

## **Resurging Prebendalism, Clientelism and Candidate Endorsement Syndrome: A Critique of the 2019 Presidential Election in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Before the 2019 presidential election, Nigeria's political landscape was besieged by a series of candidate endorsements from various religious, socio-cultural, political, and professional groups. The candidacy of the incumbent President, Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC), and that of a former Vice President, Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) enjoyed unprecedented mind-bugling and staggering endorsements. This occurred despite strong concerns/criticisms on the likely performance of the incumbent, the dismal records, and the issue of integrity of the main challenger. The questions this paper raise therefore are: were the various endorsements made based on the credibility, integrity, performance, and track records of the two main candidates, or were they based on a clientelist, prebendal, and patronage system, which have characterised politics/political contests in the country? Did such endorsements emerge from a rational, apolitical, and objective assessment of the two candidates? Besides, did those endorsements have any significant effect on the outcomes of the election? To answer these questions, Rational Choice was used as the theoretical anchorage, while a survey design with a mixed-method approach was adopted. An online questionnaire was administered to fifty respondents purposively drawn from a population that comprised academics, professionals, members of civil society organisations and students to generate primary data. Secondary data were sourced from books, journal articles, newspapers, and media commentaries. Results showed that the majority of the endorsements were not objective; rather, they were based on political manoeuvres/patronage, religious, ethnic, and tribal sentiments among other factors. This reflects that personal or group's material benefits are placed over performance in the country's political arena.

**Keywords:** Candidate endorsements, Prebendalism, Clientelism, Patronage, Nigeria's 2019 presidential election

### **Introduction**

Principally, democracy as a form or system of government hinges upon citizens' choice, majority rule and the respect for the opinions of entities and groups, among other elements. Besides, the system of rule affords citizens and groups the platform to be part of the decision and policy-making process of government; and a legal ground to endorse, criticise or replace any 'well/ill-performed' government or political party from office through a constitutional means of election (Thompson, 2000; Gauba, 2007).

However, pieces of evidence from democratic practices around the world, especially in Africa have shown that the support and endorsement of an executive office-holder or those in the parliaments enjoy from their people may not necessarily be a function of performance or the delivery of their election mandates. Rather, such support and endorsements in many cases, are induced and emanate from the arena of clientelism or prebendalism or a system of tribute and patronage. In this wise, the personality or performance of an incumbent government or an opposition candidate, which forms an integral part of rational choice is secondary, while electoral choices are artificial and premised on a system of exchange or religious, ethnic, and tribal sentiments.

In the case of Nigeria's 2019 presidential election, the frenzy of candidate endorsement particularly on the two main contenders for the country's top seat, filled the political landscape, so much that the personalities, track records, programmes, policies, and manifestoes became tributary. The candidacy of the incumbent president, Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC), and that of a former Vice President, Atiku Abubakar, and the candidate of the main opposition party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) enjoyed unprecedented mind-bugling and

staggering endorsements. Religious groups, professional associations, and tribal and ethnic clutches rolled out a series of endorsement notes in print, electronic and social media to declare and canvass support from the general public. This occurred despite strong concerns and criticisms on the likely performance of the incumbent, which was evident in the alarming spate of insecurity, poverty, and economic decline in the country; and the dismal records and the issue of integrity of the main challenger.

For the incumbent president, his first tenure (29 May 2015 – 29 May 2019) was characterised by renewed insurgency in the North East region; armed banditry across Northern States; unabated herders-farmers' violence among other insecurity challenges. Besides, the country's economic situation worsened with an alarming surge in the poverty rate; while the purported fight against corruption, which formed the cardinal objectives of his administration was not yielding much the desired outcomes. Besides, his administration was criticised for its high-handedness in the fight against corruption, free speech (also labeled as hate), and the ideology that "citizens' fundamental rights must bow to national security" as advanced by President Buhari during the National Convention of the Nigerian Bar Association in August 2018 (*Premium Times* 28. August 2018).

More specifically, the World Poverty Clock reported in 2018 that Nigeria had overtaken India in poverty rate with 87 million Nigerians living below the poverty rate of \$1.90 per day (CNN, 2018). On the other hand, Atiku Abubakar was alleged by the U.S of siphoning several millions of dollars from the coffers of the government and depositing in the country with the aid of his fourth wife, Jennifer Douglas, an American citizen between 2000 and 2007 while in office as vice president (*Premium Times*, 2017; *The Guardian*, 2007).

The foregoing raises questions on the rationale behind and justification for such immense endorsements received by these two top candidates *en route* the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria. Were the various endorsements made based on the credibility, integrity, and track records of the two main candidates or were they based on a clientelist, prebendal, and patronage system, which has characterised politics/political contests in the country? Did such endorsements emerge from a rational, apolitical, and objective assessment of the two candidates? This article seeks to answer these questions.

### **Understanding the Rational Choice Theory**

Generally, the rational decision or choice theory depicts a world of an open system of variables in which the problem is defined, alternatives identified, and consequences surveyed with the intention of obtaining the most efficient result of maximum net value in any given situation (Anderson, 1975; Finsterbusch & Motz, 1980; Lane, 2000; Dye, 2005; Olugbenga, 2017). In other words, the theory posits that individuals make decisions based on a cost-benefit analysis of available options.

However, the origin of the theory is often credited to the work of Anthony Downs - *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957) and William Riker's - *The Theory of Political Coalitions* (1962). Anthony Downs argued that important aspects of political life might be explained in terms of voter self-interest (Downs, 1957). He established how political opinion in democracies sums into a 'bell-shaped' distribution, with the majority of voters holding moderate views (Downs, 1957). Downs also opined that this fact drives political parties in democracies to take mainstream positions.

Riker, on the other hand, gave an example of how and why political coalitions are formed using mathematical reasoning. To explain other related fields such as public choice, social choice, formal modelling, or positive political theory—to explain nearly everything, including voting, legislation, wars, and bureaucracy—other proponents connected to Riker directly or indirectly have further developed the theory.

With respect to electoral choices, and voting behaviour in particular, the rational choice theory suggests that voters' choices are predicated on their beliefs that the political party or

candidate of their choice will provide the greatest benefits or would align most closely with their values and interest (Brooks et al., 2006; Schofield & Reeves, 2014). Rational choice theorists agree that voting has a heavy opportunity cost (Gandhi, 2005). In this wise, costs may include the time and effort required to research candidates, the cost of transportation to the polling station, and the opportunity cost of not doing other activities during the time spent voting. Benefits may include the perceived impact of the election outcome on the voter's life and interests, the alignment of the candidate or party with the voter's values, and the potential to influence policy outcomes.

However, indications from certain climes in Africa, Asia, and South and Latin America have shown that voters' choices are often influenced by factors beyond rational cost-benefit analysis. These factors may include social pressure, emotional attachments to candidates or parties, the influence of media and advertising, material inducement, ethnic cleavages/affiliation, group considerations, gender, and religious sentiments (Brooks et al., 2006; Schofield & Reeves, 2014). Distinguishing a rational from an irrational voter's choice, Lee et al. (2016) argued that:

Voters' decisions are rational if their voting behaviour is based on (a) voters' intention (*intention-behavior consistency*), and if their intention is based on (b) voters' evaluations of the performance or capabilities of the candidate (*candidate evaluation*). Any decision not meeting the above two criteria would be considered irrational (2016, p. 2).

Overall, the rational choice model provides a useful framework for understanding voting behaviour, but applicability may be limited to more advanced democracies and may mirror real-life situations in developing democracies. However, within the context of this paper, the theory presents a veritable landscape for assessing endorsements before the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria.

### **Explaining prebendalism and clientelism**

Since Richard Joseph's pioneering work on Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria (1987, 1998), prebendalism has gained notable attention in the literature on Nigeria's, and by extension, Africa's government and politics. Rotimi Suberu opines that "the theory of prebendal politics provides and provokes stimulating analyses of Nigerian federalism" (Suberu, 2013, p. 1). According to Joseph, the distribution of state offices is "legitimated by a set of political norms according to which the appropriation of such offices is not just an act of individual greed or ambition but concurrently the satisfaction of the short-term objectives of the subset of a general population (Joseph, 1987, p. 67).

Clientelism, on the other hand, is a system of 'exchange' between electoral constituencies as principals and politicians as agents in democratic systems (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007). This exchange is focused on particular classes of goods, though the feasibility and persistence of clientelistic reciprocity are not determined by the type of goods exchanged. For Christopher Clapham, clientelism is "a relation of exchange between unequal" (Clapham, 1982). In other words, it is an unequal relationship of exchanges between the powerful and the weak (Thompson, 2000). According to De Walle, clientelism exists in all polities, but the forms it takes, its extent, and its political functions vary enormously, however across time and place (De Walle, 2007, p. 50). With particular respect to Africa, de Walle expounds that:

It is important to note that in sub-Saharan Africa, a pervasive form of elite clientelism, prebendalism, actually involves relatively little patronage. In the context of low levels of economic development, inadequate national integration, a history of authoritarian politics, and few organisational resources available to them, African leaders typically used state resources to co-opt different ethnic elites to maintain political stability. The clientelism that resulted was not redistributive and generally benefited only a relatively small proportion of the citizenry in more than symbolic ways (De Walle, 2007, p. 50).

In a more vivid form, Thompson asserts that in a clientelist's context, the leader relies on the clientelistic network to ensure that his patronage permeates through the whole of society (to an

extent that), the more people who feel that they benefit from this political system, the more legitimacy and support the regime receives (Thompson, 2000). Therefore, legitimacy and support are founded on patronage, and thus fragile; they are mutually beneficial to the two parties; avoid violence, and are asymmetrically contractual (Thompson, 2000). In this wise, political loyalty and endorsements are premised on this client-patrons' amity and not necessarily on merit.

In a more elaborate manner, Lemarchand makes a distinction among the various forms of clientelism: patronage pretends, and tributes (Lemarchand, 1988). According to him, prebendalism is a form of clientele relationship. Tribute explains the "traditional practice of gift exchange in peasant societies, in which patron and client are engaged in bonds of reciprocity and trust; it involves the real redistribution of wealth and is embedded in a communitarian ethos... On the other hand, patronage is the "practice of using state resources to provide jobs and services for political clienteles... in other to gain support for the patron that is dispensing it" (De Walle, 2007, p. 51). Prebendalism, which is the third form of clientelism, is a situation of handing out to prebends, in which an individual is given a public office in order for him/her to gain personal access to state resources (Joseph, 1987; De Walle, 2007).

Within the context of Nigeria, Suberu contends that the prebendal theory "shows that the constituent ethnicities of Nigeria's federal society are the bases for the organisation, mobilisation, and legitimisation of prebendalism's ethno-clientelistic networks of patronage, corruption, and rent-seeking" (Suberu, 2013, p. 1). In a similar vein, Oni explicates that:

What makes prebendalism an enduring theory of Nigeria's political economy is its insightful analysis of how the prebendal system has gained acceptance in the wider political concept both on written legal codes and unwritten normative practices. Terms like zoning, federal character, revenue allocation formula, etc are legally designed to "share" the state in terms of recruitment of personnel into the civil service, military and para-military services, the appointment of heads of government parastatal, admissions to Universities, and other training institutions. One clear violation of Weberian ideals is that meritocracy is sacrificed for mediocrity in preference for candidates to fill bureaucratic positions of the state. To worsen the situation, each individual holding state office is constantly aware of his route of ascension to such position and in most cases, primordial interests supersede national interests in decisions that should be taken on their merits (Oni, 2017, p. 9).

## **The various endorsements**

### *President Buhari*

Endorsements on the candidature of President Buhari began barely two years into his first tenure. This came despite the president not making any official declaration and amidst raising concerns for his ailing health; worsening economic and security situations in the country. Observing such a trend, Onuah (2018) asserts that "campaigning for the re-election of a president in Nigeria has often started with such support groups before the incumbent declares his intention to run again"

The first of such endorsements/understated campaigns came from a coalition of '900' groups, under the aegis of "4 plus 4 for Buhari..." (The Cable News, December 15, 2016). The leader of the group, Saadatu Babaji, stated that members of the group were across the 774 local government areas in the 36 states of the Federation, with the sole aim of canvassing support for the re-election of Buhari in the 2019 poll alongside the Kano state governor, Ibrahim Ganduje. Babaji opines that the spread of the group across the country was an indication of Buhari's wide acceptability (The Cable News, December 15, 2016).

In a similar manner, the Buhari Support Group (BSG), an amalgam of '189 groups and associations, headed by Abu Ibrahim, which purportedly worked for President Muhammadu Buhari in 2015; once again endorsed the 'yet-to-be-declared' candidature of President Buhari for the 2019 presidential election. Such endorsement in October 2017 came twenty-eight (28) months into his four-year tenure (Obiejesi, 2017). Justifying such endorsement, the Senate Majority Leader, Ahmed Lawan, who was part of the BSG's delegation unequivocally, expressed that:

We have issues we think that the administration will be dealing with very successfully, now that we have an economic recovery and growth plan, which encapsulates everything we need to move Nigeria forward... I believe that we have every justification to be happy because, the president campaigned on three major pillars of anti-corruption, fighting the insecurity across the country and revitalising the economy of Nigeria... It has been a very good journey so far and also, we believe that Mr. President and Nigerians have a future beyond 2019. What he has started, by the grace of God, he should be able to complete, by 2023 (Obiejesi, 2017).

From the foregoing, it is important to mention that the ‘campaign slogan of the ruling APC en route to the 2015 elections was ‘change’; while the manifestoes of Buhari encapsulated economic recovery, security and fight anti-corruption. According to the scorecard presented of the BSF, the president had performed incredibly well!

The third notable endorsement spree on the candidature of President Buhari came from the bosom of a group of politicians that paraded itself as ‘Buharists’; a coinage ascribed to the followers of President Buhari’s ‘political ideology’. Generally, and particularly in politics, ideologies are vital as they provide a cognitive-intellectual map for socio-political and economic actions. Putnam describes an ideology as “a life-guiding system of beliefs, values, and goals affecting political style and action” (Putnam, 1973). Gauba explains that:

In the realm of political theory, the term ideology is applied in two contexts: a set of ideas, which are accepted to be true by a particular group, party or nation without further examination; and as the science of ideas, which examines how different ideas are formed, how truth is distorted, and how we can overcome distortions to discover true knowledge (Gauba, 2007, p. 13).

However, an examination of such ideology shows that it is built on a massively-gigantic emptiness. Nonetheless, the Buharists, spare-headed by the governor of Kaduna state, Nasir El-Rufai, who is of Fulani extraction as the president, and believed to be a staunch supporter of Buhari; claimed to be working for the victory of the president in the 2019 presidential poll (Obiejesi, 2017). At the level of the ruling party, the APC; its National Executive Committee had on February 28, 2018, met to endorse the candidature of the president for a second term. However, the spokesperson of the NEC stated in a contradictory manner that “the party made it clear (at the meeting) that the endorsement is not an automatic ticket for the president, (as) the party would still conduct a presidential primary to be fair to other potential candidates” (Onuah, 2018). Again, this came before the 75-year-old president declared an intention for a second tenure.

During the terminal end of 2018, and as the 2019 presidential election drew near, the drums of endorsement sounded louder, as more groups declared support for President Buhari’s second term bid. Interestingly, these endorsements came against the backdrop of the First Lady/wife of the president’s decision not to work for her husband’s re-election. A factional pan-Yoruba socio-cultural group, *Afenifere*, led by Chief Ayo Fasanmi, had on January 29 converged at the International Conference Centre of the University of Ibadan to move a notion for the endorsement and adoption of the candidature of President Buhari and his vice, Professor Yemi Osinbajo (a Yoruba) for a second term. Addressing the group made-up of prominent Yoruba monarchs and politicians, including Professor Osinbajo, Fasanmi declared that:

I want all of you to work and vote for Buhari who has performed very credibly and I think he deserves a second term in the office. He is the only candidate that is campaigning about a corrupt free society. I am pleased that all the South-west is under the APC fold (Adebayo, *Premium Times*, January 29, 2019).

Meanwhile, the other faction, believed to be the main body, led by Chief Reuben Fazoranti was believed to be backing Mr. Buhari’s main challenger in the election, Atiku Abubakar. On the side of Northern Nigeria where the two main contenders hail from, a prominent socio-cultural group, the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) endorsed the candidature of Buhari over that of Atiku. The acting chairman of the Forum, Alhaji Liman Kwande expressed that the ACF believed that

President Buhari deserves a second term in order to consolidate the laudable achievements of his administration, which was achieved in three years and eight months (*The Punch*, 2018). Interestingly, the Forum advised Nigerians to vote for candidates based on qualities including clarity and unity of purpose, performance, the content of character, leadership qualities, and morality. But the question is, did Buhari's endorsement satisfy these qualities and benchmarks? In a similar vein, the North-Central Union (NCU), declared support for the re-election of President Buhari, stating that he did well enough to deserve a second term (Abiola, 2019).

The last set of endorsements came from farmers, especially various chapters of the Rice Farmers' Association of Nigeria (RIFAN) barely one week before the 2019 presidential election. It is interesting to note that the administration of President Buhari placed a restriction on the importation of rice to the country, while local production of the commodity, touted as Nigeria's staple food was encouraged and massively supported.

As part of the administration's Economic Recovery Plan, Nigeria's economy, which was heavily dependent on crude oil was meant to be diversified. One such way to achieve such diversification was through the Anchor Borrower Programme (ABP) among other initiatives. Therefore, the endorsements from RIFAN did not come as a surprise, as President Buhari was labelled "a friend of rice farmers" (*The Daily Trust* of February 8, 2019). Besides, the endorsement, the national body of rice farmers and the Fertilizer Producers and Suppliers Association of Nigeria jointly donated a sum of 1.7 billion naira to support the president's re-election bid (*PM News*, 30 December 2018). Interestingly, the Bauchi State chapter of RIFAN promised to deliver 800,000 votes to the APC-led federal government for the presidential election (Bakam, 2019, *Punch* 5 February).

#### *Atiku Abubakar*

The first known public endorsement of the candidacy of Alhaji Atiku Abubakar interestingly came from a serving minister in President Buhari's cabinet. The minister, who oversaw the Women Affairs and Social Development Ministry, Aisha Alhassan, in an interview with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC Hausa) in September 2017, unequivocally stated that she would give her support to Atiku if he chose to run for the 2019 presidential election (*Vanguard*, 6 September, 2017). The politician popularly called "Mama Taraba", further stated that Atiku was her godfather ever before her foray into politics.

Although Alhassan's view was greeted by vehement condemnations from within and outside the ruling APC government, it served as a precursor to Atiku's expression of interest and eventual emergence as the candidate of the PDP for the 2019 presidential election. Of note was the adoption of Atiku by five regional socio-cultural/political groups as their candidate for the 2019 election. Those groups were; the Pan Niger Delta Forum (PANDEF); Northern Elders' Forum (NEF); Ohanaeze Ndigbo; Afenifere and the Middle Belt Forum (MBF). As the name of these groups suggests, they are regionally-based ethnic associations, with membership within the country and beyond. Justifying the endorsement of Atiku Abubakar, the leader of the NEF, Ango Abdullahi, explained that:

The reality is that we have to fish for a president among the two major parties, the ruling and the main opposition...It is clear that the country requires a new leadership and this is why the Northern Elders Forum, which I lead is in agreement that a new leader should emerge and that leader is Atiku Abubakar (*Pulse ng*, 2019).

In a similar vein, the leader of PANDEFF, and a former minister of information declared that:

We have served in governments, so nobody should make the mistake of saying we are looking for jobs. We don't belong to a political party but we met as elders and leaders of the three regions of the country because the country is at a crossroads. We want a leader not sick, but focused and

having the respect of foreign leaders. We have been passing through crises and the outside world is laughing at us. One man cannot change the constitution of Nigeria, the moment you can remove the chief justice of Nigeria (CJN) by fiat and gets the power to remove the senate president, you become a dictator!

In addition, the President of Ohanaeze Ndigbo, John Nwodo, narrates that:

Today’s Nigeria is not the one we used to know. The Nigeria we have today is not the Nigeria we desire. I grew up in Nigeria where we use to love each other. Today, we have a head of state who has reminded us of our ethnic and religious differences and has put us in jeopardy. We have seen Katsina, Zamfara, Sokoto, and Borno states crying that they have been overwhelmed by insecurity and seeking military intervention. This is the edge of a precipice. These proclamations of governors followed the declaration by the former chief of army staff, asking Nigerians to take up arms and defend themselves following the unrest in the middle belt. The very essence of government is to secure the country. The security of the country is in jeopardy. We have a constitutional deadlock in the country. Southern and middle belts have insisted on restructuring, APC committee recommended interesting initiatives but nothing from the president except to say we don’t have a problem with structure but with the process.

## Method

In order to generate data for the study, the survey research design with a mixed-method approach was adopted. Specifically, a semi-structured questionnaire was designed and administered online to a total of fifty (50) respondents purposively drawn from a population that comprised academics, professionals, members of civil society organisations, and students to generate primary data. On the other hand, secondary data were sourced from journal articles, books, newspapers, and media commentaries. Primary data were presented in tables and analysed with the frequency count and the simple percentage scores. On the other hand, secondary data were analysed descriptively.

## Presentation of data

**Table 1:** Distribution of respondents by socio-demographic characteristics (SDC)

SDC	Frequency (n=50)	Percentage (%)
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	28	56.0
Female	22	44.0
<b>Age</b>		
Below 18	05	10
18-59	29	58
60 and Above	16	32
<b>Religion</b>		
Christianity	22	44
Islam	18	36
Traditional	03	
Others	07	14
<b>Educational Level</b>		
Secondary School	05	10
First degree	21	42
Second degree	16	32
Ph.D.	08	16

## Ethnic Group

Yoruba	14	28
Igbo	12	24
Hausa	10	20
Others	14	28

Source: Online Survey, 2020/2021.

Significantly from Table 1, 24 (48%) of the respondents possessed higher degrees, while the three main ethnic groups in the country (Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa) were adequately represented in the survey with 72%.

**Table 2:** Questions and responses on items drawn from the research questions

Items	Frequency (n=50)	Percentage
<i>The various endorsements enjoyed by the candidacy of President Buhari were rational and based on objective assessments of his credibility, integrity, and performance.</i>		
Strongly Agreed	09	18
Agreed	11	22
Strongly Disagreed	19	38
Disagreed	09	18
Indifferent	02	
<i>The various endorsements enjoyed by the candidacy of Atiku Abubakar are rational and based on objective assessments of his credibility and integrity.</i>		
Strongly Agreed	10	20
Agreed	06	12
Strongly Disagreed	19	38
Disagreed	09	18
Indifferent	04	8
<i>Considering the recent performance of the Buhari-led administration in the areas of security, economy, and the fight against corruption, would you agree that the endorsements were rational and or based on patronage?</i>		
Rational	19	38
Based on Patronage	26	52
Indifferent	05	10
<i>Considering recent calls for the resignation of President Buhari by certain groups that previously endorsed his candidacy, would you maintain that the initial endorsements were justifiable?</i>		
Yes	20	40
No	27	54
Indifferent	03	6
<i>The various corruption allegations against Atiku Abubakar affected his chances in the election?</i>		
Strongly Agreed	22	44
Agreed	09	18
Strongly Disagreed	08	16
Disagreed	05	10
Indifferent	06	12
<i>The various endorsements influenced the outcome of the 2019 Presidential polls?</i>		
Strongly Agreed	12	24
Agreed	06	12
Strongly Disagreed	22	44
Disagreed	07	14
Indifferent	03	6

Source: Online Survey, 2020/2021.



### **Discussion of findings**

The first item in Table 2 showed that a total of 28 respondents (56%) representing disagreed and strongly disagreed that the endorsements enjoyed by the candidacy of President Buhari before the 2019 Presidential election were rational and based on objective assessments of his credibility and performance. On the other hand, 20 respondents agreed and strongly agreed. Significantly, there is a contention over President Buhari's performance during his first tenure (May 29, 2015- May 29, 2019). It is important to stress that the cardinal objectives of the Buhari-led administration were security, the economy, and the fight against corruption. However, it must be stated that the country did not fare well in these three areas; thereby raising the rationality behind the numerous endorsements the candidacy of Buhari enjoyed.

Item 2, Table 2, showed that 27 responses (54%) disagreed and strongly disagreed that various endorsements enjoyed by the candidacy of Atiku Abubakar were rational and based on objective assessments of his credibility and integrity. However, 16 respondents (32%) believed the endorsements were rational and objective. The foregoing raises questions on the parameters used by the various endorsing groups. Or was it the case of choosing between two devils?

On item 3, 19 respondents (38%) maintained that the endorsements the candidacy of President Buhari enjoyed were rational and objective, despite strong criticisms of the Buhari-led administration in the areas of security, economy, and the fight against corruption, which forms the cardinals of the administration. On the other hand, 26 respondents (52%) believed that considering the performance failure of the Buhari-led administration in those cardinal areas, the prior endorsements were based on patronage. Responses on item 4 showed that 27 respondents (54%) believed that the various endorsements on the candidacy of President Buhari were unwarranted and unjustifiable in the first instance considering recent calls for his resignation by notable groups that previously endorsed his candidacy.

It must be noted that owing to the insecurity challenges and general discontent in the country may have caused a reversal. On the opposition candidate, item 5 showed that 29 respondents (58%) various corruption allegations against him affected his chances in the election. In a similar vein, 29 respondents believed that the various endorsements on the candidacy of the two contestants did not have any significant effect on the outcome of the 2019 Presidential poll.

From the foregoing, it is imperative to revisit the performance of the Buhari-led administration in its first tenure – from 29 May 2015 - 29 May 2019. This shall be done using security, the economy, and the fight against corruption, which were the administration's cardinal focus as measures for assessment. Prior to 2015, Nigeria was unfortunately labelled a terrorist country by the international community, owing to the violent campaigns of Boko Haram. Activities of the group, particularly in the country's North East region, resulted in the willful destruction of people's lives, property, infrastructure, and means of subsistence (Adefisoye, 2022). Activities of the group were believed to have claimed 2,800 lives between 2009 and 2012, according to Human Rights Watch (Human Right Watch, 2020). The report claims that in the bombing of the Police Headquarters in Abuja in 2010, 815 persons were killed in 275 different incidents during the first nine months of 2012, and more than 60 police stations were assaulted in 10 Northern States.

Similar to this, according to Global Terrorism Index, Boko Haram was responsible for 87% of female suicide attack fatalities between 2014 and 2015, with at least 146 suicide attacks resulting in over 900 fatalities (GTI, 2016). In 2014 and 2015, the group was ranked as the deadliest terrorist organisation, and the second deadliest in 2016 (GTI, 2016). In total, 491 attacks by Boko Haram resulted in 5,478 fatalities in 2014 (GTI, 2016).

This issue had a negative effect on Nigeria's external image coupled with unimaginable internal woes, which were manifest in economic decline and the depletion of the country's external reserves which were ostensibly deployed to fight terrorism. Unfortunately, the 2 billion dollars meant by the preceding administration meant to purchase arms in the fight against terrorism was

allegedly diverted to fund the 2015 re-election bid of President Jonathan (BBC, 2015; Premium Times, 2015).

It is important to note in 2014, the Nigerian economy “nearly doubled, racking up hundreds of billions of dollars, ballooning to the size of the Polish and Belgian economies, and breezing by the South African economy to become Africa’s largest” (Omilusi, 2019, p. 53). However, the failure to save for the rainy day, massive corruption, and the crash of the price of crude oil in the international market soon plunged the country into economic recession in the first of the Buhari-led administration.

With respect to corruption, Nigeria public office holders are notorious for crass looting of public funds. Different international financial gate-keeper and anti-graft bodies, such as the World Bank, The International Monetary Fund, Global Financial Integrity (GFI), Transparency International, among others attest to this fact (Omilusi, 2019). It was reported by popular news media in the country that between 2000 and 2009, an estimated \$182 billion was unlawfully laundered from the country to foreign bank accounts (The Punch, 2017). President Buhari captured this ugly trend at the United Nations General Assembly in October 2016 that between 2005 and 2015, an estimated \$150 billion was looted from the country’s treasury, leading to 136<sup>th</sup> position of the 168 countries on the Corruption Perception Index in 2015 (*The Punch*, 2017).

Obviously, President Buhari inherited a litany of intimidating internal and external complexities to battle as Nigeria’s president. The crash in crude oil price in the international market, economic recession, raising poverty rate, security challenges occasioned by the resurgence in militancy in the Niger Delta region, herder-farmers’ conflicts and insurgency were characterized the Buhari-led administration in its first term. In particular, herder-farmers’ conflict assumed an alarming dimension during President Buhari’s first tenure to an extent that the president was accused of complacency in dealing with the conflict owing to his Fulani heritage.

On the fight against corruption, no doubt, the President was determined in the resolve, however, the fight against graft goes beyond personal determination but a systemic. Although the Whistle-Blowing policy introduced by the administration yielded significantly, the pockets of corruption cases within the President’s cabinet and especially within the anti-graft agencies marred such campaigns. Besides, such anti-graft war was labeled by opposition politicians as an attempt to clamp down political opponents of Mr. President (Omilusi, 2019).

Nonetheless, the President’s determination to diversify the country’s economy by revitalising the agricultural sector was a laudable initiative. For a country with over 200 million people, food importation was not sustainable. Therefore, the mantra of “growing what we eat and eating what we grow” was a welcome development. Besides, the Anchor Borrower Programme (ABP) of the administration was a well-directed step, geared towards encouraging agriculture. Despite such initiative, the border-closure initiative targeted at taming the influx of imported goods, especially rice led to an all-time increase in the price from 7, 500 naira in 2015 to about 38, 000 naira of a commodity regarded as Nigeria’s staple food. This led to widespread hunger in the country.

The foregoing, no doubt contributed to the decline of the popularity of a man who unseated a sitting president in 2015. Perhaps, the foregoing also contributed to the acceptance of the candidacy of Alhaji Abubakar as an alternative, despite the integrity issues around him.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, the authors have examined the subject of (resurging) prebendalism, clientelism and electoral endorsement syndrome, with a specific focus on Nigeria’s 2019 presidential election. One of the questions raised in this paper, particularly with respect to the unprecedented endorsements enjoyed by the candidacy of the incumbent president was the rationality/objectivity of such endorsements in the face of worsening economic and security conditions in the country and the rise

in corruption cases, which form the cardinals of the campaign promises of the APC-led federal government.

In a similar vein, the endorsements of the candidacy of the main challenger and candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), Atiku Abubakar enjoyed put a similar question mark on the rationality/objective of such endorsements, particularly with issues of integrity of the candidate. Perhaps, was it a case of choosing between two devils? Or was it that the various groups were only interested in securing safe havens for themselves from the eventual winner of the election.

However, rationality is a social construct and quite relative. In other words, what constitutes rationality to a group or an individual may not constitute the same to the other. This in itself mirrors the incoherence in the performance gauge in Nigeria's politics as performance is not measured by rational democratic indices of performance but by ethnic, religious, and material benefits that have been enjoyed or may be enjoyed in the future from politicians. These form the very basis of prebendal politics, clientelism and patronage.

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