

## **Democracy, Good Governance and Development in Nigeria: A Critical Appraisal of Muhammed Buhari's Eight Years Rule**

<sup>1</sup>Uchechukwu Kizito Ogu & <sup>2</sup>Anthony Udoka Ezebuoro

<sup>1</sup>Department of Educational Foundations, College of Education, Zing Taraba State

<sup>2</sup>Department of Philosophy, University of Nigeria Nsukka

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### **Abstract**

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**W**hen Muhammad Buhari assumed office as president of Nigeria in 2015 after sixteen years of PDP rule, many Nigerians hoped the new administration will steer the country away from the confusion and hardship that characterized the past administration and bring the much-needed development, however, how the government performed in changing the fortunes of the country positively remains a debate. How did Nigeria fair under his administration? Did he improve adherence to constitutional provisions in governance? Did the country become better than it was in 2015? The paper examines the nexus between democracy, good governance and development in Nigeria in the eight years of Buhari's government. Data for the study was sourced through content analysis approach. The paper argues that Nigeria witnessed various dimensions of political, economic and social crises occasioned largely by the non-adherence to the provisions of the Constitution. From the persistent violations of the rights of Nigerians including the restriction of the freedom of the press to the rising level of poverty and destitution among Nigerians, from the flagrant disobedience to the rule of law to the failure to conduct free, fair and credible elections in the country it has been a tale of woes for Nigeria. The paper, therefore, recommends the adherence to constitutional provisions and to rule of law, strengthening of democratic political institutions and inclusive policies and programmes for sustainable development in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** *Democracy, Good governance, Development, Constitution, Political institutions.*

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Corresponding Author: **Uchechukwu Kizito Ogu**

### **Background to the Study**

Democracy is a system of government where the whole population or all the eligible adult members of a state typically participate in government through their elected representatives. In other words, supreme power is invested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through representatives they freely choose in free, fair and credible elections. Democracy is distinguished from other forms of government by such elements as rule of law and respect for the constitution, sovereignty of the people, strong and viable opposition, free press and civil society and so on. While democracy continues to grow worldwide, there still remains concerns about its future with many in many countries considerably dissatisfied with how democracy is working in practice. However, public support for democratic ideals remains strong and by one measure, global democracy is at or near a modern-day high. According to Pew Research Centre (2019), as of the end of 2017, 96 out of 167 countries with population of at least 500,000 (57%) were democracies of some kind and only 21 (13%) were autocracies. The centre also noted that about 46 or 28% of other countries exhibited elements of democracy and autocracies. The questions of whether democracy is inherently a good thing and whether democratic institutions facilitate economic development have remained top of discourse about democracy. While it is reasonably fair to say that democracy is a good thing because it facilitates free human choice and furthers the good of political participation, the answer to the latter is an empirical one as people within the development field are not fully agreed about the effects of electoral democracy on the development process. Khan et al (2016) and Przeworski and Limongi (1993) argued that that the experiences of Korea, China and Russia show that a strong authoritarian state can be better able to engineer a successful process of economic development than an electoral democracy such as Nigeria because of the perilous economic state in which more than half of the population lives, (133 million (66.5%) Nigerians according to the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS) live in multidimensional poverty).

While campaigning for office pre 2015 presidential election, President Buhari reeled out a three-point agenda: revamp the economy, curb corruption and improve security in the country. These promises he reiterated when he sought reelection in 2019. He specifically highlighted security especially promising to tackle and lead from the front in the war against the terrorist organization Boko Haram tormenting the country. He promised also, to improve the economy through a number of schemes and policies such as a science-innovation driven economy, diversification of the economy away from its over dependence on oil and so on. In addition, he pledged to fight corruption with emphasis on checking graft at the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and the oil sector. While the fight against insecurity seemed to work in the earlier years, the situation went progressively worse as newer and even more dangerous security threats emerged, including but not limited to the unrelenting herdsmen attack on farming communities across the country, kidnappings and banditry. In 2021, the insecurity spread to southern Nigeria that was previously peaceful, now there is an increase in attacks on security formations, especially the assets of the Nigerian Police (ICIR, 2021).

Nigeria has seen two recessions in the Buhari's administration, first in 2016 and the other in 2020. Key economic indices show that the economy is still weak despite the pledge to address the economy. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) measured annually, dropped from 6.31% in 2014 to 3.65% in 2021. The country's debt profile rose from N9.8 trillion in 2015 to N44.06 trillion as of third quarter of 2022. The Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2022) reported that Nigeria's unemployment rate increased from 10.4% in 2015 to a projected 37% in 2023 which the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG) describes as a negative trend. Inflation rate increased from 9.5% in 2015 to 21.8% in 2022. 133 million or 63% of Nigerians are multidimensionally poor (an index that captures the percentage of households in a country deprived along three dimensions of well-being - monetary poverty, education and basic infrastructure services). In spite of Buhari's pledge to fight corruption, Nigeria remains one of the most corrupt countries in the world as the country's corruption percentage index rating keeps worsening. Nigeria dropped from 136<sup>th</sup> in 2015 to 149<sup>th</sup> in 2020. In 2022, Nigeria scored 24 on a scale from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). When ranked by score, Nigeria ranked 150<sup>th</sup> among 180 countries in the index (TI, 2022). From the foregoing, therefore, it is not debatable that President Buhari did not deliver as he promised and it is reasonable to say that, Nigeria as a consequence did not experience the much-sought development. This paper, then, appraises Buhari's compliance with constitutional provisions in governance from 2015 to 2023.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

To provide an analytical foundation to this work, it would be most appropriate to clarify the meaning of the key concepts: democracy, good governance and development.

#### **Democracy**

Democracy has its origin in the Greek language. It combines the words *demos* which means people living within a particular city state and *kratos* meaning rule or power. The words when combine form *demokratia* which translates to rule by the people. Is a form of government in which the people have the authority to deliberate and decide decisions (direct democracy) or through representatives freely chosen by the people themselves (indirect democracy) Democracy provides an environment that respects human rights and fundamental freedoms, and in which the freely expressed will of the people is exercised. According to Przeworski et al (1996), democracy is a system where political office is filled through regular, free and fair elections between competing parties with the possibility of a winner freely assuming office. For Dahl (1971), democracy comprises of components such as voting equality, freedom of expression and association, effective participation and right to run for office. Dahl says that these criteria are necessary because when violated, the members of such democratic community will not be politically equal. Its overriding objective is to promote liberty and entrench freedom in acknowledgment of the natural tendencies of men to dominate others. Its goal is to domesticate power for the benefit of the people. A democracy is a polity in which collective decisions (laws, policies and procedures) are the expression, direct or indirect of the preferences and choices of the collection of equal rights bearing citizens. It thus pertains to the rule of a politically social group - a state or political authority, or a city or town.

Democracy has turned out to be the most successful and increasingly most popular political idea and form of government in the world. That is primarily because it allows people to live in dignity and freedom and have a decisive say in who governs them and how the state is governed. It is broad and diverse and every country has a unique democratic credential and countries will therefore be differently democratic.

However, 'clean' democracy can be identified with the following elements:

1. Respect for basic human rights which are enshrined and protected by the constitution of the state.
2. A multi-party-political system paired with political tolerance which manifests in the respect and acceptance of dissenting and opposing views.
3. A democratic voting system/periodic election which must be free, fair and credible and ensures peaceful transfer of power from one government to another.
4. Respect for the rule of law which promotes equality of citizens.
5. Democratic governance which involves building open, responsive and accountable institutions and processes that serve the needs and preferences of the public. It ensures that all citizens have the opportunity to participate in government and have a say in how they are governed.

### **Good Governance**

Governance is the way rules, norms and actions are structured, sustained, regulated and held accountable. According to Sharma et al (2013), governance is the manner in which authority, control or power of government is exercised in mobilizing a society's social and economic resources, to ass the issues of public interest. Since governance is the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented, an analysis of governance focuses on the formal (government) and informal actors (citizens and other bodies) involved in decision-making and implementing the decisions made and the formal and informal structures that have been put in place to arrive at and implement the decisions. It is the process of managing the affairs of the state (Nkana et al, 2013). Thus, governance is the process of decision-making and the process by which the decisions are implemented (Onichakwe, 2016). Onichakwe (2016), posited that the third world countries gave currency to and coined the concept of good governance which then found its place into the lexicon of public administration around the 1990s. The concept is said to be tied to developmental aid to Third World countries by western countries after the Cold War. World Bank (1992), defined governance as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development. Good governance it said is synonymous with sound development management. It is central to creating and sustaining an environment which fosters strong and equitable development and is an essential complement to sound economic policies. UNDP (2014) asserted that governance processes refer to the quality of participation necessary "to ensure that political, social and economic priorities are based on a broad consensus in society and that the voices of the excluded, poorest and most vulnerable are heard in decision-making". Ezebuiri et al (2021) also argued that effective governance institutions and systems that are responsive to public needs deliver essential services and promote inclusive growth,

while inclusive political processes ensure that citizens can hold public officials to account. In addition, good governance promotes freedom from violence, fear and crime, and peaceful and secure societies that provide the stability needed for development investments to be sustained.

World Bank (1992) identified the following aspects of governance:

1. The form of polity and the way authority is exercised in society;
2. The process by which authority is exercised on the country's economic, political and social spheres and extent to which the citizens are involved and given responsibility;
3. The capacity of governments to conceive, formulate and execute policies and in general, to discharge governmental functions as effectively, adequately and efficiently as possible.

Conversely, poor governance is readily recognizable with the following symptoms:

- a. Failure to make a clear separation between what is public and what is private, hence, a tendency to divert public resources for private gain.
- b. Failure to establish a predictable framework of law and government behaviour conducive to development to development, or arbitrariness in the application of rules and laws.
- c. Excessive rules, regulations, licensing requirements, and so forth, which impede the functioning of markets and encourage rent-seeking.
- d. Priorities inconsistent with development, resulting in a misallocation of resources. (World Bank, 1992).

### **Elements of Good Governance**

Good governance ensures that the political, economic and social priorities of the state are taken in such a way as to ensure that voices of every citizen including the most vulnerable and the poorest are heard. The outcomes are peaceful, stable and resilient societies, where services are delivered in a way that meets the needs of all members of the society. It is underpinned by the following:

1. **Accountability:** this is a key theme running through many aspects of governance. It ensures that the rulers and leaders are responsible to the ruled and led in an honest manner, this is because the legitimacy of the leaders is derived from the consent of the people. Sustainable development will require that public officials account for actions taken in the public's name and with public resources. When the quality of public administration is effective, responsive and accountable, there is bound to be economic growth (Evans & Rauch, 1999). However, capacity for sustainable development is not just about efficient administration; it also requires states to be responsive to the needs and demands of people, and the separate needs and rights of women and men, as well as being capable of administering, coordinating and mobilizing collaborative action to address an increasingly interconnected and complex development agenda (UNDP, 2014).
2. **Popular participation:** citizens participate in government either directly or

through their chosen representatives who must be elected through free and fair electoral processes. Participation is both a right and a means to more sustainable development. There is a close link between people's active engagement in their own development processes and the success of project which will be better targeted to local needs with more sustainable results. When this happens, the socio-economic well-being of the people will improve, so too will the legitimacy of the development process itself. It enhances and builds trust between those who make the decisions, those who implement and the population at large. It promotes equity and strengthens the cohesiveness of societies.

3. Justice and rule of law: the rule of law is a major element and principle of democracy and good governance and is critical for sustainable development. When countries adhere to the rule of law, there is higher tendency for growth and investment through the protection of property rights which is a fundamental human right in most countries. Effective rule of law frameworks, together with implementation, help prevent and mitigate violent crimes, resolve grievances, and protect citizens; all key elements to contain violent conflict. Some studies suggest that a conservative estimate of the economic costs of lost production, due to high levels of crime and violence, ranges from 2 to 3 percent of GDP (World Bank, 2011)
4. Openness and transparency: public access to information: openness and transparency are essential to achieving sustainable development. Evidence abound that informed citizens and the private sector are better able to engage in developing policies, they are better collaborators and partners with government on service delivery and also better able to hold governments to account, leading to improved development outcomes (Amartya & Dreze 1989). Transparency in government behaviour sends strong signals to citizens and investors, and evidence shows that the more information a government releases, the greater the investment and subsequent effect on growth (Andrew, 2009). There is also evidence that transparency in budget, expenditure and procurement processes lead to increases in service delivery. Transparency also has an intrinsic value (endorsed in various international conventions), namely, that citizens have a right to know how revenue and resources are being used in their name.
5. Consensus oriented and tolerance for divergence: it is unarguable that the exacerbating tensions in the relationship between the state and citizens is a result of failure to accept divergence, the end result being instability and violent conflicts. It is widely acknowledged that no single model of governance should be imposed. Good governance should aim at reaching broad consensus after mediating different interests in the society for the best interest of the community.

### **Appraisal of Democracy and Good Governance in Buhari's Eight Years**

President Muhammad Buhari assumed office as the 5<sup>th</sup> democratically elected president of Nigeria on May 5<sup>th</sup> 2015 having defeated the candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), a party that has been in power for 16 years prior. He was reelected for a second term in 2019 again under the platform of the All Progressive Congress (APC). Under his

administration, the country has witnessed many highs and lows, while progress has been on some fronts like in infrastructural development, there is general disillusionment especially with the way the government has handled the economy, security and fight against corruption, the three pillars of his government agenda. We shall here, examine the extent to which the government has complied with the underpinnings of good governance and democracy to effect national development.

### **Justice and Rule of Law**

Section 1(1) of the 1999 Constitution upholds the supremacy of the Constitution. It states “This Constitution is supreme and its provision shall have binding force on all authorities and persons throughout the Federal Republic of Nigeria”. The supremacy of the Constitution is underscored by the provision of Section 1(3) that any other law inconsistent with the provisions of the Constitution shall to the extent of the inconsistency be void.

What we witness under the government, however, is the gross violation of this very important provision of the Constitution. The mindset of the Buhari's government to the operation of rule of law was taken to a dangerously low point on August 26, 2018 by President Muhammad Buhari while addressing the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA). He stated that the rule of law must be subjected to the supremacy of national security and national interest. The law he said can only be optimally practiced in a Nigeria that is safe, secure and prosperous. He also added that it is a matter of judicial recognition by the Supreme Court that where national interest and public interest are threatened or where there is a likelihood of their being threatened, individual rights of those allegedly responsible must take second place, in favour of the greater good of the society.

The above stated mindset explains Buhari's government notoriety for disobeying the orders of various courts of competent jurisdictions to release prominent political prisoners like Omoyele Sowore, Ibrahim El Zakzaky, Sambo Dasuki and Nnamdi Kanu. Mr. Omoyele Sowore, convener of Revolution Now was arrested in August 2019 after he called for a nationwide demonstration against the government of President Muhammadu Buhari. He was charged with treason, money laundering and cyberstalking the president, all of which he denied. He was first granted bail in September, 2019 and then again in October, 2019 by an Abuja High Court but the Department of State Services (DSS) acting on behalf of the Federal Government of Nigeria refused to release him. Similar fate has befallen Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, leader of the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) who in spite of the orders of the Court of Appeal in October 2022 for his release remains under DSS custody.

Ibrahim El Zakzaky and his wife, on the other hand were arrested by the military on December 14, 2015, after a clash between his followers and the Nigerian Army. On December 2, 2016, the Federal High Court in Abuja ordered that El Zakzaky and his wife be released from detention, describing the continued detention as a violation of their rights as provided for in Section 35(1) of the 1999 Constitution, an order which the government refused to obey.

Former National Security Adviser (NSA), Sambo Dasuki was arrested in December, 2015 and charged with diversion of \$2.1 billion of state funds and the illegal possession of firearms. Despite the decisions of different courts granting him bail, the government refused to release him accordingly. First was the order of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) court on October 4, 2016, to which the government said it was under no compulsion to obey. Later on, January 17, 2017, an Abuja High Court reaffirmed previous court orders granting him bail but he was not released.

In addition, the government has elevated nepotism and injustice to a near state policy. Rivers State governor Nyeson Wike has accused the Buhari's government of excluding other regions in the country from key appointments (*The Guardian*, 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2021), Junaid Mohammed a former federal lawmaker, described nepotism in Buhari's government as the worst in Nigeria's history (*Punch*, 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 2016). In the same vein, Catholic Bishop of Sokoto Mathew Hassan Kukah accused Buhari's government as full of nepotism and corruption (*The Sun*, 27<sup>th</sup> December, 2022). No sector demonstrates this charge of nepotism more than the security sector where over 90% of heads of military and paramilitary agencies are people from one section of the country and one religion. In fact, the president has refused to appoint a south easterner into the headship of any of the security agency. There is no doubt that these aberrations have affected efforts to build national unity and integration.

### **Participation of Nigerians in Government**

What is the level of participation of Nigerians in Buhari's government? Has their involvement met international standard and has it produced the necessary outcomes? Casually examined, one may claim that Nigerians have been involved in government insofar as they participate in elections held every four years to elect their representatives: president, governors, members of the national and state assemblies. However, the extent to which these elections have been free, fair and credible is a matter of public debate. Under Buhari, however, elections have been one of the major problems of the democratization process. The country's struggles for sustainable democracy, good governance and development have been so daunting as a result of the failure to conduct free, fair and credible elections. Elections have been marred by rigging and fraud which objective is to frustrate the democratic aspirations of citizens who have voted or would have voted into office someone other than the victor. The 2023 general elections are a major indicator of the government's denial of the people's right to freely choose their representatives. The presidential election conducted alongside National Assembly election on Feb 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2023 has been described as the worst election in the history of Nigeria.

Apex Igbo socio-cultural organization Ohaneze Ndigbo described it as the worst ever conducted in the history of Nigeria's democratic process with results doctored to favour a particular political party. Candidates of the two main opposition parties in the election Atiku Abubakar of the PDP (*Independent*, March 2, 2023) and Peter Obi (*The Sun*, March 17, 2023) in separate statements condemned the election as the worst ever with Mr. Abubakar



describing it as a rape on democracy and Mr. Obi saying that the conduct of the election has downgraded Nigeria's global rating. They have gone to court to challenge the outcome of the election. Reports of voters' suppression, harassment and intimidation in places like Lagos, Rivers and Imo States and widespread alteration and falsification of election results lend credence to the claims of the opposition and election observers.

### State of the Economy

Having been in power for eight years, how did Nigeria under Buhari's government fair in terms of economic growth, poverty and unemployment reduction, inflation and other economic indicators? The table below throws more light.

**Table 1.**

Year	GDP (\$)	Per Capita (\$)	Growth (%)
2021	440.83	2,066	3.65
2020	432.20	2,075	-1.79
2019	448.12	2,204	2.21
2018	421.74	2,126	1.92
2017	375.75	1,942	0.81
2016	404.65	2,145	-1.62
2015	493.03	2,680	2.65
2014	574.18	3,201	6.31
2013	520.12	2,977	6.67
2012	463.97	2,728	4.23
2011	414.47	2,505	5.31

**Source:** Macrotrends

The table above presents a good picture of how the country's economy fared under the eight years of Muhammed Buhari. The last three years of PDP saw Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rise from \$463.97 billion in 2012 to \$520.12 billion in 2014 when Nigeria became the biggest economy in Africa. The GDP, however, dipped slightly to \$493.03 billion in 2015 when APC and Buhari took over and dropped further to \$375.75 billion in 2017 before improving to \$440.83 billion in 2021. Similarly, Nigerians enjoyed better per capita income under the PDP government than they did with APC and Buhari's government. Under the PDP government in 2014, the per capita income of Nigerians rose to an all-time high of \$3,201 but fell to \$1,942 in 2017 before improving to \$2,066 which puts the country behind smaller and lesser endowed African countries like Algeria, Botswana, Cape Verde and Seychelles which has the highest GDP of \$14,540. The growth rate of the economy also suffered under Buhari's government dipping to -1.62 in 2016 and -1.79 in 2020 when Nigeria suffered two recessions, that is from a high of 6.67 and 6.31 in 2013 and 2014 under the previous government.

Nigeria's unemployment rate which is updated quarterly averaged 13.55% from 2006 until 2020, reaching an all-time high of 33.3% under Buhari in the fourth quarter (Q4) of

2020 from a record low of 6.40% in the fourth quarter of 2014 under Jonathan and PDP government. The poverty level in Nigeria also increased under the government with about 133 million Nigerians living in multidimensional poverty according to the National Bureau of Statistics. According to the World Bank, Nigeria has maintained the infamous title of Poverty Capital since 2016 with 4 in 10 Nigerians living below \$2. The World Bank in its 2022 Poverty and Prosperity Report, Nigeria contributed three million people to global extreme poverty. Similarly, according to the Global Hunger Index (GHI), published jointly by the German based Westthungerhilfe and Dublin based Concern Worldwide, Nigeria was ranked 103 out of 121 countries in the index. In the same vein, under Buhari's government, inflation rate also increased with the headline inflation rate in November 2022, reaching as high as 21.47%. This made it difficult for many Nigerians to afford the basic needs of life. Under the government, the perception of corruption in Nigeria worsened between 2017 and 2018 according to reports by Transparency International (TI). In 2014, a year before Buhari assumed office, Nigeria ranked 136<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries surveyed and scored 27 points (The maximum points a country can score is 100 points, and the least is zero. Zero signifies the worst score and 100 the best), but in 2017 and 2018, Nigeria ranked 148<sup>th</sup> and 144<sup>th</sup> respectively with scores of 27. The situation got even worse in the years between 2020 and 2022 with ranks of 179<sup>th</sup>, 154<sup>th</sup> and 150<sup>th</sup> with scores of 25, 24 and 24 for the three years (2020, 2021 and 2022).

Currently, Nigeria is pulled in different directions by diverse forms of insecurity, such as Boko Haram terrorism, herder-farmer conflict, the Niger Delta crisis, banditry and the Biafra and Yoruba Nation agitations in the South East and South West respectively. In the 2022 Global Peace Index, which measures the global state of peace, Nigeria ranked 37<sup>th</sup> out of 44 African countries and 143<sup>rd</sup> out of 163 countries surveyed globally. A 2022 survey by Afrobarometer highlights that almost 89% of Nigerians felt that the country was heading in the wrong direction and 77% were dissatisfied with the state of democracy in the country. The most common challenges identified include poor management of the economy, high levels of unemployment and poverty, poor infrastructure, and high levels of crime and insecurity (Tella, 2023). All these negative indicators show that the state of the economy under the eight years of Buhari was poor. This is in spite of the government's pledge on assumption of office to improve the economy. The precarious situation has negatively affected the quality of life of Nigerians. In 2022, Nigeria obtained 0.34 points in the Digital Quality of Life Index, ranking 86<sup>th</sup> out of 117 countries worldwide. The score according to Sasu (2022), decreased compared to the previous year score of 0.46 points. This indicated a worsening quality of digital wellbeing in the country. The situation has also forced many companies to shut down operation and leave the country thereby worsening the unemployment crisis in the country. Many of these companies particularly in the oil and gas sector have cited high production cost, hostile business environment and insecurity as the cause of their disinvestment from Nigeria (Izuaka, 2022).

### **The Fate of Democratic Institutions**

Democratic institutions are institutions that facilitate and promote the operations of democracy, they make democracy work. Where they are strong, democracy thrives and

grows, the reverse is the case where they are weak. These institutions include political parties, civil society, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), judiciary (the courts), legislature, the police and military and so on.

Democratic institutions have always been weak in Nigeria since the return to civilian rule in 1999 as successive presidents have manipulated these institutions for personal and party gains but it is perhaps under Buhari that these institutions fell to their weakest point. The government muzzled civil society, silenced independent journalists and even questioned the supremacy of the rule of law to the consternation of many. The government oversaw the erosion of the independence of bodies like the Nigeria Police, Department of State Services, INEC and so on. These bodies which are supposed to be apolitical and neutral became even more political than the political parties themselves. They became the weapons with which the government harassed and intimidated opposing and dissenting voices. Adewunmi Emowura, lead strategist at Gatefield, a public strategy and media group in an opinion published on Aljazeera in February 2019 titled 'Nigeria's democracy is fading away' chronicled Buhari's attack on institutions in an effort to weaken them. Most notable is the January 2019 suspension of the then Chief Justice of Nigeria (CJN) Walter Onnoghen and his subsequent replacement with an acting CJN few weeks to the 2019 general elections, a move which many including the international community described as a violation of judicial independence. The government also used the fight against corruption to intimidate, harass, break into judges' residences to detain them.

The members of the National Assembly were also targeted for attacks by agents of government acting on the behest of the president. In August 2018, operatives of the state secret police the Department of State Services staged a blockade at the National Assembly with many opposition lawmakers including then Senate President Bukola Saraki harassed and put under investigation for alleged criminal activities which have never been substantiated many years after. The government also attacked the freedom of expression and the press, which is the right of the people to express their feelings on any matter, and for the press to perform its constitutional role of educating, informing and entertaining the people. The hallmark of this attack was the attempted frivolous Social Media regulation bill and hate speech regulation which included over reaching provisions for social media regulation, the two bills were, however, withdrawn following public outcry. The government in 2021 suspended Twitter for seven months for deleting one of President Buhari's tweet. Media outlets were ordered to delete their Twitter accounts as a "patriotic gesture". Dahl (1971) argued that gagging public voice and censoring of the media is a roadblock to political participation and a ploy to oppress the opposition in a democratic state.

The government's major weapon here is the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) who always accuses media houses of alleged breach of the broadcasting code. In May 2021, the NBC fined Channels TV and Inspiration FM N5million for allegedly broadcasting secessionist, divisive, violent and inflammatory comments. Same Channels

TV in March 2023 was again fined N5million over Ahmed Datti's "ending democracy" comment. Other media houses like Arise News, TVC, AIT and Trust TV were similarly fined. The Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE), International Press Centre (IPC) and National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) condemned the fines as arbitrary and a violation of Section 39 of the Constitution which guarantees the "right to freedom of expression including freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart idea and information without interference". This ugly situation saw Nigeria drop from 120 to 129 across 180 countries in the 2022 press freedom ranking. The ranking which is compiled by Reporters without borders described Nigeria as one of West Africa's most dangerous and difficult countries for journalists who are often watched, attacked, arbitrarily arrested and even killed.

### **Conclusion**

Governing a country as diverse as Nigeria with more than 250 ethnic groups, all seeking inclusion in the government is not an easy task, more so for Buhari who assumed office with a party newly formed from the merger of different political parties. What he did with the affairs of the country within the eight years, however, is one everyone that has divided opinions with majority though agreeing that his performance was sub-par. Records available show that on the three-pronged agenda of the Buhari administration; to improve the economy, fight against corruption and fight insecurity, he performed well below expectations. Nigeria lost her position as the largest economy in Africa, inflation rate spiraled out of control, Nigeria became the poverty capital of the world, and more Nigerians became unemployed under the government. Nigeria performed poorly in the Corruption Perception index according to Transparency International while Nigeria too became a slaughter zone in the hands of bandits, terrorist, kidnappers and other criminal elements with the government not able to tackle the situation. Ezebuoro (2015) concluded that the whole exercise or what transpired within the whole eight years lacked what he termed "inclusive government and development."

It is important therefore, to set an agenda for development for the Tinubu's administration so as to right the wrongs of Buhari's administration. The administration must ensure that the following things are done to put Nigeria back on the road to development:

1. Adherence to constitutional provisions particularly as they relate to rule of law, separation of powers and respect for the independence of every arm of government and procedures for free, fair and credible elections. Chapter One of the Constitution upholds the supremacy of the Constitution which provisions shall be binding on all authorities and persons throughout the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Chapters V, VI and VII specify the functions and powers to be exercised by the different arms of government which is to be exercised without interference by any agency or body in the country. The incoming administration must ensure that all these are respected. The government must more than other priorities place a high premium on the lives of Nigerians, since the primary responsibility of the government is to protect lives and property of citizens. The government must demonstrate more political will in dealing with the activities of bandits and

murderous herdsmen terrorizing large parts of the country.

2. Strengthening of democratic institutions: With the Buhari's administration, democratic institutions became very weakened that they were unable to perform their functions independently. When democratic institutions that are supposed to serve all Nigerians of different ethnic, religious and political affiliations become tools in the hands of the government in power to manipulate as it wishes, opposition dies, morale ebbs and citizens live at the mercy of the government. As Ogu and Areji (2022) suggested particularly, that institutions need to be developed to play a role in the development and maintenance of a democratic culture and the best way to do this is by allowing them to play their roles without interference from the government.
3. Adoption of inclusive policies and programmes: This is to ensure that no section of the country is excluded from government. This is to give everyone a sense of belonging and thus assuage the feeling of marginalization by some sections of the country. One profitable way to do this as Ogu (2021) pointed out is by promoting respect for the principles of federal character which ensures that the government or any of its agency is not dominated by persons from a few states or a few ethnic groups. A situation as with the Buhari's government where no Nigerian from the South East was found worthy and competent enough to head any of the security agencies in Nigeria and the omission of the Eastern Rail corridor in rail projects in Nigeria while building rail lines into Niger Republic do not promote national unity and integration. The Tinubu's government must adhere strictly to the federal character principle which provides that national resources are equitably allocated and political appointments are equitably distributed. However, meritocracy must not be sacrificed for political patronage and nepotism. Competence, character and capability must be the first criteria in appointment into offices.

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