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**Regime Change and Fight Against
Corruption in Nigeria: A Focus on
President Buhari's Democratic
Administration**

Social Sciences Research

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Abstract

The high numbers of cases of corruption in Nigeria have caused many Nigerians to bother and think about the way out of the problem. The study focused on regime change towards the fight against corruption in Nigeria with emphasis on President Muhammadu Buhari democratic government, particularly his first tenure. The study utilized secondary data, as well as conceptualized the fight against corruption as a conceptual framework for the study. The study re-emphasized: that President Buhari perceived corruption as the greatest form of human rights violation; that Nigeria ecosystem breeds corruption owing to the existence of impunity emanating from lack of independence of the institutions and other agencies handling anti-corruption matters; that President Buhari's bravery to fight against corruption no matter whose ox is gore served as a red flag to bureaucratic corruption in Nigeria despite the perception of some persons that anti-corruption fight of the president is selective; that Buhari bravery to fight against corruption was boosted by his political party (APC) constitution item No 4 which clearly states the party's position against corruption. The study recommended among others that law should be enacted to mandate all political parties in Nigeria to have anti-corruption law in their constitutions and the adoption of equality before the law in handling corruption cases by the anti-corruption institutions, and the law courts.

Keywords: *bravery, corruption, fight against corruption and perception, regime change*

Introduction

The issue of corruption has attracted every reasonable person that bothers about the negative effects of corruption on development. Corruption could be classified into three major types; political, bureaucratic and electoral corruption. Consequently, corruption is any bad, immoral, untrustworthy and dishonest transaction/practice capable of violating the principle of responsibility, duty, uprightness or public morality (Ugala, 2010). Corruption is a by-product of ethical decay which destroys every facet of national life.

The first and second republics of Nigeria were not free from accusations of corruption which made Major Kaduna Nzeogwu lead a coup on January 15th 1966 halt the first Republic and the one (coup) announced by Brigadier Sani Abacha on December 3rd, 1983 that ended the second republic, which thereafter Major General Muhammadu Buhari became Military Head of State to curb corruption (Otoghagua, 2004; Madiebo, 1980). The second republic government led by ShehuShagari was accused of no commitment to the electorates well-being who enthroned his government (Otoghagua, 2004). Similarly, President Goodluck Jonathan led government was also accused of not being brave and not having the will to solve Nigeria's problem, particularly corruption (Onya & Elemanya, 2016).

Corruption is an enemy of the progress and development of an individual and a country because it thwarts development. The alleged corrupt practices that occurred in President Jonathan's led government from 2010-2015 in Nigeria due to his not braved and lack of will to tackle corruption in Nigeria spurred Muhammadu Buhari; Nigeria 4th democratically elected President to declare and vow to fight against corruption and corrupt practices in Nigeria (Onya & Elemanya, 2016). President Buhari past records of War against Indiscipline (WAI) when he was military Head of State and his promise to war against corruption during his electoral campaign attracted Nigerians as the man with a brave heart to do what he promised. Hence, through the aids of secondary data, the paper looks at regime change with emphasis on the democratic government of President Buhari

as concerns anti-corruption fight in his first tenure and the people perception of his fight against corruption in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

Regime Change

The regime is a method/or system of government, for example, democratic regime while change is to make a difference or to pass from one form to another (Hornby, 1995). From the aforesaid, regime change simply implies a change of government. However, regime change is more than just a change of democratic government because the change is motivated by purpose, which most times is the citizens' desire to end an unaccepted regime due to inept and irresponsible to the people's plights. So, here, regime change is seen as an electoral injection of an agent of change to bring about the citizens' demands to reality. Therefore regime change does not mean an end of incumbent's tenure for a successor to be elected but electoral rejection of incumbent due to some alleged variables such as poor performance and corruption in government. In summary, regime change, as used in this paper, is the rejection of the incumbent in order to make way for agents of positive change (newly elected officials) who are capable of influencing the people's desires by setting agendas, providing guidance and policies, and evaluating feedback in order to improve the people's performance/achievement.

Corruption

Corruption or corrupt practice is an unwanted behaviour motivated by personal selfishness. Corruption is a deviation of formal rules of conduct that govern the actions of someone in a position of public authority owing to personal motives such as wealth, power or status acquisitions(Olopeoma,1998). Considering corruption as illegal means of wealth acquisition, Lipset and Leuz (2000) noted that corruption is an effort to get wealth or power via illegal means for private gain at the public expense or misuse of public power for private benefits. There are various types of corruption namely political, economic, bureaucratic, judicial, and moral corruption respectively (Viashima, 2017). Corruption is unlawful in Nigeria but very functional because of its socio-economic and political useful effects to the actors. Klaveren believes that a corrupt bureaucrat sees his office as a business from which he/she is able to extract legal income (Ozioma, 2007). Here, corruption is seen as unlawful social behaviour of government

functionaries to misappropriate public wealth/ properties for personal gain at the expense of the need to improve the living conditions of the masses. By nature, corruption is misconduct, law-breaking and depravity.

Fight against Corruption

The fight against corruption is a graft-prevention campaign aimed at fostering good governance by reducing bureaucratic wrongdoing. It is an illegal conduct committed with the intent of furthering one's own self-interest over the well-being of others. The absence of honesty or integrity, which included the exploitation of a position of trust for dishonest gain, is known as corruption (Zesto & Blanc, 2007). Government corruption is one of the emblems of governance failure since it has a detrimental impact on development and economic progress. Corruption slows down investment and economic growth owing to the discouragement of new ideas and innovations (Ezoem, 2010).

In this regard, fighting against corruption by the government in power is the enactment of laws and formulation of legal frameworks targeted to halt and prevent corruption in a country. It concerns awaken the existing rules, guidelines, and enactment of laws to guide governmental activities/affairs toward the attainment of good governance. While considering what constitutes the meaning of ethics and morality, Mukoro and Arubayi (2011) identified among others accountability, discipline and integrity, honesty and impartiality, which according to them, should guide the conduct of all public officers in discharging their responsibilities. Hence, being against corruption is an anti-corruption fight to discourage and prevent dishonesty government functionaries of acquisition of success, wealth, power or any advantages unlawfully at the expense of the masses' general well-being/welfare.

Nigerian Ecosystem and Corruption

Nigerian society encourages corruption. Corruption is a challenge to democracy in Nigeria and most of the problems of the country are traceable to corruption (Obiora, 2017). Some Nigerians are being engaged in corruption owing to the existence of impunity in Nigeria. The lack of independence of anti-corruption institutions and agencies is due to the process of the enthronement

of the leadership of the anti-corruption institutions and agencies are based on political appointment. The described situation creates a culture of impunity which breeds corrupt practice as those politicians and their political cleavages in the ruling party seem to be untouchable considering Nwaze's (2012) assertion below.

Nwaze (2012) asserted that "Nigerians seem to have practically surrendered and accepted corruption as a way of life." Nigeria state lacks strong institutions but has strong men, which causes a weak institutional enforcement framework. In Nigeria, the overwhelming, overbearing and commanding influence of the political elite who are commonly called "big men" on structures, organizations and institutions, scot-free with their loots as a result of no effective checks and balances. Nwaze (2012) further asserts that:

Even with the preponderance of anti-corruption agencies, not enough progress is being made in the war against corruption. The 'big men' who perpetuate the massive corruption in the land would seem to be untouchable; they are obviously bigger and stronger than these agencies. It is business as usual while the agencies keep themselves busy by pursuing petty thieves.

Ethical standard reduces opportunities for discretion which in turn minimizes the incidence of bribery, favouritism, nepotism, fraud, misappropriation, embezzlement, extortion as the pathways to accomplishing corruption. Nwaze (2012) identified the following as causes of corruption in Nigeria; weak institution enforcement framework, lack of ethical standards in government business, poor reward system, lack of leading by example by Nigerian leaders and extended family pressure as breadwinner.

President Muhammadu Buhari Anti-Corruption Perspective

President Muhammadu Buhari anti-corruption battle is formed by his view of corruption becoming a norm in Nigeria. President Buhari views corruption as the greatest form of human rights violation (Onya and Elemanya, 2016). Citizens of a democratic country through an election they collectively transfer their rights (will) to the elected leader(s), which legitimate the government of such country.

In his inauguration, President Muhammadu Buhari asserted that “if Nigeria does not kill corruption, this number one enemy may eventually kill Nigeria” (Buhari, 2015). This assertion spurred President Muhammadu Buhari to adopt home-grown anti-corruption policies and legal frameworks, which include the Treasury Single Account, (TSA) Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB) and its tribunal, whistleblower policy among others.

President Buhari push against corruption in Nigeria was due to the accusation of ex-president Jonathan not brave and not having the will to solve Nigeria’s problems, particularly corruption, which graduated from being an aberration into a national norm (Onya & Elemanya, 2016). President MuhammaduBuhari in 2015 during his inauguration to declared that; I belong to everybody and I belong to nobody (Chesa, Oweh & Adah, 2015), a declaration that depicts Mr President readiness to tackle corruption in Nigeria. In a time of his electoral campaign in 2015, Buhari who was the presidential candidate of All Progressive Congress (APC) vowed to fight against corruption and since he was enthroned democratically, the anti-corruption fight has remained his core priority (Premiun Times, 2016).

President Muhammadu Buhari character of anti-indiscipline in the time of his military regime made Nigerians believe in his anti-corruption idea” during his campaign. Item No. 4 of the President’s political party (APC) constitution unambiguously states the position of the party towards anti-corruption crusade if it is elected into power (APC Constitution, 2013). After the 2015 swearing-in of Buhari as President, he swings into the fight against corruption as petitions were filed. According to Akpan and Eyo (2018), President Buhari focused on;

anti-corruption war by re-rigging the headship of key Federal government’s anti-corruption agencies to wit: the EFCC; Department of State Security (DSS); Nigeria customs; Nigeria Immigration and Prisons services; the Nigeria Ports Authority (NPA); Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA); Nigerian National Petroleum Cooperation (NNPC); Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), the Armed Forces Services Chiefs and Nigeria Police Force; among others.

Former minister of petroleum under President Jonathan administration Mrs Diezani Alison-Madueke was investigated on her stewardship while she was in office concerned the numerous alleged illegal oil deals in NNPC (Izeze, 2015; Izeze, 2015; Daily Sun, 2016). Buhari democratic

government also through investigation unfolded \$ 2.1 billion for arms procurement but allegedly diverted, shared among PDP bigwigs and their cohorts as money for the 2015 presidential election campaign (Akpan and Eyo, 2018). Consequently, they further noted that further inquiry was made; arrests and the people allegedly benefitted from the aforesaid looted funds were prosecuted. The report has also shown that part of the looted funds and assets have been recovered from some of the people who were connected with the arms procurement funds saga who opted for plea bargain and EFCC entered into agreements with them.(Ogundepe, 2017 in Akpan & Eyo, 2018). Also, the diversion of N1.9 billion being paid for a fight against Ebola was equally investigated (Abiodun, 2015).

However, despite the President Buhari administration fight against corrupt practices, which have yielded some results, some people see it as a selective fight because most of the people investigated, arrested and persecuted were People Democratic Party (PDP) members who worked under ex-president Goodluck Jonathan administration.

The Perceived Nature of President Buhari Anti-corruption War in Nigeria

President Muhammadu Buhari democratic government was welcomed by most Nigerians with hope particularly after listening to his inaugural speech in which a declaration made by him became a slogan, I belong to everybody and I belong to nobody (Chesa, Oweh&Adah, 2015). The President demonstrated his bravery when vowed to fight against corruption in Nigeria no matter whose ox is gored. However, some Nigerians perceived his declaration of unbiased in pursuance of his anti-corruption crusade in Nigeria as not true but selective by citing instances as follow;

The list of alleged looters of public funds that were released in batches showed alleged looters of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) members only without members of ruling All Progressive Congress (APC) party alleged looters and other political parties. Despite, the judgment of Justice Hadiza Rabiou Shagari in FHC/CS/964/2016 which says that only the list of funds looters, the monies and the circumstances of such recoveries should be published but not any list of alleged funds looters before the courts. Thus, the publication of the alleged funds looters in the media by the Buhari led administration undermines the power of the court to determine such ongoing corruption cases as which violated the rights of those listed in such publication (Akpan & Eyo, 2018). Some PDP senators threatened to withdraw their support to the government of President

Buhari on the basis that the anti-corruption war is focused mostly on their members owing to the endless arrest of party's members on the related cases of corruption. To the PDP members, the unlawful arrests of their members are meant to silence their members as the main opposition party in Nigeria (Essien, 2017). He further noted that PDP perceived the ongoing arrest and prosecution of their members as to coerce the party's members to cross carpet to APC to enjoy relative peace and freedom from being arrested and prosecuted for any alleged corrupted practices. Although the ruling APC Senators debunked the allegation of selective anti-corruption action against PDP members and their cohorts.

Moreso, Chief Olu Falae lamented that Buhari anti-corruption war is selective and becoming unbearable (Punch, 2016). PDP Lagos State Chapter in 2016 criticized President Buhari claims that his ministers are not corrupt. The PDP argued that some of his corrupt ministers were being shielded by the President government due to their financial contributions to his election. PDP Lagos State chapter accused President Buhari of there exists corruption in his government that he pretends, that he should present himself for a live platform for questions and answers if truly he was very confident that any of his ministers are not corrupt (Onya & Elemanya, 2016). Also, President Buhari was accused of his administrative attitude to rule of law, that his administration repeatedly disobeys courts orders. For example, the case of the denial of 6 times court bails granted to Rtd Colonel Sambo Dasuki, the ex-president Jonathan national security adviser (Oyesina, 2018).

President Buhari anti-corruption war is seen as selective as perceived by some persons. However, his approach of home-grown style such as whistle-blower policy has initially put government functionaries on their toes as it relates to governmental business/activities. Also, the uninterrupted Senate Ad hoc committee investigation by Mr. President that unfolded the financial recklessness of N1.5 billion in the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) Interim Management Committee (IMC) (Abdulateef, 2020), which most of the IMC members are APC ruling party depicts to some degree of certainty of Mr President declaration of I belong to everybody and I belong to nobody towards his anti-corruption fight against corrupt practices in Nigeria (Abdulateef, 2020). The world leaders and organizations applauded his zeal in fighting against corruption in Nigeria, which has earned him "as the champion of the anti-corruption war in Africa as acknowledged by African Union (AU) (Akpan & Eyo, 2018; Channel TV, 2016; Ibtemes, 2016 ; The Nation, 2016).

Conclusion

Nigeria has been known as one of the corrupt countries in the globe even the evidence of corruption has led to regime change of governments led by President Shehu Shageri in 1983 by the military and 2015 presidential election in which President Jonathan in 2015 accepted defeat prior to the announcement of the election's result (Omonbi and Umoru, 2015). Nigerian society needs an agent of change to inject desired and credible change in the governmental sector to minimize if not eradicate government functionaries' corrupt practices. President Buhari led administration his first tenure to an extent demonstrated bravery which injected an element of change in government dealings as relates to corruption because in his democratic regime public funds looters opted for plea bargain after arrest, investigated and prosecution (Akpan and Eyo, 2018; Ogundepe, 2017), which served as a red flag to corruption particularly bureaucratic corruption in his first tenure despite the perception of some persons that his anti-corruption fight was selective. However, while President Buhari is relentless combating corruption; Nigerians are worried about the increased insecurity while waiting for dividends of the government of the man highly regarded as messiah and agent of change, which propelled him (/Buhari) to the presidency.

Recommendations

- i. Nigeria government should re-emphasized the need and ensure through enactment law that all political elected officeholders sincerely declare their assets with code of conduct Bureau prior to swearing-in.
- ii. The national assembly should enact a law to mandate all political parties in Nigeria to have anti-corruption laws in their constitutions and should unambiguously state.
- iii. Law should be enacted in Nigeria to prevent alleged corrupt persons from political appointments and vying for any political positions to serve as a deterrent to others who intend to engage in such acts.
- iv. The war/fight against corruption by any elected government should base on the principle of rule of law that says "equality before the law". Treat the alleged equally without sentiment.

- v. The institutions and other agencies handling anti-corruption should be periodically given in-job-training and remunerated to spur them to service delivery actions without compromise

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