in the Fourth Republic, 1999-2020

PDP		APC	
<u>Year</u>	<u>Budget Sum</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Budget Sum</u>
1999	₦299 billion	2015	₦4.425 trillion
2000	₦702 billion	2016	₦6.06 trillion
2001	₦894 billion	2017	₦7.44 trillion
2002	₦1.06 trillion	2018	₦9.12 trillion
2003	₦1.45 trillion	2019	₦8.92 trillion
2004	₦1.19 trillion	2020	₦10.33 trillion (Proposed)
2005	₦1.06 trillion	Total	<u>₦46.295 trillion</u>
2006	₦1.88 trillion		
2007	₦2.39 billion		
2008	₦2.74 trillion		
2009	₦3.05 trillion		
2010	₦4.04 trillion		
2011	₦4.07 trillion		
2012	₦4.09 trillion		
2013	₦4.99 trillion		
2014	₦4.96 trillion		
Total	<u>₦41.21 trillion</u>		

Source: Budget Office, NBS

If in six years, the APC has this huge budget sum, how will the APC government explain its budget performance? What executed projects by the administration is in tandem with the total budget sum?

f. Politicisation of the Anti-corruption Crusade

Anti-corruption was and remained as a key manifesto in President Buhari's government. At the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House, London, General Muhammadu Buhari said:

... on corruption, there will be no confusion as to where I stand. Corruption will have no place and the corrupt will not be appointed into my administration. First and foremost, we will plug the holes in the budgetary process. Revenue producing entities such as the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and Customs and Excise will have one set of books only. Their revenues will be publicly disclosed and regularly audited. The institutions of state dedicated to fighting corruption will be given independence and prosecutorial authority without political interference. But I must emphasise that any war waged on corruption should not be misconstrued as settling old scores or a witch hunt. I'm running for president to lead Nigeria to prosperity and not adversity. (Buhari, 2015a, p.5)

The international community was convinced or was rather gullible by this promise and therefore worked to assist in enthroning Muhammadu Buhari as president in 2015. However, in governance the antecedents of President Buhari's administration in fighting corruption is rather Janus faced. The President Buhari government has politicised this key element that endeared him and his party to Nigerians and beyond. The politicised nature of the government's anti-corruption crusade is easily discerned in most corruption cases

and as it is being shadily handled by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (hereinafter EFCC).

There is link in corruption, legislative oversight and the executive-legislative relations. Budget padding as either committed by those in the executive and the legislature has remained a regular reoccurring decimal; with the executive barking more than it could bite those found culpable of budget padding (Agunyai, & Olawoyin, 2019). President Buhari said above that his anti-corruption crusade would not be to settle old scores yet it is of public knowledge that the continued detention of Lt. Col. Sambo Dasuki against several court rulings directing his release has fallen on deaf eyes because it is a means of settling old scores. Again, it is no secret that politicians with proven cases of financial misconduct by the EFCC see in the APC a safe haven to run to for shelter as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Anti-corruption Crusade under President Buhari’ Watch

Personality	Allegation	Destination
Danjuma Goje	Allegedly mismanaged N25 billion state fund.	Senate
Stella Oduah	Accused of diversion of N3.5 billion.	Senate
Orji Uzor Kalu (Abia State)	Mismanaged N7.65 billion state fund.	Senate
Rochas Okorochoa (Imo State)	Mismanaged state funds.	Senate
Gabriel Suswan	Mismanaged N3.1billion state funds	Senate
Ike Ekweremadu	Money laundering and other illicit dealings.	Senate
Ibrahim Shekarau	N950 million Goodluck Jonathan campaign fund	Senate

Ifeanyi Uba	N43 billion subsidy fraud	Senate
Theodore Orji	N27 billion state funds	Senate
Abdul Aziz Yari	Questionable payment of N10 billion from the London-Paris refund; N35 billion spent on IDPs; Mismanagement of N151, 190, 477, 572.02 ecological and stabilisation fund.	Senate
Ibikunle Amosun	Stockpiling 1, 000 AK47 and 4 million bullets	Senate
Godswill Akpabio	Mismanaging N100 billion state funds	Senate, now Minister of ND Affairs
Chimaroke Nnamani	Mismanaging N5.3 billion state funds	Senate
Dino Melaye	Accused of illegal possession of arms, Gun running and sponsoring of hoodlums in Kogi State.	Senate

Source: Author's Compilation

Other instances may further suffice this point, especially when corruption cases are exposed within the APC but oftentimes treated with kid gloves. Here, a number of incidents readily comes to mind. First, the former Secretary of the Government of the Federation, Babachir David Lawal, with proven corruption case has been handled by the EFCC with levity. Hitherto, the issuance of a letter by the president dismissing the report of a committee that indicted Babachir David Lawal of corruption compelled Senator Shehu Sani to adjudge the anticorruption fight thus: "When it comes to fighting corruption in the National Assembly and the Judiciary and in the larger Nigerian sectors, the President uses insecticide, but when it comes to fighting

corruption within the Presidency, they use deodorants” (Baiyewu, 2017, para:3).

Second, the former Minister of Finance, Mrs. Kemi Adeosun with proven case of certificate forgery of National Youth Service Corps (hereinafter NYSC) was escorted to leave the shores of Nigeria by the Department of State Services (DSS) while the EFCC looked away. Third, under President Buhari’s watch, the EFCC goes after every former PDP governor (e.g. Ayo Fayose, Ekiti State) whereas no former APC governor such as Rauf Aregbesola, now Minister for Internal Affairs, is being investigated. Does it mean all of APC’s former governors are not corrupt? Fourth, a couple of celebrated EFCC cases suddenly get out of the public radar. For example, Ayodele Fayose, the erstwhile governor of Ekiti State who was an ardent critic of the Buhari administration was, even prior to his departure as governor, placed under EFCC watch; with instructions to authorities in charge of borders, seaports and airports to watch out for Ayodele Fayose in an attempt to leave the shores of Nigeria. Surprisingly, Ayodele Peter Fayose presented himself to the EFCC on the day of his formal handover of power in Ekiti State. Despite the fanfare preceding his arrest, Ayodele Peter Fayose spent a couple of days in EFCC’s custody and was released to go pending further investigations. However, little progress rather than conviction is achieved on Ayodele Fayose’s case with the EFCC.

Fifth, there is a repulsive membership policy in the APC. It is noticed that the broom, as the key symbol of the APC, sweeps away any prospective member of whatever political, economic and financial

crimes once he or she becomes a member of the party. The celebrated case of former governor of Akwa Ibom State, Godswill Akpabio who was under EFCC investigation cross carpeted to the APC, remains a case of reference. Of course, after a few consultations with the powers that be in the APC and Aso Rock Villa, Godswill Akpabio was admitted into the APC. Godswill Akpabio's membership into the APC, of course, raised a couple of ripples in Nigeria. First, there was public outcry against it urging the EFCC to probe him. However, no further investigation ensued. Second, following Godswill Akpabio's loss in the senatorial election bid, he has since been rewarded with a ministerial post as the Minister of Niger Delta Affairs. It is obvious then that the ruling APC government grants amnesty from prosecution those who are either in the party, or in President Buhari's government. Such is political corruption and it undermines public trust and confidence on any government (Morris, & Klesner, 2010).

g. Collapse of Electoral Jurisprudence in Nigeria

Electoral jurisprudence in Nigeria is in shambles if not in comatose especially in the Fourth Republic. Recalling that, late President Umaru Yar'Adua admitted shortly after his presidential election victory that the electoral process which brought him to power after all was flawed. Intending to have credible elections henceforth in the country, he instituted the Mohammed U'wais Panel. President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan equally set-up the Panel on Election Violence and Civil Disturbances (the Ahmed Lemu Panel). Thought set-up by various PDP governments the far-reaching recommendations of both panels on electoral reform were jettisoned by both the PDP and the APC. The Buhari-led APC federal

government equally ignored the recommendations of the Ken Nnamani Electoral Reforms Committee instituted on its own volition. The behaviour of both parties are disdainful of far-reaching electoral reforms, which of course, is an indication of a desire of the continuation of the status-quo that permits electoral manipulations.

Furthermore, President Muhammadu Buhari equally withheld his assent to four versions of the bill to amend the Electoral Act that were presented to him by the 8th National Assembly in 2018. And just before the 2019 presidential elections, President Buhari again withheld his assent to yet another bill intending to amend the Electoral Act. In each of these refusals to assent, the president cited proximity to the next elections and the short time at the disposal of the INEC to implement reforms; reasons or excuses Nigerians found laughable. The enormity of the actions of the president is that a reformed Electoral Act would have codified important improvements such as capping the nomination fees of political parties, extension of the Electoral Act to local government elections, ensuring the registration of voters, public accessibility to election results, adoption of electronic means of the release of election results, among others.

Worse still, election petition tribunals and the Supreme Court at the start of the Fourth Republic have remained loyal friends to the party in power. It is simply indicative of the lack of the independence of the judiciary in Nigeria and a demonstration of being subservient to the presidency who holds the veto power to make judicial appointments, transfers, discipline, promotions and remunerations. This veto power at the domain of President Buhari was exercised just

before the commencement of the 2019 presidential election, when the Chief Justice of Nigeria (hereinafter CJN), Justice Walter Onnoghen was removed from office citing cases of impropriety committed by the CJN. For whatever reasons proffered, the Nigerian public was suspicious that the timing was wrong as it was just a couple weeks to the 2019 general elections and may have been orchestrated for a purpose.

Political events unfolding after the 2019 presidential election; especially the composition of election petition tribunals, it became obvious that the removal of Justice Walter Onnoghen and subsequent appointment of Mohammed Bello, who is of the same ethnic and religious extraction with president Buhari, as the new CJN was purposively done to validate the election of President Buhari both at the tribunal and at the Supreme Court.

The above scenarios indeed played out when the presidential election petition tribunal and the Supreme Court both validated the electoral victory of President Buhari thereby brushing aside the weighty allegations bordering on certificate discrepancies against the president—issues that are set to dictate the future of elections in Nigeria. The PDP presidential candidate, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar had approached the tribunal on three counts. First, the issue of non-qualification of Buhari to run for the election *ab initio* on account of Buhari's no submission of a secondary certificate. The tribunal chairman Justice Mohammed Lawal Garba ruled that Buhari's certificate from the Nigerian military is higher than the Secondary School certificate stated as a minimum academic requirement for the

election by the constitution and so Mr. Buhari is not only qualified, he is eminently qualified to contest the election. Second, the PDP identified discrepancies in Mr. Buhari's names on the certificates presented for the election. The tribunal asserted that the discrepancies in Buhari's name on his school certificates as presented by Atiku Abubakar are irrelevant in the determination of the case because *whether it is Muhammadu with a 'U' or Mohammed Buhari with an 'O', they all refer to and identify the second respondent, Mr. Buhari.* And third, on the subject of attachment of requisite certificates to INEC Form CF001, the lead judge of the presidential election petition tribunal states that *"a candidate is not required under the Electoral Act to attach his certificate to his form CF001 before a candidate is adjudged to have the requisite qualification to contest the election"* (Egbas, 2019, para:12).

Apparently unsatisfied, the PDP and Alhaji Atiku Abubakar approached the Supreme Court to overturn the judgment at the tribunal. In its response to Atiku's appeal, the Supreme Court led by Chief Justice Tank Muhammed ruled that "we have examined all the briefs and the exhibits for over two weeks and we agree that there is no merit in this appeal". The apex court promised that it will make public the reasons for their verdict on a later date. This promise is unconvincing. It took the apex court two weeks to examine the exhibits as tendered by the PDP and their presidential flagbearer but it was not enough time for the Supreme Court to equally avail the PDP, Atiku Abubakar, the Nigerian voters and the international community the reasons for the verdict. Reservations have since been expressed on the actions of the Supreme Court in Nigeria. Oluwole

(2019, para:4) for example said the nation's electoral process is still far from perfect, although we can appreciate the fact that there has been a remarkable improvement since 1999. Several reforms of the various aspects of the procedure had put an appreciable degree of credibility on the process. There is no doubt that the hazardous elements that characterise Nigeria's general elections are still here, howbeit in curtailed measures.

Such evaluations are not out of place because what is clear from these developments is that under the APC presidency a new trend has long unfolded; a scenario where the judiciary is so harassed, suppressed and repressed by the executive under the President Buhari administration that Lady Justice's blindfold is apparently transparent, enabling her to see to the direction of the APC government in giving judgments.

h. Disdain for Foreign Election Observer Missions

General Muhammadu Buhari was impressive in his address in Chatham House, London, when he appreciated and welcomed the foreign interests shown in the 2015 presidential election. According to General Buhari:

...the global interest in Nigeria's landmark election is not misplaced at all and indeed should be commended, for this is an election that has serious import for the world. I urge the international community to continue to focus on Nigeria at this very critical moment. Given increasing global linkages, it is in our collective interests that the postponed elections should hold on the rescheduled dates; that they should be free and fair; that

their outcomes should be respected by all parties; and that any form of extension, under whichever guise, is unconstitutional and will not be tolerated. (Buhari, 2015a, p.2)

Interesting as the above epigraph sounds and which served as a platform for which the APC rose to the tumultuous victory it got in 2015. On 1 April, 2015, during his acceptance speech, President Buhari said:

I give special thanks to President Obama and his timely intervention and support for peaceful and credible elections in Nigeria and for sending Secretary John Kerry and other United States officials. The European Union – especially the United Kingdom, France, Germany and other nations that were actively involved in ensuring the success of this election are equally appreciated... The U.S support before, during and after the 2015 elections was vital to Nigeria's stability and I will never forget the role they played in the stability of Nigeria. (Buhari, 2015b, para:15)

Curiously, what form of intervention was performed by the Obama administration to merit these special thanks from President Buhari? However, in the 2019 presidential elections, President Buhari and his APC are no more friends with the international community that it saw as a worthy friend in 2015. A number of events leading up to the 2019 presidential elections and the positions the international community took on these matters such as the postponement of the 2019 presidential election, the sack of the CJN, Justice Walter Onnoghen, among others, has made the APC to see the international community

as either pro-PDP, or meddling in the internal affairs of Nigeria. The following couple of reactions from the APC suffice this point further.

First, Nasir el-Rufai, the executive governor of Kaduna State was most agitated and unimpressed with comments made by international election observers. He threatened foreign observers on Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) thus: “as Nigerians, we must understand that these guys can sit pretty in their countries and say things but when crisis breaks, we are here. We are the victims; our wives and children are the victims...We are waiting for the person that will come and intervene. They will go back in body bags, because nobody will come to Nigeria and tell us how to run our country. We’ve got that independence and we are trying to run our country as decently as possible (Adelani, et al, 2019, para:8)

Yekini Nabena, Deputy National Publicity Secretary of the APC equally accused foreign election observer comments as interference saying “Nigeria is a sovereign nation and such actions by these western countries negate the principles of international law which outlaw’s interference in the domestic affairs of a sovereign nation by another country” (Adelani, et al, 2019, para:14).

Second, Steven Chukwu, the Director of Publicity, Nigerian Democratic Forum (NDF) accused the U.S., the U.K and the European Union of a plan to impose Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, the PDP’s presidential candidate on the people of Nigeria through undemocratic means. According to the NDF “the driving force for their support of Atiku Abubakar is worrisome and calls for any

Nigerian that desires to still have a country after the elections to stand up against the re-colonisation of Nigeria” (Godwin, 2019, para:12).

Third and finally, the APC hierarchy accused the international community of desperation to impose Alhaji Atiku Abubakar as Nigeria’s president because President Buhari’s anticorruption fight is adversely impacting on the economies of these foreign countries. According to Steven Chukwu, the Director of Publicity for the Nigerian Democratic Forum (NDF) there is:

...anecdotal evidence that the High Street shops in the UK suffered a slump in December of that year simply because looters in Nigeria were unable to patronise the stores as they were unable to steal money to spend in that country, many of the shops have since folded up. Almost four years later, other sectors of all the meddling countries have taken hits from not having cash injection bankrolled with stolen funds from Nigeria. Their situation became desperate because other African countries are beginning to follow in the examples of President Buhari, which means another four years of his leadership style will leave the US, UK and EU in dire economic situations while Africa would have made progress in truly being liberated (Godwin, 2019, para:13).

i. Blindness to the Federal Character Principle

Obviously, being conversant with the huge heterogeneity of the Nigerian federation, the 1977 Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) considered the inclusion of the Federal Character Principle² in the 1979 Constitution as a strategy for peace, equity and stability. The CDC (1977) asserts then that:

There had in the past been inter-ethnic rivalry to secure the domination of government by one ethnic group or combination of ethnic groups to the exclusion of others. It is therefore essential to have some provisions to ensure that the predominance of persons from a few ethnic or other sectional groups is avoided in the composition of government or the appointment or election of persons to high offices in the state.

Arising from the above need, Section 14(3) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria states that:

The composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic of other sectional groups in that government or in any of its agencies.

Furthermore, in pursuant of the above objective, Section 4(1b) of the Federal Character Commission Act CAP F7 LFN 2004 stated that the Federal Character Commission (FCC) must monitor, promote and enforce compliance with the federal character principle by ensuring that each region of the country is fairly represented at all levels of government (Adamolekun, et al, 1991; Okeke, 2019).

However, under the President Buhari administration, the political map of Nigeria is erroneously monolithically a federation with homogenous religion, ethnic and cultural underpinnings. Political,

economic, security, and judicial appointments under the President Buhari administration is blind to all sections of Nigeria. It is no secret that majority of appointments in President Buhari administration are either persons from the North geopolitical zone or Muslims. Furthermore, against public outcry appointments have remained skewed against the South geopolitical zone since 2015 when the administration took office. President Buhari's appointments have not demonstrated his memorable inaugural quote, "I belong to everybody and I belong to nobody" (Buhari, 2015b).

Some Nigerians see nothing amiss in this trend and instead argue that in as much as these persons can deliver the expected results. But does it mean persons of other geopolitical groups cannot deliver? Recalling at the commencement of the President Buhari administration in 2015, two senior advisers to the president, Malam Garba Shehu (Senior Special Assistant, Media and Publicity) and Mr. Femi Adesina (Special Adviser on Media and Publicity) both retorted that more appointments were still coming to correct the observed imbalance in appointments. Obviously, to placate restive Nigerians, the presidency in November of 2017 published a list of appointees with seventy-five appointees from the North and eighty-two from the South (Ogunniran, 2018). Nigerians were unsatisfied with Buhari's list of appointees arguing instead that:

the list is an affront on the sensibility of Nigerians as all the key positions are from the North: The major security offices-Chief of Army Staff, National Security Adviser, State Chief of Protocol, Chief of Air Staff, Chief of Defence. The main economic offices-

Accountant General, Deputy Governor of Central Bank of Nigeria, Group Managing Director, Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, Comptroller Generals of Customs and Immigration. Other core offices such as Chairman of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Inspector General of Police, Attorney General of the Federation etc. Summarily, there has never been such brazen abuse of the principle as witnessed in this administration (Ogunniran, 2018, para:10).

The Buhari administration is in its second tenure of four years each and the lopsidedness in appointments has not been balanced.

j. Militarisation of Elections

President Muhammadu Buhari, in his reaction to the 1983 presidential election of the defunct Second Republic, was widely quoted in saying the shameless rigging and the widespread pervasion of the electoral process could not, in all honesty, have been said to have produced a government of the people, by the people. What we had through the manipulated results both at federal and state (even local governments) levels, were governments imposed on the people by the scandalous use of a mixture of political thuggery and widescale bribery. (Olagunju, et al, 1993, p.6)

President Buhari's Chatham House, London, speech equally promised to deliver quality elections while guaranteeing basic human rights. According to him:

While you cannot have representative democracy without elections, it is equally important to look at the quality of the elections and to remember that mere elections do not make democracy. It is globally agreed that democracy is not an event, but a journey. And that the destination of that journey is democratic consolidation--that state where democracy has become so rooted and so routine and widely accepted by all actors. With this important destination in mind, it is clear that though many African countries now hold regular elections, very few of them have consolidated the practice of democracy. (Buhari, 2015a, p.3)

Whereas the above two statements credited to President Buhari are sacrosanct in the democratic life of any democracy, the question would then be if there is anything differently done in the conduct of elections by the INEC under the President Buhari Government? The answer is an emphatic No. Elections mostly in opposition states are conducted under a highly militarised atmosphere; especially in opposition neighbourhoods, states (Rivers and Ekiti States) and where security agencies openly assault opposition candidates (Birch, & Muchlinski, 2017; Vergee, Kwaja, & Onubogu, 2018). For example, the last governorship election in Ekiti State, Nigeria, is a case in point. Mr. Ayodele Peter Fayose, then sitting governor of Ekiti State was denied of his security aids days to the governorship election. The governor raised alarm and stated, against his fundamental human right of free movement, how he was held incommunicado, if not hostage while the election lasted. The governor went ahead to show on national televisions in Nigeria photo clips of how he was brutalised by security agencies.

Political watchers in Nigeria say the brazen display of brutality by security agencies is rather a display of partisanship where corrupt politicians have possibly infiltrated their ranks (Badmus, 2017). The enormity of such partisanship by security forces is that in the 2019 general elections, 626 Nigerians lost their lives whereas 106 Nigerians died in the 2015 general elections (Sanni, 2019). The ratio of deaths, which is skewed against the 2019 general elections, is worrisome in that the 2019 general elections were conducted under the APC as a government with a solemn promise to do things differently.

More so, the INEC characteristically, has ever remained partisan to the ruling government and party. The ruling APC government by dint of recent electioneering processes in state elections has become a beneficiary of INEC's glaring inconsistencies. For example, INEC declared the governorship election in Osun State as inconclusive, while it had hitherto declared election in Lokoja/Kogi Federal Constituency conclusive on similar circumstances. Expectedly, these inconsistencies have elicited reactions. First, the Kogi State chairman of the Nigerian Union of Journalists, Mr. Momoh Jimoh Adiza, wondered the criteria the INEC adopted in declaring the Osun State election inconclusive whereas declaring the Lokoja/Kogi Federal Constituency election conclusive. According to him, the candidate of the All Progressives Congress, Haruna Isa polled 26,860 votes, as against that of the People's Democratic Party, Abubakar Bashir who secured 14,845 votes; even as 19,960 votes were cancelled in 17 polling units and the difference between the duo was around 12,000. Since Nigeria is not a banana republic, there is need for the laws of the country to be implemented to the latter, not minding whose ox is

gored; there's need for INEC to be firm in handling electoral matters with a view to consolidating on the nation's democracy. (Obahopo, 2018, para:5-6)

Second, Idris Miliki Abdul, the Executive Director for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution, asked the INEC to explain the glaring inconsistencies in declaring the Osun State governorship election inconclusive and that of the Lokoja/Kogi Federal Constituency conclusive. He requested that:

There's need to make reference to the just concluded bye-election of Lokoja/Kogi Federal Constituency conducted on the 11 August, 2018 and relating it to the pronouncement of INEC in respect of Osun State governorship election held on 22 September, 2018. If INEC could declare that election inconclusive as a result of cancelled votes, in which the cancelled votes outnumber the difference between the two leading political parties as provided for in both INEC guidelines and the electoral law in Nigeria, on what basis was the result of the bye-election declared conclusive by the same INEC in Kogi State. (Obahopo, 2019, para:9)

The ruling APC government choose not to interfere but rather allowed the INEC to remain independent as its name falsely connotes because the APC remains the beneficiary of these lopsided happenstances.

Conclusion

This paper was primarily concerned with public trust and confidence in one of the central institutions of representative democracy—the executive. It asks specifically: Is public trust and confidence on Nigeria’s executive under President Muhammadu Buhari waning or not? The paper concludes on the following standpoints:

- a. That the executive in Nigeria under President Muhammadu Buhari is waning—that the fanfare, euphoria and expectations resulting from the “Change Mantra” in 2015 has since eroded. The change in the APC’s campaign slogan to the “Next Level” has not rekindled fresh hopes in Nigerians like the predecessor, the “Change Mantra”. The paper highlighted the avoidable actions and policies the President Buhari Government have done that has instigated the decline in public trust and confidence in the government.
- b. Arising from the unmet expectations, the change Nigerians wanted was not change in initials of Nigeria’s president from Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (GEJ) to General Muhammadu Buhari (GMB) or President Muhammadu Buhari (PMB) but instead change in the manner of governance; a complete departure from the way governance has been carried out in Nigeria in the Fourth Republic. If public trust and confidence on the President Buhari-led federal executive is faltering, eroding and waning, it means that the capacity of the government to meet peoples’ expectations and aspirations is stagnating whereas the demands on the government are ever growing in Nigeria.

- c. The prevailing militarisation of elections, lopsided electoral jurisprudence, among others, is an indication that election Eldorado and indeed democratisation is still a far-cry in Nigeria.
- d. Like any other political party in Nigeria, the APC has equally been engaged in unwholesome electoral misconducts—voting buying, hate speeches, foreign observer intimidation; those same issues the “Change Mantra” promised to do differently.

Notes

1. According to Freedom House (in Repucci, 2018, p.5) “populism is a mystically unified ‘nation’ against corrupt ‘elites’ and external enemies, and claims for a charismatic leader the power to voice the will of the nation. It is therefore fundamentally illiberal, rejecting diversity of identity and of opinion within society and discarding basic principles of modern constitutional thinking: that democracy requires constraints on the will of the majority and checks on the decisions of the executive”.
2. Federal Character principle is used as a synonym for "representative bureaucracy" and "quota system" in the civil service and the military.

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