STATES SOFT POWER UTILISATION IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: PROS AND CONS FROM THE NIGERIAN PERSPECTIVE

FI Braimah
Elizade University, Nigeria
Z Edo
Delta State University, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This article analyses the challenges that Nigeria is confronted with in regard to its potential and utilisation of soft power. The utilisation of soft power among state actors has become a dominant feature in international relations. The expensive nature of military actions, human loss, coupled with the fact that it does not always lead to compliance with international laws, has led to the popularity of soft power politics. For a developing country like Nigeria, which is the most populous country in Africa, the significance in annexing its soft power potential within and outside Africa cannot be overstated. The Twenty-First Century has witnessed massive investment from countries even with authoritarian government systems towards improving their soft power potential. How Nigeria utilizes its soft power potential will determine its level of development and influence in regional and global politics. The article outlines various challenges, such as corruption and insecurity that affect Nigeria's capacity to explore its soft power potential. Also, the article finds that Nigeria has massive soft power capacity and that there is a realistic potential to overcome the existing challenges in order to deploy its soft power. The article recommends, amongst others, that the "Nigeria-first" foreign policy should be skewed to attract foreign direct investments; also, it suggest that the departments of culture and tourism in the national and sub-national governments should formulate purposive courses of action that will usher a pragmatic development of Nigeria's soft power potential.

Keywords: Corruption, Democracy,Human rights, Soft and Hard Power,State power

1. INTRODUCTION

For two decades or more, the world has steadily been moving towards recognition of soft power in international relations. Even autocratic regimes or illiberal administration such as Russia and China are investing billions in enhancing their soft power potentials. The idea behind the current drive is anchored on a realisation that military strength and/or economic sanctions have not really addressed the tensions that exist between nation-states; and, that given how these tensions have increased in the 21st century, hard power have been found to not be very effective in addressing the many conflicts facing the world. If anything, the exponential rise in alternate state structures or non-state actors, which challenge constituted authority for

political space, terror groups and populist regimes have been seen as a direct reaction to what many considered as the arbitrary use of some state military strength and economic sanctions in addressing concerns and differences. Of course, to combat destructive forces demands the exercise of power. Hence, Alshehri (2010: 8) and Hadi (2019: 25) note that: *"The hard power method is full of destructive results, which still does not solve the problem in anyway, while the soft power method is focused on addressing terrorism roots. The failure to effectively implement soft power policy may be the main reason behind the constant escalation of terrorism."* It is no wonder therefore, owing to the importance of this behavior changing explanation, that the soft power 30 ranking have for some years now developed a tracking methodology in ranking a country soft power potentials and its use. This has led to some healthy competition among industrialised nations to boost their soft power potentials.

Nigeria, which is the focus of this article is considered the giant of Africa. It is the most populous country in Africa and ranked among the first 10 most populous countries in the world with an estimated population of 206 139 589 (Worldometer, 2020). Rich in mineral and natural resources, Nigeria has the potential to be a major global player within the community of states. However, it has not risen to its potential and has even been referred to as a crippled sleeping giant (Osaghae, 1998; Idoko, 2018). However, it is believed that with the focus shifting away from the realist conception of power

and to soft power politics, the country can again exert persuasive influence within Africa and the rest of the world using the resources within its boundary.

2. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING AND CONCEPTIONS OF POWER

The conception of power in international politics have always hovered between two dominant perspectives. On one side of the spectrum is the realist tradition, which emphasizes the role of the sovereign state, national interests, economic and military strength in defining states relationship in world politics. Scholars of this persuasion see the international arena as one that is characterized by conflictual and competitive drive. The basic assumption here is that in the international system, states are living in a state of anarchy and as such cannot rely on others for survival but must take care of themselves (Antunes & Camisao, 2018). Therefore, in realist view, for a state to remain relevant in their interactions with others it is important that it develops, consciously, those instruments that will help increase its influence and prestige as well as instill fear on other competitors. The development of nuclear weapons, economic capability, national armies, military bases in foreign lands and so on were evident of the dominance of this school of thought, especially as witnessed during the cold war era. Alignment and non-alignment policies were also driven by hard power politics.

Scholars, like Fergusson (2004) and Gray (2011), argue that the effectiveness of a country foreign policy cannot be separated from its utilisation of hard

power. In fact, Fergusson (2004: 24) quips that *soft power is merely the velvet glove concealing an iron hand."*

At the other end is the liberal idealism perspective. This perspective is anchored on the belief that aside of the notion that states are rational actors, they are also capable of ensuring lasting peace and security. Because the focus of idealism goes beyond seeing the state as a unitary actor, it emphasises factors like culture, economic system and government types, which shape its preferences towards other states. According to Copeland (1996, 2015), such economic inter-dependency for instance can reduce the likelihood of war as cooperation is enhanced. War and conflicts do not need to define human relations across the globe. Idealists believe that it is to the mutual interests of everyone that the international system is not overheated as the ultimate goal of every state is to ensure that its people prosper without fearing an attack from other states.

While there is a marked difference between idealism and soft power, Nye (2011: 82) warns that *"Soft power is not a form of idealism or liberalism but simply a form of power, one way of getting desired outcomes."* That is, the idea of soft power in international relations is seen as an extension of idealism that espouses the need, especially in the face of global terrorism, to positively influence state behavior towards common goals (Nye, 2004, 2011).

2.1 Conceptions of Soft Power

The notion of soft power as distinct from hard power was first introduced in international politics by Joseph Nye over three decades ago (Nye, 1990). Nye's (1990) objective was to explain American vast arrays of soft power at a time when many were questioning the decline of America's influence in global politics. As propounded by Nye (2004), soft power "is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion (and) …. it arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals and policies." Trunkos (2013 cited in Hadi, 2019) notes that soft power deals with a nation's national resources which is capable of using to affect other nations so as to persuade and elicit positive outcomes.

As a concept, soft power is not really new in international relations. While the coinage of the term can be rightly traced to Nye (1990), there are ample examples of its practices among states in their dealings with one another. The Marshal Plan that helped in the reconstruction of ravaged Europe following the end of the Second World War is a very good example of the use of soft power. The end goal of the Marshal Plan was to neutralise the threat of communism. Today however, states are consciously investing billions in their ability to attract and influence; and, how a state is able to do this impacts greatly on other aspects of society.

Zaman (2016) notes three trends that led to the popularity of soft power in the 21st century. First was the appearance and proliferation of nuclear weapons. The fear that arises from using nuclear weapons and its long-lasting effects made states to rethink the

use of hard power or military power in modern times. For instance, countries like Iran's and North Korea's fervent determination to pursue or acquire nuclear weapons has not sat well with some world leaders who considered such move as a threat to the security and stability of the world. It is believed that with these countries armed, the world will be a far less safe place to live. Of course, the response has been the introduction of economic sanctions which paradoxically have led to the emergence of terror groupings around the world. The second factor is the popularisation of advanced education, which creates a conducive ground for the spread of soft power. Advanced education helped to loosen social structures which led to a worldwide democratisation movement, which helped in the transformation of visions into political reality and ultimately making the pen mightier than the sword. That the recent soft power ranking placed Britain as number one is not surprising as its educational system continue to wax stronger even in the face of uncertainties.

The third factor is the penetrating force of information and knowledge which flow more easily and are more effective than guns. According to Nye (2013), there are three basic resources available to a state that can be used to measure the effectiveness of soft power. These resources are, cultures, political values and foreign policy. Well utilized, these resources can help to enhance a country's soft power in its interaction with its international partners. However, there are certain obstacles that a country can face which can limit its soft power influence; and, this article looks at some of the challenges faced by Nigeria in attempting to utilize its soft power in the 21st century. First, this article discusses foreign policy as a viable soft power instrument.

2.2 Foreign Policy as a Viable Soft Power Instrument

A country's foreign policy is its strategy in dealing with other nations. It relies very much on a country's domestic policy for its success. Factors that enhance the strength of a country's foreign policy could be its military might, economic wealth or its natural and human resources. Foreign policies can either strengthen or limit the soft power influence of a state. An aggressive foreign policy can, for example, alienate states, lead to the loss of allies and create a feeling of distrust. The decline of American soft power during the Trump presidency/administration,which saw the U.S fall behind to 4th position from 3rd in the 2018 soft power index, is adduced to lack of interest shown by the Trump administration in public diplomacy (Nye, 2019). The Trump administration's plan, for instance to drastically alter U.S. foreign assistance and to redirect aid money to countries that tend to agree with American policies, is seen as an action that would impact negatively on *"U.S. soft power, fuel extremism and cede large parts of the world to influence from U.S adversaries, especially China"* (Rogin, 2019). It is therefore believed that the *"America first"* policy of the Trump administration that led to the U.S. withdrawal from three major agreements, namely, the Trans-Pacific partnership, the Paris

Climate Agreement and the Iran Nuclear Deal, has adversely affected the U.S. global influence. The Portland soft power ranking cited these three withdrawal as a major foreign policy flaws of the U.S government. According to the soft power 30 report, these "shifts in policy created an inconsistent and unpredictable U.S. foreign policy that gives America the paradoxical look of a great power in retreat, as well as a bully looking to extort as much as possible from as many possible" (Portland Soft Power Ranking, 2019).

According to an American historian, Hal Brands (cited in Frazee, 2018), America's global prominence and influence in the years following the cold war (and this explains why America came on top), was based on America's cultural attraction, its democratic values and its reputation. In many instances where hard power was reverted to, there have been serious challenges to the U.S. global image and influence. The American military incursion into Iraq, Afghanistan and, in recent times, Libya has challenged the effectiveness of its soft power. In Libya for instance, Obama's admission that failing to prepare for the aftermath of the ousting of Libyan leader, Col. Qaddafi was a regrettable action of his presidency did not help in increasing America's soft power as Libya has since plunged into chaos and has been described in many circles as a failing state. Also, American incursion into Arab affairs using the military might has given rise to anti-American sentiments, especially within the Arab world. Such anti-American sentiment has made the job of leadership more

difficult as Arab leaders have to deal with how to please donor countries like the U.S. whilst simultaneously trying to appease a large anti-American constituency at home (Nye, 2004). Such Anti-American sentiment engineered through aggressive foreign policy is viewed as a total disregard for a nation's sovereignty, and this does not help the reputation of U.S., as a global power. For example, president Trump's public criticism of U.S. allies, his abrupt cancellation of a visit to Denmark because of its refusal to sell an Island to the U.S., his public courtship of authoritarian leaders, cutting a phone call with Australian prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, and telling him that their conversation was the worst call by far that he had with world leaders that day, has left allies with two options: forget the insults or to partner more closely with U.S rivals like China (Frazee, 2018).

This examples shows that a country's foreign policy matters a lot and if seen in negative light, can destroy a country's soft power influence, its reputation and credibility. It also shows that soft power can enhance a country's profile and reputation in the international relations. Japan provides a good example in this regard. Since the inauguration of Soft Power 30, Japan has risen every year, steadily rising from 8th position in 2015 to 5th by 2018. Japan was able to achieve this despite its well documented language barrier which ordinarily constitute a major challenge to its soft power utilization. The Japan story is proof that conscious efforts by states to enhance soft power influence can help. Japan has done well in its diplomatic network; and, it has the fifth

largest diplomatic network in the world. In terms of oversees aid contribution, Japan is the second largest contributor to the UN budget. These and the leadership role it is now playing in its region, since the US withdrawal from the Trans Pacific Partnership, have helped to reposition Japan in global politics as a force to be reckoned with.

2.3 Culture and Soft Power

Nye (2004: 11) defines culture as the set of values and practices that create meaning for a society. A country's culture can be effectively used as a diplomatic tool in courting friendship in international relations. It also constitutes a key challenge in state's attempt to utilize its soft power. One of the basic reason why Britain is number one in the soft power 30 ranking of 2018 is due to the richness of its culture which it had not only exported to the world, but has continuously strove to enhance. Citing British art, film, music, fashion and sport, the survey ranking notes that these have continued to flourish in highly competitive global markets. According to its authors, "the English premier league also remains a vital cultural asset, projecting British soft power and attracting fans around the world. Such influence is especially felt in the developing world like Nigeria where the attractiveness of its football league has seen the growth of a fanbase with total support for one club or the other in the English premiership.

Since soft power rests on the ability to shape the preference of others (Nye, 2004), Britain continues to perform incredibly well in recent ranking through sports and education. America has also benefited immensely through films and televisions as these have helped to inspire the dreams and desires of others.

However, as Nye (2004: 12) argues, the effectiveness of any power resource like culture, depends on contexts. For instance, American films that make the United States attractive in China or Latin America may have the opposite effect and actually reduce American soft power in Saudi Arabia or Pakistan. The challenge, therefore, is that the cultural resources or soft power of a country could be better put to use by understanding the cultures of others. Unlike foreign policies which are the preserves of government, culture on the other hand is mainly driven by civil societies and the private sectors. As the soft power 30 ranking shows, the U.S. soft power is strongest in its higher education, institutions, cultural production and technological innovation; and because of this, no single president can wipeout the vast soft power resource that the U.S. has amassed over a long period of time. A country with a strong and attractive culture may be able to rebuff the culture of another; and, this is a key challenge.

Regional powers like China and Russia have found it difficult to export their culture over countries like South Korea. The world-wide appeal of the English language has also made it difficult for countries like Russia and China to export their culture beyond their territories, though in recent times China and Russia are making great strides in enhancing their cultural soft power. As reported by the British Council

(2015), China will be on course to have opened over 1 000 Confucius institutes around the world by 2020, while Russia is investing heavily in international news broadcasting. The same goes for France and Japan whose ranking in the soft power 30 is admirable.

One of the key challenges faced by countries like Russia and China is their non-liberal approach to governance and this tends to restrict the role played by civil society and the private sector in the exportation of culture as a form of soft power. This stems from an erroneous belief that government is the main instrument of soft power. But as is the case in the U.S, Britain, France and Japan, civil society plays significant roles. However, the lack of control by states on non-state actors in this regard can produced negative outcomes. For instance, a film produced in Hollywood that paints the American society in negative light will have negative impact on its soft power.

The movie "24" played by lead actor Kiefer Suderland where suspected terrorists are tortured and summarily killed, will surely not go down well in countries that have high regards for the rule of law and human rights (see Jane, 2007). In spite of China's autocratic style of leadership, which of course does affect its soft power, its commitment to Africa, South East Asia and Latin America where it has spent trillions of dollars trying to buy influence, has played a positive role in enhancing its soft power. In fact, China depends heavily on its cultural values and development model in its soft power calculations (Barker, 2017).

2.4 Nigerian Political Values

Political value is one of the most crucial of soft power resources available to a state. The attractiveness of a country value system can influence other international actors to key into a country's agenda. Values like respect for human rights, the rule of law, disaster assistance programs, aid and so on are all intricately connected to soft power. The Marshall Plan, one of the first classic example of the use of soft power in international relations after World War II, saw the United States pumping billions of dollars into war-ravaged Western Europe to prevent it from falling into the influence of communist Soviet Union. This exercise of soft power raised the profile of the U.S. as a global power in the eyes of many who see American values as incomparable. Russian, China and North Korea are facing challenges in this regard as they attempt to harvest soft power in the 21st century. Cases of human rights abuse, lack of political openness and democratic institutions are adversely affecting their commitment to soft power and they give them undesirable images in Europe and in other countries committed to these values. Countries with poor human rights records and anti-democratic values will not enjoy the same kind of attraction that countries like Britain and the United States have, for example, educational exchange programs and tourism. However, caution must be exercised with regard to the U.S.A. whose political values have deteriorated as sources of soft power during and after president Trump's administration.

Indeed, many in the U.S. have recent-

ly criticised Trump policies on immigration. The argument borders on the notion that president Donald Trump's stance is undermining the American values that have for years defined the country's value system. Rugh (2016) observes that Trump's public criticism of America's enduring institutions, calling the American free press dishonest, questioning the integrity of electoral bodies and the disparaging of U.S. intelligence agencies as incompetent and politically-biased, have undermined the respect for America and challenged its soft power. This discrimination of certain sections of a country's population can also have adverse effect on its utilization of soft power.

The ban of certain religious groups like the Jehovah's witnesses group in Russia and the confiscation of their publications have engendered negative reaction from other international actors who see the freedom of free worship as an inalienable rights of all humans. Hence, Nye (2004: 14) argues that the values a government champion in its behavior at home affect the preferences of others as it can repel or attract others. The greatest challenge faced by Nigeria in developing its soft power potential stem from its political values. While the country is constitutionally committed to the advancement of human rights, equitable distribution of resources and zero tolerance on corrupt practices, the reality on the ground is a far cry from this commitment.

3. NIGERIA'S SOFT POWER POTENTIAL AND IMPLICATIONS

Nigeria's soft power can be drawn from a variety of sources including foreign policy, cultural attributes, sports and politics.

3.1 Nigerian Foreign Policy Soft Power Implications

Previously, Nigeria core foreign policy focus has been Africa. In other words, Africa was the centre piece of Nigeria's foreign policy. However, this foreign policy thrust was necessitated by the fact that most African states were still under the grasp of colonialism and it became expedient that after her independence, Nigeria played an active role in ensuring that colonial rule is stamped out from the continent (Gamawa, 2018). Over the years, Nigeria has played the "Big Brother Africa" card as it strives to ensure that peace and stability is restored in countries that are conflict-ridden. This has no doubt increased its prestige and influence in the African continent as it continued to take the initiative in providing troops, resources and material assistance to countries mired in crisis. Negeria's humanitarian intervention and technical assistance during this period have also accorded it respect and prestige.

One notable area where this was seen was during the regime of president Ibrahim Babangida in 1987 when he established the Technical Aid Corps Scheme to provide technical assistance to African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states. According to Tella (2017: 113-4), "*unlike traditional financial aid, it aims to provide Nigerian technical know-how to developing countries in critical skills such as medicine, engineering, law, and lecturing*

..." This was a major foreign policy boost and attraction as it eased the burden on countries like Angola, Benin Republic, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Ethiopia, Kenya, Fiji Island, Dominica, Guyana and Jamaica because the Nigerian government took the responsibility of payment of their salaries. The TAC scheme, whose major objectives includes giving assistance on the basis of assessed and perceived needs of the recipient countries, promoting cooperation and understanding between Nigeria and beneficiary countries, and facilitating meaningful contacts between the youths of Nigeria and those of the recipient countries, was a classic example of Nigerian soft power utilization during its military era (Tella, 2017).

However, over the years, the country has also experienced her own share of humanitarian crisis exacerbated by the activities of the Boko Haram group who are largely domiciled in the northern part of the country, increased level of poverty and inequality among her ever growing population, insecurity, environmental crisis in her Niger Delta region, corruption, etc. This has led to shift in focus in her foreign policy calculations. Nigeria foreign policy thrust is now anchored on 'Nigeria First' and shifted drastically from Africa as its core. The rationale for this shift according to Nigeria Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is that a realistic foreign policy should reflect domestic realities on key areas like building a thriving and sustainable economy, food security, poverty reduction, infrastructural development, energy sufficiency among others, (Salau, 2020). While it is true that domestic policies in Nigeria is far

from appealing, which makes these stated goals laudable, this change in Nigeria foreign policy outlook is expected to impact negatively on its soft power potentials especially as it relates to her relationship with her African neighbors. Again if the 'Nigeria first' foreign policy direction is anything like its American counterpart, then we are surely going to witnessed a drop in Nigeria engagement in Africa affairs.

3.2 Nigeria's Cultural Attributes as Soft Power

Ranging from fashion, education, sports, pop culture, movies and music to traditional festivals, Nigeria possesses a vast array of soft power that if well channeled will contribute immensely to the country's prestige and influence. Conversely as already noted, a misuse of these potentials can damage the country's reputation. The cultural diversity of Nigeria presents a kaleidoscope of festivals, arts and beautiful cultural practices that can be developed for the purposes of tourism. Nigeria's diverse culture, arts and festivals, film and music industry is a veritable source of soft power, but it has not been fully harnessed. Instead, the Nigeria film industry has continued with negative and outdated cultural practices in their production. The yearly Bini Igwe festival and others in other parts of the country have not been fully harnessed for the international market. Nigeria comparative advantage in this regard is presently underestimated by the relevant policy makers. Nigeria film industry otherwise, known as Nollywood, is regarded as the third largest in the world and outside agri-

culture, and is Nigeria's second largest employer of labour generating $600 million annually (Idowu, 2020). This is a great achievement, despite hindrances like piracy and lack of funding from government. Given how far Nollywood and Nigerian music have advanced, government should be keenly interested in aiding the industry especially in areas like technology as these will further advance the country's soft power potential. Fawole (2018) notes how the U.S. government backed Hollywood during its earliest years in the production of movies that painted the United States as the good guy and its enemies as evil. Hollywood did in fact play a major role during the cold war era between the Soviet Union and the U.S.A. That the U.S. continues to be among the first five in Soft Power Ranking, despite Trump foreign policies which alienated other countries, is largely due to its popular culture which showcased itself in various ways. According to Nye (cited in Idowu, 2020), US popular culture embodies products and communications with widespread appeal to the extent that even a Soviet teenagers wore blue jeans, seeking for American recordings whilst Chinese students used symbols modeled on the statue of Liberty during the 1989 uprisings.

3.2 Sports (Football) as Soft Power Potential for Nigeria

Nigerian football in the early seventies and eighties was closer to what European football is today. During this period, a match between Rangers of Enugu and IICC of Ibadan would certainly be played in a fully-packed stadium. Football stars like Henry Nwosu, Sunday Eboigbe, Bright Omokaro and others, who were African football greats, were actually plying their trade in Nigeria local leagues. This was also true in other sporting activities like table tennis where the great Atanda Musa held sway not only in Nigeria but also across the globe for a good number of years. However, the decline in sporting activities in Nigeria, especially with football, have had an adverse effect on Nigeria's image. While football continues to have large followership in the country, it will take a keen eye to see a Nigerian wearing a local jersey of any one of the local clubs (Aneke, 2016). This is because ''*the frequency of local jerseys is dwarfed by the usage of imported jerseys, mirroring the interest and viewing figures of the national league compared to the global juggernauts of the Bundesliga, Premiership, Serie A and Ligue 1*'' (Aneke, 2016).

More important, was the fact that nationals from other countries were signed by Nigerian clubs. This was adduced to the vibrancy and liquidity of Nigerian football during this era as it attracted players from other regions. Aneke (2016) notes that Nigerian football league was just so vibrant that some players had to change their nationality to play in the league. Examples include Annas Ahmed, a player who was able to obtain a Nigeria passport and played for Raccah Rovers of Kano. Aside of players, coaching staffs also flocked to the country. Teofanis came from Greece to coach Leventis, Roberto Diaz from Brazil and Janusz Kowalik from Poland to coach Enugu Rangers between1976-1984. Alex Dominguez from Argentina coached

Kaduna Ranchers Bees, while Allan Hawkes who came from West Midlands coached the Shooting Stars. Stadiums were jam packed with recorded attendance of over 25 000 spectators; and, during big games, attendance could be over 50 000 (Aneke, 2016). The soft power potentials of sports cannot be under emphasised as the British example demonstrates. Sports bring nationalities together and, many times, it has been used as a conflict resolution stratagem. However, the decline of sports in Nigeria has had adverse effects on its influence across Africa and beyond.

4. CHALLENGES TO NIGERIA'S SOFT POWER POTENTIAL

Soft power can effectively and successfully be deployed in an environment that is attractive and conducive to international investors. The Nigeria ambiance is presently challenged by factors that hinder the deployment of its soft power potential. For example, corruption has remained a challenge to the economic development of Nigeria and, presently, it constitutes a hindrance to the actualization of the country's soft power potential. It is common knowledge in Nigeria that public funds are diverted into private accounts by those entrusted with it. Agbakwuru (2020) reports that the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offenses Commission (ICPC) uncovered the diversion of 2.67 billion naira meant for the nation's school feeding programme into private accounts. The ICPC, according to the same report, has also uncovered 2.5 billion naira meant for agricultural development that was also diverted

into several private accounts. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) that is legally mandated to investigate and stem corruption is itself mired in corruption allegations. Ojo (2020) reports that since the inception of the EFCC in 2003, all the chairpersons appointed to oversee the activities of the commission were all removed on alleged corrupt practices and abuse of office. Mallam Nuhu Ribadu, the pioneer chairperson of the commission was demoted and removed from office because of alleged abuse of office and human rights. Mrs Farida Waziri who headed the Commission from 2008 to 2011 was sacked because she allegedly compromised the investigation of corruption against the former governors of Bayelsa and Edo States, Mr Timipreye Sylva and Mr Lucky Igbinedion, respectively. Mr Ibrahim Lamode who held sway at the EFCC from 2011 to 2015 was booted out of office for alleged failure to remit over 2 trillion naira into government coffers, among others. The immediate past chairperson of the EFCC, Mr Ibrahim Magu, was also removed from office on the allegations of corrupt practices and living beyond his legitimate income. He was denied confirmation of his appointment by the Nigerian senate because of damning reports by the state security services. He is presently subjected to a presidential probe to unravel his level of corruption and abuse of office.

According to Campbell (2020), Nigeria ranks 146 out of 180 countries surveyed by Transparency International on corruption. Most Nigerians, according to the report, perceive their government as corrupt. The prevalence of corrup-

tion in Nigeria is largely driven by greed, weak civil society participation, selfish desires of the ruling class and poor political participation by the large pedestrian contingent. Page (2018) states that corruption remained a major obstacle that has hindered Nigeria from realizing her potential for greatness. Campbell's (2020) position resonates with that of Page (2018) to the effect that the ordinary Nigerian sees government as corrupt. Indeed, corruption remains a challenge that has to be surmounted for the country to actualize and sustain its soft power potential. The perception of Nigeria as a corrupt nation by the international community does not help its soft power drive. Another challenge militating against the development of Nigeria's soft power potential is the present widespread prevalence of insecurity occasioned by the activities of bandits, hoodlums, kidnappers, boko-haram and the ISIS.

Ajodo-Adegbenro & Okorie (2014) linken the prevalence of insecurity in Nigeria to corruption. According to them, corruption is at the root of widespread poverty and crimes, which by extension are the causes of insecurity. This observation is still germane. Another pitfall stifling the development of Nigeria's soft power potential is in the unstable business environment of the country. Poor infrastructure, weak economic base driven by energy policy that delivers poor and unstable electricity, are factors that further stifle the actualization of Nigeria's soft power. Poor and deplorable road network do militate against the development of soft power in Nigeria. Most of the road network to the cultural and tourism bases in the countryside remain deplorable. Beautiful and diverse landscapes of the countryside are inaccessible. Culture and tourism have been identified as veritable means of driving the development of a country's soft power; however, the national and sub national governments in Nigeria have over the years paid minimal attention to the development of the cultural and tourism potential of the country. For example, the Nigerian Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism had, as far back as 2016, faulted the poor budgetary allocations to the development of culture and tourism in Nigeria. He also decried the zero allocations of budgetary funds to the tourism industry by previous governments (Ovuakporie & Agbakwnu, 2016).

The plan by the Nigeria national government to retrieve artifacts stolen from the ancient Benin Kingdom and other ancient kingdoms in Nigeria still remain in the realm of planning. Soft power as a component of the sub-structure of Nigeria's economy cannot blossom without a conscious and deliberate support from the super-structure. Presently, there are no deliberate efforts by way of policies, both at the national and sub-national government levels, to prioritize the development of soft power. Another challenge to Nigeria's deployment of soft power is in the poor perception of its human rights records. Political values have been identified as drivers for enhancing the soft power potential of a nation; and, it is a known fact that the international community generally frowns at abuses of human rights and, in most cases, discourages business relations with countries

that post poor human rights records. The 2019 Human Rights Watch Report scored Nigeria low on Human Rights records. The report identified abduction, kidnapping, banditry, extra-judicial killings, police brutality, killer herdsmen/farmer's clashes as examples of human rights abuses in Nigeria. The report also scored the human rights records of the Nigerian security forces low; and, it highlighted police crackdown of innocent and unarmed protesters by excessive force, disobedience of the orders of the courts by government, killing of over 42 unarmed protesters by soldiers in Abuja and several other cases of human rights abuse (Human Rights Watch Report, 2019). The Nigerian government in a reaction to massive protests by youths across the country disbanded the Federal Special Anti-Robbery Squad (FSARS) that has over the years engaged in the abuse of the fundamental human rights of the youths nationwide (Paquette, 2020).

Although Nigeria has experience of over twenty years of unbroken democratic governance, its democratic credentials are not comparable to what obtains in some of the developed democratic countries. According to Tella (2019), Nigeria has a democratic deficit; and, its scorecard in critical areas of assessment like Democracy Index, the Freedom House, the Mo Ibrahim Governance Index and Transparency International Corruption perception is far from what is expected of the most populous country in Africa. Nigeria's electoral processes have since 1999 been bedeviled by irregularities including ballot box snatching, deliberate re-writing of election results, "re-

tail rigging" (vote buying) and outright electoral violence. The 2015 and 2019 general elections in Nigeria witnessed electoral violence and other forms of electoral malpractices. The political class in Nigeria changed the methods of their electoral malpractices to massive retail rigging or vote buying to beat the strategies put in place by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to stem out electoral malpractice. Onyeji (2020) reports that the Edo off season elections held on September 19, 2020 experienced massive retail rigging by the two major contesting parties. Referencing the report of the Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth and Advancement (YIAGA), a non-governmental organization that monitored the election, Onyeji (2020) posits that the exercise was marred by cases of electoral violence, shooting, ballot box snatching, disruption of voting in some polling units, intimidation, harassment of election observers and massive vote buying. The Ondo State elections that was held on the October 10, 2020 was also marred by electoral violence and massive vote buying. The democratic credentials of Nigeria, especially its electoral processes, remains a minus for the image of the country. Poor democratic image, obviously cannot support the development of a country's soft power.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article has argued that the utilisation of soft power in international relations comes with varying challenges and that a state must not only strive to neutralise these challenges

to its soft power but must consciously work towards enhancing it. Also, the article has indicated that a country's domestic policy, the image it projects abroad, and how well dissidents' views are addressed can have an impact on its soft power. Nigeria, despite being a democracy with regular elections, has seen its soft power potential challenged. The article has stated that cases of human rights abuses, extra judicial killings, lack of an enabling environment for the private sector to thrive, non-adherence to the rule of law and court decisions and so on, have seriously affected Nigeria global image even within its sub-continent (Tella, 2018). However, Nigeria has the capacity to effectively influence decisions with far-reaching regional impact. How this is done solely depend on how she neutralises the many impediments that limits her soft power capability.

The article recommends that the *"Nigeria First"* foreign policy direction of the national government should be skewed to attract foreign investors to partner with local counterparts. This is with a view to attract adequate investments in the development of Nigeria's soft power potential. The Nigeria national assembly is, therefore, encouraged to make laws that are investor-friendly to attract investments in the soft power sectors like sports (football), development of tourist's sites that abound in the country, encourage the sponsorship of Benin Arts, Benin *"Igwe"* festival, the *"Argungun"* festival among many others. *Developing Nigerian football, arts and festivals for the international market will drive the actualization of some of Nigeria's soft power potential. These various industries should be financially empowered by government. As Tella (2019) advises, industries like Nollywood, need to "reinvent"* themselves in order to shape, not just the perception of its African audience, but also that of the world. They can do this more effectively with government support. Also, the national and sub-national governments should confront the security challenges head-on to create an enabling environments for investment in the soft power sectors. The Nigeria legislatures, national and sub-national governments and departments should also amend the relevant laws purposively in order to enable increased private sector participation in the provision of public infrastructure to mitigate the country's infrastructure deficit and to usher a pragmatic policy for the development of soft power for the country. Lastly, government and the various law enforcement agencies should take steps to arrest and prosecute those involved in electoral infractions as there are laws in the statutes penalising electoral offenses.

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