

Political Season of Letter-Writing, Nigerians' Disenchantment and President Buhari's Re-Election Agenda

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Abstract: Ahead of the 2019 general elections, two former heads of state have once again set the Nigerian polity agog with their open unexpectedly critical letters to President Muhammadu Buhari highlighting his government's shortcomings. They called for a third force to replace the two apparently effete dominant political parties in the country -- the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressive Congress (APC). Focusing on the widespread disenchantment with the Buhari administration, this essay examines the contents of the letters, the writers' motives, and the implications of such open confrontation for the political realignment among electoral gladiators preparatory to the 2019 elections.

Keywords: Politics, Re-Election, Letter-Writing, Ruling Class.

1. INTRODUCTION

President Buhari was given tremendous leeway and was lauded across the world upon assuming office. Many observers – and even those in the human rights community – were willing to give him the benefit of the doubt, desperately wanting to believe his claim of being a “born again democrat” (Smith, 2016). On assumption office in May 2015, Muhammadu Buhari faced the daunting tasks of living up to exceedingly high international expectations and meeting the needs of a nation that was clearly yearning for change. Indeed, one would be hard-pressed to recall an African head of state that came to office with more pressure, but also with as much as the amount of goodwill that President Buhari immediately assumed after his predecessor, Goodluck Jonathan, conceded power. Buhari's main selling points were his stated commitment to ethical leadership, fairness and consolidation of democracy.

However, as the nation moves towards another season of partisan contestation, the public mood is once again being gradually goaded into the expectation of change. This is happening precisely because the consequence of their choice in the last contest has disappointed a substantial and vocal proportion of the electorate (Barrett, 2018). Widespread disenchantment has once more generated the populist urge for change. It is this reality that those who are pushing the agenda of change for the President's attention are probably hoping this will influence the outcome of the next contest for choosing a national leader. But in a space of two weeks, two former heads of state – Olusegun Obasanjo and Ibrahim Babangida – made major interventions on the state of the nation. Focusing on the widespread disenchantment with the Buhari administration, this essay examines the contents of the letters, the writers' motives, and the implications of such open confrontation for the political realignment among electoral gladiators preparatory to the 2019 elections.

2. THE CRUX OF THE MATTER: WHAT TRIGGERED DISCONTENTMENT IN THE POLITY

The emergence of President Buhari and his party, as alluded to above, poured in high hopes and expectations from Nigerians, considering the huge promises which the APC and its presidential flag bearer made during the campaigns. These promises embodied some radical actions poised to make far-reaching changes in the country's polity. The main policy thrust of the administration consists in a re-invigorated and sustained fight against insurgency; declaration of total

war against corruption; and poverty reduction through job creation (New Telegraph, 2016). In other words, President Buhari came to office on the wave of a “massive popularity that seems to be built on his almost mythical renown for incorruptibility, steadfastness and wilfulness” (Jeyifo, 2018). However, there have been mixed reactions on whether the administration has made any significant difference in these areas. Some critics have even questioned the mental and physical capacity of the President.

For instance, as anger and disenchantment build over his inaction, “political insiders have questioned Buhari’s willingness, or ability, to keep the top job after he spent much of the past year in Britain being treated for an undisclosed ailment that left him visibly weakened” (Onuah, 2018). There have been increasing criticisms of the government’s response to the economic crisis that has caused increase in prices, pay cuts and owed salaries, job losses and growing unemployment. While some have rated Buhari fairly well, others think he has been abysmal and that his ‘body language’ (a term which was generously employed in a variety of situations during the last administration) does not support the much touted change which he promised (Adu, n.d) given the level of disillusionment in the polity three years after.

Unabatedly now, a spate of kidnappings for ransom has plagued some parts of the country. Also, the warped structure of the Nigerian state is not only holding down the country in terms of development but is also fuelling agitation for self-determination in different parts of the country, essentially by some of the president’s political opponents. In its editorial, The Punch (2018) sums up the Nigerian precarious situation thus: “The society has become crime-infested; kidnapping has become the country’s fastest growing and most profitable business; banditry has grown also and armed gangs hold sway in parts of many cities across the country”. Indeed, the year 2018 started on a sore note following a spate of violence that took the lives of several citizens in different theatres across the country (This Day, 2018). The slowness, the unpreparedness and the clumsiness with which Buhari himself, his administration and the security agencies responded to these killings left most Nigerians stunned and fearful of the forebodings thrown up by these spectral massacres (Jeyifo, 2018). More worrisome is the fact that the culture of impunity in the polity persists because the relevant security agencies have not succeeded in apprehending the entrepreneurs of violence so as to bring them to justice. Suffice to say that a criminal justice system that is inefficient, inadequate, corrupt, infrastructural deficient, under-financed, undermanned and prone to abuse such as the present Nigerian criminal justice system is a threat to the rule of law and all other indices of democracy and good governance.

There can be no doubt that the old Boko Haram sect is weakened, disoriented and factionalised. But this has led to the emergence of a splinter group that appears to be far more sophisticated, more focused, more ideologically driven and hence, far more dangerous than the savage bloodthirsty sect led by Abubakar Shekau and his crazed cohorts (Alamu, 2018). Similarly, the degrading of the Boko Haram terrorist insurgency has given way to Fulani-herdsmen terrorism, whose handling has exposed Buhari’s glaring leadership deficit (The Punch, 2018). It appears the pace with which the government is going is too slow for Nigerians particularly the matter of security which has been exacerbated by Fulani herdsmen’s attacks on farmers in many parts of the country (Adegbite, 2018).

Today, Nigeria is arguably the only country in the world which in this 21st century, has to contend with marauding cattle herders at all, not to talk of persistent acts of murders, kidnapping, rape and destruction of farmlands in the supposed name of grazing and defending herds of animals. The incessant attacks in Benue State (particularly, in January 2018) and other parts of the country show that the government places no premium on the lives of its citizens. And, as is often the case in attacks of this nature across the length and breadth of the country, especially those concerning the Fulani herdsmen, the victims suddenly realise their vulnerability – they cannot be protected by the Nigerian state.

3. WHEN LETTERS BEGAN TO MAKE WAVES

The publication of a number of opinions aimed at drawing the President’s attention to anomalies and aberrations of prevailing conditions in the land became a shrill torrent of near abuse. This perception of the climate of public opinion was exacerbated by the utterances of some senior political figures, who set the tone of the national conversation (Barrett, 2018). Thus, ahead of the 2019 general elections, former President Olusegun Obasanjo once again set the Nigerian polity agog with his unexpectedly critical open letter to President Muhammadu Buhari (Odufowokan, 2018) highlighting the government’s shortcomings and the need for a third force to replace the already tested two dominant political parties in the country, that is PDP and APC. This is predicated on the lingering disenchantment with the government and the dwindling popularity rating of the Buhari administration. His letter came some months after a key member of the Buhari

political family and Governor of Kaduna State, Mallam Nasir El-rufai, had written his, suggesting that the government had failed the people and unable to deliver both the change it promised and the leadership that was to come naturally. The president who enjoyed massive support from Nigerians in 2015 and rode to power on the goodwill of the populace who were fed up with the sixteen years of mis-governance by the then ruling Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) now faces the challenges of declining political influence and competitive advantages of opponents in his aspirations to lead Nigeria for another term.

First to fire the salvo against the president's plan to seek re-election was Rev. Fr. Ejike Mbaka, fiery preacher and Spiritual Director of Adoration Ministries, Enugu (AMEN). At the 2017 cross-over night of his ministry at its Adoration Ground, he advised President Buhari not to run for a second term and also called on Northerners to seek suitable replacement for him in 2019 (Akinsuyi, 2018). Mbaka, in his New Year message, posited that the hardship experienced by Nigerians in 2017 was man-made and not an act of God, suggesting that unless President Buhari changes his team, the cabal will drag him into the mud: "Unless President Buhari quickly and strategically, positions the right people and changes the former ones inaugurated by him, the wind of change that he inaugurated will end his regime" (Vanguard, 2018). Earlier, Mbaka (cited in Premium Times, 2016), had accused President Muhammadu Buhari of focusing more on fighting corruption than responding to an economic emergency that had left many families struggling or unable to feed.

But as the groundswell of criticism against President Buhari increases, Olusegun Obasanjo, in a special press statement issued in January 2018, titled "The Way Out: A Clarion Call for Coalition for Nigerian Movement", opined that the man whose election he supported has failed (Bakare, 2018). Obasanjo, said Buhari has performed far below expectations and should honourably "dismount from the horse" to join the league of the country's former leaders whose "experience, influence, wisdom and outreach can be deployed on the sideline for the good of the country" (Ogbonnikan, 2018). In summary, Obasanjo accuses President Buhari of demonstrating three major weaknesses. The three are 'nepotistic deployment', a coded term for the president's indefensible and appalling lopsided appointment of security chiefs from his own part of the country; a 'poor understanding of the dynamics of internal politics' that has produced division and inequality; and his grating buck-passing that sees him avoiding responsibility for unpleasant happenings (Akinlotan, 2018). Obasanjo berated Buhari for allowing the clashes between herdsmen and farmers to go "sour" and messy, submitting that the endorsement of the President by some governors to seek re-election barely 24 hours after 73 people who were killed by herdsmen in Benue State were given mass burial was "a sad symptom of insensitivity and callousness" (Ibekwe, 2018).

Obasanjo's statement includes a guiding thesis, analysis of data at his disposal, and a conclusion that also serves as recommendation or call to action. His overall thesis is poor governance arising from inadequate leadership skills (Sekoni, 2018:18): "I believe the situation we are in today is akin to what and where we were at the beginning of this democratic dispensation in 1999. The nation was tottering. People became hopeless and saw no bright future in the horizon. It was all a dark cloud politically, economically, and socially." In the final section of his statement, Obasanjo calls for formation of Coalition for Nigeria (CN) to take Nigeria out of Egypt to the other side of River Jordan, i.e. from enslavement to freedom and from poverty to prosperity: "CN must be a movement to break new ground in building a united county, a socially-cohesive and moderately prosperous society with equity, equality of opportunity, justice and a dynamic and progressive economy that is self-reliant and takes active part in global division of labour and international decision-making" (ibid).

Barely two weeks after a similar advice, ex-Military President, Ibrahim Babangida asked President Muhammadu Buhari not to seek re-election in 2019. He urged Buhari to complete his first term and allow a new generation of leaders to take control of the affairs of the nation (Alli, 2018). In a press statement released by Kassim Afegbua, his spokesman, Babangida said it was time to sacrifice "personal ambition" for the "national interest" (Sahara Reporters, 2018). Babangida's controversial letter – "Towards a National Rebirth," touched the same raw nerve. He argued that Buhari had failed to weld a fragile country together and he should pave the way for a "new breed" of young leaders in 2019 (The Punch, 2018). The statement also describes the president as an analogue leader unsuited for modern intricacies and challenges; and blames him for allowing bloody clashes to fester everywhere in the country, for sticking to an unproductively reactive style of leadership, and for lacking in capacity, both intellectually and idiosyncratically, to manage people and crises (Akinlotan, 2018). Babangida, who overthrew Buhari in 1985 and ruled till 1993, said:

I am alarmed by the amount of blood-letting across the land. Nigeria is now being described as a land where blood flows like river, where tears have refused to dry up. Almost on a daily basis, we are both mourning and grieving, and often times left helpless by the sophistication of crimes (Daily Post, 2018)...In the fullness of our present realities, we need to cooperate with President Muhammadu Buhari to complete his term of office on May 29th, 2019 and collectively prepare the way for new generation leaders to assume the mantle of leadership of the country... The next election in 2019 therefore, presents us a unique opportunity to reinvent the will and provoke fresh leadership that would immediately begin the process of healing the wounds in the land and ensuring that the wishes and aspirations of the people are realized in building and sustaining national cohesion and consensus (Sahara Reporters, 2018).

Interrogating the motives behind the letter-writing adventure and its timing may reveal some things about the writers. While several issues raised in the letters cannot be faulted because they are issues agitating the minds of Nigerian masses which had been discussed loudly at personal levels and on social media, and in hushed tones among the political elite, there are concerns that it may not be an entirely altruistic intervention by the former presidents (Adedjoja and Olaleye, 2018). Put differently, while Babangida and Obasanjo bear an important message, which is the ineptitude, divisiveness and sectionalism that the Buhari government represents, their motives may not altogether be public-spirited. For instance, since 2007 Obasanjo has made himself the moral arbiter of successive administrations after his failed attempt at securing a third term. Obasanjo, who led Africa's most populous country from 1999 to 2007, supported Buhari's ascension to the country's top post and has previously defended his performance.

Those who appear to side with the government of the day disagree with the letter, whether in terms of its timing, content or intention. These people hold the view that Obasanjo carries with him a huge moral burden and cannot in good conscience offer such advice to a man with supposedly 'better moral standing' (Adedjoja and Olaleye, 2018). For every regime, Obasanjo has always wanted to ride on the crest of public disenchantment with governments to win popular adulation. However, his qualities as a man and leader, according to Akinlotan (2018), may not be inspiring, but he paradoxically inspires the country when he offers himself as the opportunistic champion of the country against bad and incompetent leaders. Analysing the content of his letter, Alamu (2018) affirms that:

It is noteworthy that in all his past sorties against evil governance, only once did General Obasanjo ascribe the problem facing the country to clannishness and nepotism. This was in a famous Faculty Lecture at the University of Ibadan in June 1985 which also doubled as a coded red card for the Buhari military regime... Thirty three years after, history seems to be repeating itself, and both times as epic tragedies: in the same man and even as a returning head of state, patent patriotism is trumped by the perversely primordial.

There is something depressingly drab and predictable about the interventions from the "military wing" of the Nigerian cabal (The Punch, 2018). Manipulation is their permanent vocation, their all consuming passion. The oppressive and corruption-riddled regime of Babangida exemplified this in the eight years he ruled as dictator. His convoluted, dishonest political transition programme ended in the criminal annulment of the June 12, 1993 elections, alienation of a generation of seasoned political actors and enthronement of a worse military dictatorship (ibid). Nigerians will recall the way and manner General Babangida hurriedly shoved aside the administration of Major General Muhammadu Buhari in just about 20 months of massive anti-corruption shake-up between 1984 and 1985 when Buhari was a Military Head of State, in what was meant to affect Babangida himself, who as the Army Chief of Staff was accused of many corrupt practices. That Babangida has joined Chief Olusegun Obasanjo in this letter writing exercise designed to impugn upon President Buhari's integrity is therefore understandable (Odeyemi, 2018). For Babangida, as observed by Abati (cited in Andah, 2018) the controversy, the confusion- attended by seeming cowardice, that grew around his statement, which could have strengthened an emerging symphony of public thought, made the intervention to end up as mere spittle.

The letter-writing season also depicts some fundamentals about the Nigerian political culture and its emerging leaders in a democratic polity. As aptly canvassed by Pearse Doherty (2017), political culture will change only when politics changes – "for far too long, the state has been governed in the interest of the few. The disadvantaged and vulnerable have, at best, seen a blind eye turned towards their needs". Nigerians, since political independence, have been governed by mostly circumstantial/accidental leaders whose knowledge of governance and visions for a great country were substantially limited and often tangential to aspirations for collective/corporate progress. Having desired a fundamental departure from

then subsisting, perhaps even impugned, system, or so it seemed, Nigerians in their millions saw in the 2015 elections, the opportunity to change a 'fantastically corrupt' government and the party that had ruled for sixteen years! The same scenario seems to be playing out preparatory to the 2019 general election as many Nigerians are already aligning with the opinions expressed (a sort of agenda-setting) in the letters of these political gladiators -with covert or overt interest in who becomes the next president, more so that many of the voters are always swayed by emotions and sentiments along the country's fault lines. The political gladiators quite know this!

Although Schumpeter's position that democracy is meaningful only when a society is able to accept or reject the people who want to govern it manifested in the 2015 general elections, it appears now, by way of introspection, that the All Progressive Congress (APC) and its then presidential aspirant may have underestimated the enormity of the polity's governance crisis being inherited from past administrations. As Keboitse Machangana (cited in Tshipa, 2014) rightly opined, democracy "is not just about the opportunity to cast a vote every five years or every four years, but rather people expect a lot out of democracy".

It must be stated however, that the contents of the letters have a realistic bearing on the state of the nation and the Buhari administration as alluded to in section two of this essay. Further explanation on one or two issues will confirm this. As observed in the Punch Editorial (2018) "while he received massive support from across the country to become President, he is by his appointments, presenting himself as a parochial, sectional leader". Thus, talking about clannishness, it is visible that president Buhari's appointment favoured his Hausa/Fulani kinsmen to the detriment of other sections of the country. More importantly, the South-East and South-South zones that voted massively against Buhari, seem to bear the brunt of his lopsided appointments.

For instance, the composition of the entire Security Council is made up of Fulani, and the only person in their midst is the Chief of Defence Staff, a Yoruba man, who does not command any troops (Nzeshi and Adegoye, 2018). All cabinet rank appointments including the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Chief of Staff, the National Security Adviser, DG-NIA, DG- Department of DSS, are all Northerners (Sobowale, 2018). Also, the Chief of Army Staff, the Chief of Air staff, the Inspector General of Police, the Comptroller-general of immigration, the Comptroller-general of Prisons, the Comptroller-general of Nigeria Civil Defence, the EFCC Chairman, INEC Chairman and Defence Minister are from the north.

What therefore, becomes more worrisome is the popular insinuation that the Buhari presidency has been hijacked by a Fulani cabal. Thus, the picture that emerges currently in the eyes of the informed public is that there is an unelected shadow government at the heart of the popularly elected government of president Buhari. Mrs. Aisha Buhari had, in an interview with the BBC Hausa Service (2016), alleged that her husband's administration had been hijacked, adding that he needed to re-jig his cabinet for her to campaign for his re-election in 2019. Aisha was quoted in the interview as saying that the husband did not know 45 out of 50 people in his cabinet. She warned that if things continued the way they were, she might not go out in 2019 asking women to vote for him again. Aisha had further suggested that the government having been hijacked by only a "few people", those who worked for the success of the APC in the last general election had been sidelined. Mrs. Buhari's decision to go public with her concerns may shock many people, but it shows the level of discontent with the president's leadership.

Aisha Buhari is not the first highly placed Nigerian to have raised the alarm over the activities of a cabal that has hijacked the president and are calling the shots in the country. The Senate president, who is officially the number three man in this country, raised such an alarm. Asiwaju Bola Tinubu, whose contributions to the making of this presidency cannot be wished away, also recently implied such, and there could be so many muted complaints from highly placed quarters indicating such (Onwuasoanya, 2016). One name that has been repeatedly mentioned as having a strong influence in Mr. Buhari's appointments is his cousin, Mamman Daura. He holds no official position, but he is believed to be the most powerful man in the presidency, and he is said to have Buhari's ears. Aisha and some members of the APC are also believed to be frustrated with the influence of Abba Kyari, who is the president's chief of staff (Hassan and Abubakar, 2016). Apparently in a dilemma of who to trust against the background of reports that certain individuals in his government have been working to undermine his efforts, and frustrate the fight against corruption, President Buhari seems to rely more on his informal circle of associates to run government, a development which seems to pitch the few technocrats around him against his informal counsellors (Adegbe, 2016).

4. THE UNUSUAL GOVERNMENT'S SUBTLE RESPONSE AND OTHER CONJECTURES TOWARDS 2019

Unlike other scandals of this government in which presidential spokesmen sometimes issue conflicting statements in a haphazard manner, this time there was a studied silence from every mouthpiece of the government. In fact, not even the spokesman of the ruling party, Bolaji Abdullahi, offered a comment when he was approached. The response to the Obasanjo statement was delegated and conveyed through the minister of information. Also, it was done in a gentle manner, deliberately ignoring some of Obasanjo's harsh rhetoric. When Obasanjo wrote a similar letter to former president Goodluck Jonathan in December 2013, Jonathan made the ill-advised mistake of responding to Obasanjo himself, in an open letter, with a tone that was harsh, defensive and angry. That only succeeded in adding fuel to the fire. Buhari did not fall into that trap.

The Federal Government, in its reaction to Obasanjo's statement, articulated by the Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism, Lai Mohammed, nevertheless, welcomed Obasanjo's comments as not ill-motivated. So he focused more on the economy in his response. In its conclusion, after countering Obasanjo with its own facts of the achievements, government thanked the former president for finding time out of his busy schedule to pen such a long letter, adding that it was sure his intervention was genuine and patriotic. In challenging the assertions of incompetence and dereliction of duty as opined by Obasanjo in his statement, Mohammed said:

On whether or not President Muhammadu Buhari should run for another term, it is true that many Nigerians have been calling on the President to run again, while others are opposed to his return. However, we believe this issue is a distraction for the President at this time. This is because Mr. President spends every waking hour tackling the enormous challenges facing the nation, most of which were bequeathed to his Administration by successive past Administrations. He is committed to fulfilling the mandate given to him by Nigerians in 2015. And that's where we are right now! (Daniel & Agbakwuru, 2018).

Following the exchange between the two camps and the divided opinions trailing the development, many Nigerians recalled a similar open letter from Obasanjo to the then President Jonathan, during the run up to the 2015 presidential election. An apparently angry Obasanjo, in what many described as one of the most acerbic letters in modern history, had accused Jonathan of ineptitude and of taking actions calculated at destroying Nigeria (Odufowokan, 2018). But while Buhari in 2015 rode a wave of resentment against Jonathan over "an economy in tatters, with all buffers depleted, infrastructure dilapidated, mounting foreign and domestic debts, institutions and governance processes devalued" (The Punch, 2018), endemic government corruption and a failure to defeat the Islamist Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast, much of public opinion has now turned against Nigeria's incumbent leader (Onuah, 2018). To worsen the situation and people's discontentment, "governance in many of the 36 states is in a state of ridicule and the leaders in those states are nothing more than a dent on the armour of democracy" (The Guardian, 2018).

With the gradual loss of confidence in the political party system and the difficulties, which the President Muhammadu Buhari's administration is facing in moving the country out of its current socio-economic challenges in the last three years despite its campaign promises, some stakeholders are of the view that the much anticipated restructuring of the governance system might become the determining factor of who becomes the next president in 2019 (Olumide, 2017). The desired change, as advocated in many quarters (See Ogbonnia, 2018), starts with practice of internal party democracy within the two major parties. A true change must embrace a new breed of leaders, particularly the youths, who have the zeal and the competencies to cope with the demands of the 21st century.

Concerns about the president's health had, in 2017 prompted early speculation about the ticket for his party, the All Progressive Congress, in a presidential election set for 2019. In Nigeria, informal agreements call for the presidency to alternate after two terms between a candidate from the predominantly Muslim north and one from the Christian south (Searcey and Iyare, 2017). Although, as at the time of writing this essay in March 2018, Buhari has not publicly said he would be seeking re-election, there are speculations that governors from his ruling All Progressives Congress have asked him to. Curiously however, in a departure from the last election circle, i.e. 2015, when during the same corresponding time, the polity was already abuzz with seismic realignments as manifested in *new PDP* and APC mergers, posturing, and cross-fire barbs by political actors, there seemed to be some graveyard peace (Amadi, 2018) until the letters began to make waves.

Even though Nigerians are sentimental about their multi-ethno linguistic and multi-religious configuration, history has shown that they can be united over a genuine national cause (The Guardian, 2018). In its editorial, The Punch (2018) contends that: “This is the time to do away with a political class of schemers altogether. Henceforth, choices of elected leaders should be theirs (Nigerians), not of a cabal. For so long, some expired rulers have also deployed religion and ethnicity to manipulate the people. But it is the people that make the difference through the choices they make via the ballot box in other countries”. It is strongly advocated that President Buhari has to rebuild trust in Nigerians whom he has alienated with blatant ethnic chauvinism that renders his inauguration day “I belong to everybody and belong to nobody” pledge hollow (The Punch, 2018).

Thus, while strengthening security instruments, more thought and effort should be invested in improving institutions, especially those of government and generating better policy outcomes (Joseph, 2016). Nigeria must move to the forefront in the region, in the continent, and globally in interwoven ways: building effective state institutions, advancing democracy, and democratizing development (Joseph, 2016). President Buhari should restructure his team, instil balance in the administration, inject new ideas into his government and flush out the incompetent and tainted aides to make way for performers from all over the country. He should implement economic reforms to boost productivity and competition. It is understandable, as posited by Adu (n.d) that in a country bedevilled by a plethora of maladies of varying forms and sizes needing urgent attention, the masses will scarcely have the luxury for a pussyfooting and prevaricating leader, much less the patience of one who promised change and gave the impression that the same would be more or less a transmogrification.

Worried by what they described as the total failure of the All Progressives Congress-led Federal Government to offer good governance, a host of opposition political parties, in February 2018, declared their readiness to stop APC and President Muhammadu Buhari at the 2019 elections. To realise the objective, some of them have started moves to consummate what they describe as ‘‘a rainbow coalition’’ that will field or back a joint candidate against the APC in 2019 (Ndujihe, Umoru and Yakubu, 2018). However, the ruling party’s number one concern will be Buhari’s capacity to do another term. It is not likely anyone in the leadership would dare to suggest a replacement for a serving president. But it is that same inertia that will ignite dispersals in the party. Already, there are cracks everywhere in the party, arising mainly from the president’s experiential deficit in managing large political holdings (Williams, 2017).

5. CONCLUSION

The possibility of the letters changing the course of the 2019 equation remains in the realm of conjecture. It is a possibility that could swing either way. It would be delusional, however, to pretend that the letter has not unsettled things for the ruling party and government (Adedoja and Olaleye, 2018). President Buhari may have played into the hands of the two former heads of state because of his lack of quick action and snail-like approach to decision making (Oladesu, 2018), but Nigerians must be careful to constrict those interventions. The self-appointed prefects may offer their perspectives on any subject, including putting pressure on incompetent leaders to vacate office, but they must never be allowed to immerse themselves, as they seem eager to do, in producing the next president. Their track records do not bear out their altruism (Akinlotan, 2018).

For now, it is clear that the two letters “would not be enough to galvanise an anti-Buhari hysteria nor trigger the political avalanche needed to destroy the dominance of Nigeria’s informal two-party system... and never going to measure high enough on the Richter scale to damage the reputation of the president among his trusting and unquestioning supporters in parts of the North” (Ade-Adeleye, 2018) and a negligible part of the South’s three geo-political zones. However, as posited by Barrett (2018), public commentary is a vital element in the establishment of political credibility for those who participate in governance, as representatives of the people’s will. While critical open letters, which are purported to be advisory epistles to such leaders, are often regarded as being meant not for the leader so much as for the disenchanted follower, the medium is an effective tool for both encouraging and defining strategic change as a truly transformational aspect of governance.

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