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# **IMAGES AND NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE POST-2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS**

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### **Abstract**

*The main thrust of a state's actions is viewed from the standpoint of images of its decision-makers. In the 1990s, Nigeria's image flowed partly from the composite actions and inactions of Babangida's and Abacha's regimes' annulment of June 12, 1993 presidential elections and the hanging of Ken Saro Wiwa and eight others, respectively. Using documentary sources, the paper examines foreign policy decisions and actions that facilitate either positive or negative images of Nigeria from 1999 to 2018 as well as the implications of the image management to the post-2019 general elections. Thus, it establishes that decisions and actions toward some elections processes may likely have positive or negative consequences on Nigeria's external image in diplomatic and economic relations. It suggests that Nigeria's foreign policy in the post-2019 general elections be guided and conducted in line with past images of the country.*

**Key Words:** Actions, Africa, Decisions-making, Elections, Foreign Policy, Image, Nigeria

### **Introduction**

A state is not a single conscious being; its actions are composites of individual human choices by its citizenry, political leaders, diplomats and bureaucrats aggregated through the states internal structure. Foreign policies are the strategies used by governments to guide their actions and in actions in the international arena (Goldstein, 2003: 155). Bolaji Akinyemi, highlighted some factors that exerted critical importance; personality and psychological factors as determinants of foreign policy. He posited that constitutional provisions form the skeleton; they are the bare bones. It is the personality of people running the system that puts the flesh on the skeleton given us the recognizable form (Osuji, 2012: 75).

It is worthy to note that regime types (be it military or civilian) and leader's perception is crucial in foreign policy pursuit of state. This is evidently clear by simple glance of Babangida and Abacha's regimes. Their military orientation deeply shaped their foreign policy posture. It was during their regimes Nigeria's external image was frighteningly tarnished; this subjected the country to be labelled as a pariah nation. In fact, foreign policy is a magnifier of internal settings of nation states.

In light of the above, political dispensation, which culminated to election of leaders, essentially, as it relates to Nigeria's general elections is quite fundamental. The kind of leaders elected coupled with their ideological orientation profoundly suggest their foreign policy posture that ultimately, project favourable image or otherwise of a given country.

The objective of this paper is to analyse Nigeria's image in the international communities, particularly, in the post 2019 Nigeria's general elections. Among issues of major concern are the comments made by international election observers, including responses and comments of some countries.

### **Foreign Policy and Images: Conceptual and Theoretical Reviews**

A review of the concepts foreign policy and image is relevant due to the fact that states interact in promotion of their foreign policy and images through decisions and actions. Perhaps, decisions are taken by individuals in leadership position which make for their foreign policy; while outcome of such decisions are expected, which makes for the image of the state. That is to say, if image is the end, then foreign policy is the means to that end. According to Chandra (1979: 81) foreign policy is the system of activities evolved by communities for changing the behaviour of other states and adjusting their own activities to the international environment. Equally, Northedge (1968: 8) defined foreign policy as a country's response to the world outside or beyond its frontier or boundaries, responses which are products of environmental factors. Goldstein (2003: 155) described foreign policy as a process of decision making. States takes actions because people in government choose decisions.

Johari (2014: 56) observed that a definition of foreign policy covers its value content. Each state has its own view of distinguishing between 'good' and 'evil' and tries to adhere to the 'good side as far as possible so as to give a 'positive image' to its foreign policy. Johari (2014: 457) identified five kinds of 'good' (positive image) that are usually integrated into the foreign policy of a state; there are: good of the individual citizen; the good of society at large; the good of the state; the good of special interest groups in the society; and the good of the government itself and of its personnel. It can be argued that the series of good identified by Johari represent images which he believed are integrated in a state's foreign policy. Therefore, it is the task of decision makers to shape the spectrum of these needs into semblance of integrity to the phenomenon of international politics.

From the discussion so far, foreign policy of a state is primarily, a matter of decisions, which leaders take to promote and foster good image of their countries in their interactions with other states. According to Coulounbis (1986: 128) foreign policy decisions are categorized into three; namely programmatic which have long-range consequence; the crisis decisions made during periods of grave threat with a limited time to respond; and the tactical decisions. This last category is more relevant to the analysis of images and focus of this paper. It should be noted that it is in the light of tactical decisions that priorities in foreign policy are taken. It is also through it that foreign policy of a state may be subjected to the determination of image of a state based on the priorities of other states. Practically, in the decade of 1990, Nigeria was considered by other nations as a pariah state because of their tactical decisions on prioritizing human rights and violation of which through the hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogonis by Nigeria called such action. This

demonstrates relevance of decision making approach as a framework of analysis for this paper.

Decision making approach was developed by Richard Snyder, H.W. Bruck and Barton Sapin in 1954, in their attempt to explain behaviour of decision makers, actions and reactions of state as a decisional unit. Dougherty (1971: 469) posited that decision making is an act of choosing among available alternatives about which uncertainty exist. More often than not state actor takes decision based on their perception and understanding of both internal and external settings. Decision making approach focuses attention not only on states as metaphysical abstraction or to government, or even to such broadly labelled institutions as the executive but instead seeks to highlight the behaviours of the specific human decision-makers who actually shape government policy (Dougherty, 1971: 469) . According to Snyder, all political actions are undertaken by concrete human beings and that to comprehend the dynamics of these actions, the perception of the world must be viewed based on the perspective of the persons responsible for taking the decision (Verma, 2016: 279). It is assumed that the whole parameter of foreign policy processes evolves within the ambit of state actors' perceptions, their ideological and psychological and leadership style shape their foreign policy pursuit.

Consequently, assumptions of the decision making approach follow critically that foreign policy pursuit, domestic and external environments do significantly influence and determine interactions among nations. According to Brecher (1963: 336) policy choices flow inexorably from the composite images of the decision making elites, modified only by the counter images of the competing elites within the political system. Therefore, decision makers act in accordance with their perception of reality. Thus, image and reality are the main objectives of decision makers, which may either coincide or diverge. All decisions possess a set of images and are governed by them in their response to foreign policy problem. Sprout (1961: 107) defined image and reality as psychological environment and operational environment respectively. In spite of the progress in decision making, the approach has been criticized on a number of defects. Its principle of indeterminism has been described as a failure in suggesting which element of it is relevant. Nonetheless, the approach is still helpful in the examination of images and Nigeria's foreign policy in the post-2019 general elections.

Suffice it to mention that general election is very critical in any domestic setting because it is a process where decision makers who are going to be state actors are elected. Those elected into the corridor of power, their actions and political and ideological background are fundamental in projecting good image and in taking decision in relation to foreign policy posture. Nigeria's general elections conduct and its aftermath are imperative. The credibility of the electoral process coupled with the personality elected to lead the country suggest good image of Nigeria or otherwise. Equally, observations and comments of both internal and foreign observers, particularly, western powers, usually, translate the position of the Nigeria's image in the international communities. Thus, the paper highlighted and also identified image of Nigeria's decision makers and examine realities or factors that influenced their behaviour before and after the 2019 general elections.

### **Historical Review of Nigeria's General Elections and its Aftermath.**

Elections even in the developed countries are full of uncertainties; no one can predict the outcome of elections with fullest degree of certainty. The aftermath of elections usually, determine the future of foreign policy posture of a given country. In Nigeria, elections and its aftermath had been to a large extent a cause of worry. The first republic, particularly, the post 1965 general election had been phase setter of post-election violence in the country. The deepening 1965 post-election crisis that culminated in all the regions plunged the country into crisis, which dragged the country into civil war that lasted for almost three years. The 1983 elections fraudulence was one of the factors used as an excuse by the General Buhari and Idiagbo to take over the mantle of leadership from President Shehu Usman Aliyu Shagari, who was democratically elected as president during the 1983 general elections.

The era of 1980 and 1990s was characterized by Nigeria's image crisis; this was occasioned by military rules coupled with dribbled political transition program championed by a military dictator, General Ibrahim Babangida. Babangida's political transition program spanned for almost eight years without any scintilla of fruitful results. However, cancellation of June 12, 1993 elections, dramatically, changed the perception of western world on Babangida's administration. The annulment of June 12, 1993 elections, which was adjudged the freest elections in the country, profoundly, deepened the Nigeria's image crisis. The Nigeria's image problems of the 1980 and 1990s was not unconnected with financial malpractices, gross human right abuse, strained relations with western world and the downturn in the economic fortune of the country (Saliu,2006: 223).

Sequel to the annulment of June 12, 1993 elections, the American and British governments reacted in condemning the Babangida's dictatorship; they expressed their displeasure at the turn of the events and gave open support to democratic movements. The British foreign office described the regime's action as regrettable. Similarly, the British prime minister, John Major told the House of Commons that his government would seek cooperation of other European Community Members to discontinue multilateral aid to Nigeria. Equally, the United States government described the action of the regime (Babangida regime) as an outrageous decision and threatened to lead an international campaign against any attempts by the Babangida's administration to stay in power beyond 27 August, 1993 (Aregbeshola, 2014: 334).

The annulment of June 12, 1993 elections coupled with the hanging of Ogoni nine brought about composite views and perception within and outside Nigeria. In the internal setting, quite a number of pro-democracy organizations were vociferously fighting for good governance and human right abuse. Outside the country, also, there was intense pressure that the country's bad records on good governance, as it relate to entrenchment of democracy and fight against Nigeria's bad records on human right abuses. The combined actions of these actors frighteningly tarnished Nigeria's image in the international environment. Consequently, the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) severed its relations with Nigeria. Similarly, the European Union, Canada and other notable countries shut up their embassies and High Commissions in Nigeria as a punitive measure against Abacha's government (Osuji, 2012: 73).

The 1999 elections brought Olusegun Obasanjo into corridor of power as an elected president of Federal Republic of Nigeria. Before the elections, Nigeria's external image was negatively projected due to actions and inactions of the past military dictators (General Babangida and General Sani Abacha). After the 1999 elections, as the direct image maker for the country, Obasanjo flagged off the war against negative image of the country by making deliberate policies and decisions to embark on shuttle political diplomacy. President Obasanjo visited all the continents and most countries strategic to Nigeria. As a result of the visits, comments of world leaders have been quite favourable to the extent that people have almost forgotten that the country under the Babangida and Abacha was a pariah nation (Saliu, 2006: 253). It is worthy to note that as a result of Obasanjo image laundering mission, two presidents of United States of America visited Nigeria. In furtherance to Obasanjo's repackaging of Nigeria's external image, he established Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC). Albeit, the commissions have political implications, however, it was able to capture the attention of international communities that Nigeria was fighting the menace of corruption, which is inimical to the Nigeria's external image

In 2011 general elections there were reported cases of post-election violence that led to the inauguration of twenty-two people panel led by Sheikh Ahmed Lemu. In spite of violence, the election was adjudged peaceful and credible as pointed out by some international observers. Equally, some observers reported that it was the best elections in Nigerian history. The U.S. president, Barrack Obama in early May 2011, congratulated President Jonathan and official statement supporting democratic elections was issued. Similarly, former U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria, Howard Jetter reported that the level of success and credibility recorded by Nigeria in the 2011 elections could make the country the standard bearer for democracy (Paden, 2012: 21).

Equally, 2015 general election was a giant step forward in reinvigorating Nigeria's external image in the international system. This was a reflection of post-election comments by some world leading countries. Worthy of noting was the comment of the U.S. assistant secretary of state for African Affairs, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, who stressed that Nigerian democracy, will be a beacon across the continent and beyond and that US is committed to work with Nigerian people for many years to come (Paden, 2012: 50). Moreover, in a statement issued by White House Office of the press secretary, pointed out that American people extend their congratulations to the people of Nigeria and to president-elect Buhari and look forward to continuing to work with the newly-elected government on many shared priorities (Jega, 2015: 252).

### **The 2019 General Election and External Responses**

The election was scheduled to hold on 9<sup>th</sup> February, 2019, however, due to some logistics hitches it was postponed to 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 2019. The first layer of the election was on presidential candidates and National Assembly. The second phase took place on the 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2019. The poll was for governorship and State House of Assembly elections. President Muhammadu Buhari a presidential candidate under All Progressive Congress (APC) won the election with 15,191,847 votes giving him another term for four years. The

main opposition candidate of the People Democratic Party (PDP), Atiku Abubakar scored 11,262,978 votes in the polls which had 71 other candidates on the ballot (Jimo, 2019).

The governorship election was characterized by a strange concept called inconclusive election, which include Sokoto, Kano and some other states. In fact, the inconclusive election brought about discussions on the absent of such concept in the Electoral Act as well as Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria. The elections (both presidential and gubernatorial) witnessed wide spread of vote buying, which was more pronounced than most of the elections held in the previous years as pointed out by some election observers. There was reported cases of violence, particularly, governorship and state assemblies' elections as pointed out by the United States Consul General to Nigeria, John Bray, in Port Harcourt who served as an international observer to the election. Bray stated that "We have been watching elections in Rivers State.... I am not here to grade elections or anything like that I am just here to say that there has been enough violence" (Edozi, 2019). The observation may not be unconnected with killings of 10 people in Abonnema when soldiers from the 6 Division of the Nigerian Army engaged some suspected thugs in a shot out.

On the credibility of the election processes, the head of ECOWAS election observer mission to Nigeria, Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf stressed that the electoral process was largely peaceful and transparent as voters were able to cast their votes (Edozi, 2019). Equally, American Secretary of State, Michael R. Pompeo commended Nigeria's electorates for peaceful participation in elections and condemned those whose acts of violence harmed Nigerians and electoral process. The secretary further congratulated president Buhari for his re-election (Matazu, 2019).

In the same vein, EU observers pointed out that there was improvement in the election process despite challenges across the states. Among the improvement was the issue of accreditations exercise at polling units across the country. The mission further opined that there was over all competitiveness in the elections with over all freedom to campaign, even though there was misuse of incumbency, including state-owned media which prevented a level playing field (Matazu, 2019). Equally, a delegation of joint foreign election observers, which was a conglomeration of African Union (AU), European Union (EU), the Commonwealth of Nations, National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA), has described the presidential and national assembly elections as largely peaceful, orderly and inconformity with Nigeria's legal framework. The delegation further noted that the polls provided an opportunity for the consolidation of democracy and broadened the political space in Nigeria despite the obvious challenges (Ozibo, 2019).

In connection to the credibility of the elections, the head of AU Election Observer Mission in Nigeria, and former Ethiopian Prime Minister, Haile Mariam Deselegn, acknowledged that despite challenges, election day operations were administered in a manner that allowed the free expression of peoples will. She further pointed out that the closing and counting procedures were adhered to in over 80 per cent of the voting points observed. Moreover, the chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group, Jakaya Kikwete, said "by the election, the people of Nigeria had demonstrated patience and commitment to their democracy" (Ozibo, 2019).

Taking into cognizance authenticity and acceptability of the elections results within and outside the country, the United Kingdom has confirmed that the results of the presidential election as released by the INEC are authentic. Similarly, the British minister for Africa, Harriet Baldwin, said the results were consistent with the results obtained through the civil society paralleled vote tabulation process. He pointed out that along with our international partners; the UK believed that Nigerian people can have confidence in the results (Idris, 2019).

To bring to the fore the centrality of the election, particularly, as it relates to Nigeria's external image and its foreign policy pursuit, the US government has disclosed that peaceful conduct of 2019 election and a smooth transition of power in Nigeria are its major priorities in Africa. The US secretary of state stressed this during a briefing on the planned visit of Rex Tillerson, the secretary of state to Africa (US Secretary of State).

The post 2019 elections comments and observations by both national and international observers suggested that Nigeria is on the right tract in its struggle to consolidating its nascent democracy. Quite a number of countries, particularly, major powers, US and UK commended the electoral process to the extent of accepting the overall election results. Consequence upon this, Nigeria's image is flourishing in so far as, a number of countries, after congratulating the president Buhari, indicated their intention to continue relations with Nigeria based on areas of priorities and common interest.

#### **Nigeria's Image and Foreign Policy Determinants in the Post-2019 General Election**

It was earlier asserted that in foreign policy decision making, some domestic and external factors influenced Nigeria's external image. Thus, Nigeria's build up, conduct and aftermath of the 2019 election's environments and realities both domestic and external have generated foreign policy potentials that dominated the post- 2019 election's foreign policy pursuit of the country. Included in the domestic environment as foreign policy determinants and image shapers are: the economic endowment of the country with abundance oil and gas, solid mineral resources; large arable land for agricultural production and food security. All these and the following projected good image for the country: (a) Population as reservoir of manpower and large international market. (b) Fight against corruption and economic mismanagement. (c) Democratic consolidations including proper and legal handling of post elections petitions; and (d) Ultra efforts in handling security challenges.

However, the following domestic realities equally facilitated bad image to Nigeria; (a) Ethno-religious crisis, insurgencies and other related criminal activities such as Boko Haram insurgency, farmers-herdsmen skirmishes, cattle rustling and rampaging kidnappings. (b) Corruption and money laundering related frauds; and (c) Unemployment and infrastructural decay. Similarly, Nigeria's effort in multilateral and bilateral cooperation in the global fight against terrorism; Africa and West African regional engagement in settling and resolving conflicts and disputes, promotion of democratic ideals elsewhere and other humanitarian services are some of external realities that enhanced Nigeria's good external image.

## Conclusion

From the foregoing the paper critically reviewed the concepts of foreign policy and image in line with decision making approach. It established that images and realities are the main objectives of decision makers in foreign policy pursuit, which may either give good or bad outcomes. In an attempt to examine image and Nigeria's foreign policy decisions in post-2019 elections, the paper made historical reviews of Nigeria's general elections and external responses towards them from 1960-2019 and discovered that some domestic and external realities will continue to influence the country's image and foreign policy such as economic and population resources, democratic consolidation, fight against corruption and terrorism.

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