

An Assessment of Nigeria's Role in the African Union Under Buhari's Administration (2015-2023)

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Abstract: *This study evaluates Nigeria's role within the African Union (AU) during President Muhammadu Buhari's tenure, spanning from 2015 to 2023. The objectives of the study are to examine the role of Nigeria in the formation of the African Union in 1963; and to examine the extent to which Nigeria contributed to the agenda of the African Union under Buhari's administration. The investigation employs a research design of a qualitative nature. The analysis of the interviews and documents was conducted through tabular analysis, whereby the identification of themes for the interviews conducted with the stakeholders was carried out to accomplish the objectives of the investigation. The study reveals that Nigeria made significant contributions to the implementation of the African Union's agenda during President Buhari's administration from 2015 to 2023 and achieved noteworthy accomplishments within the organization's framework. This indicates Nigeria's commitment and dedication to advancing the goals and objectives of the OAU/AU demonstrating that, despite the numerous internal challenges faced by Nigeria, it effectively participated in and contributed to the efforts of the African Union. The study strongly recommends that Nigeria should cooperate with AU member countries to coordinate efforts in the battle against Boko Haram. The government should prioritize the implementation and enforcement of transparent and accountable governance practices to effectively combat corruption at all levels.*

Keywords: *Government, African Union.*

1. Introduction

Nigeria has consistently emphasized the significance of Africa in its foreign policy agenda, regardless of whether its leaders were in military or civilian attire since gaining independence from British colonial rule in 1960. The country made substantial allocations of diplomatic and financial resources to advance its anti-colonial policy in Africa and played a pivotal role in the eradication of colonialism in the 1960s and apartheid in 1994 on the continent. These significant milestones in Africa's history not only exemplify Nigeria's active involvement in shaping the continent's trajectory but also highlight its commitment to fostering unity and cooperation among African nations. It ultimately led to the establishment of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 and the subsequent formation of the African Union in 2001. During the 4th Extraordinary Summit, which took place in Sirte, Libya, on September 9, 1999, the Heads of State and Governments of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) engaged in extensive and comprehensive discussions regarding the strategies that could be implemented to strengthen and enhance the effectiveness of the continental organization. The primary objective of these discussions was to ensure that the OAU remained relevant and responsive to the ever-evolving political, economic, and social developments occurring both within and beyond the African continent.

Additionally, the discussions aimed to expedite the implementation of the Abuja Treaty, a pivotal agreement that sought to transform the OAU into a more outcome-oriented entity. Nigeria, a key player in the African political landscape, played a pivotal and indispensable role in the sequence of events that eventually culminated in the historic transformation of the OAU into the African Union (AU) in the year 2001. The establishment of the AU in 2001 marked a significant milestone in the history of Africa, as it represented a momentous departure from its predecessor, the OAU. Furthermore, the establishment of the AU heralded a new era of transformative and sweeping changes across various spheres of African life, encompassing politics, economics, and social dynamics. This profound shift in the African political landscape ushered in an era of increased cooperation, integration, and collective action among African nations, thereby setting the stage for a brighter and more prosperous future for the continent.

Upon assuming office in 2015, President Buhari was confronted with an array of internal challenges that posed significant obstacles to Nigeria's progress and development. These challenges encompassed various aspects, including a faltering economy, the pervasive and detrimental influence of corruption, the pressing security concerns stemming from the Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East region, Niger Delta militancy, and the recurring communal conflicts that threatened stability and cohesion within the nation. The multifaceted nature of these challenges, their far-reaching implications, and their potential impact on President Buhari's administration capacity and priorities within the AU have sparked considerable interest and scrutiny among scholars and analysts alike, prompting a comprehensive examination of Nigeria's role within the AU under President Muhammadu Buhari's leadership spanning from 2015 to 2023.

Thus, this study aims to delve deeply into and meticulously analyze the intricate dynamics of Nigeria's engagement with the AU during President Buhari's tenure, shedding light on the multifarious factors that shape and influence the nation's involvement in the continental organization. By thoroughly scrutinizing the interplay between Nigeria's domestic realities and its role within the AU, this study provides a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between Nigeria and the continental organization, unraveling the intricate threads that connect the nation's internal dynamics with its external commitments and responsibilities.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine Nigeria's role in the African Union (AU) under President Muhammadu Buhari's administration from 2015 to 2023. However the specific objectives are to:

- (i) investigate Nigeria's role in the formation of the African Union in 1963
- (ii) examine Nigeria's contribution to the agenda of the African Union under Buhari's Administration

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions

- (i) Did Nigeria play any role in the formation of the African Union in 1963?
- (ii) Has Nigeria contribute to the agenda of the African Union under Buhari's administration?

Propositions of the Study

This study is guided by the following propositions:

- (i) There has been Nigeria's role in the formation of the African Union in 1963
- (ii) Nigeria has contribution to the agenda of the African Union under Buhari's Administration

2. Literature Review

President Buhari's approach to continental issues from 2015 to 2023 has implications for the AU's direction because of the internal challenges Nigeria faced during his administration, including economic struggles and security concerns, such as the Boko Haram insurgency (Haruna, 2020; Asante, 2019). These challenges influenced Nigeria's approach to the AU, as the government sought support for its domestic priorities (Maiwada, Ahmed, and Bizi, 2018). According to Emefie and Chidiebere (2019), Muhammadu Buhari's administration, which began in May 2015 placed a high level of importance on the aspect of security, particularly in addressing the grave threat of terrorism that was posed by the notorious extremist group known as Boko Haram in the northeastern region of Nigeria. This unwavering focus on national security had far-reaching implications for Nigeria's foreign policy under the leadership of President Buhari, as he actively sought regional and international support to effectively combat the menace of terrorism and insurgency that the nation was grappling with. Moreover, it is crucial to note that the prioritization of security by Buhari's administration was not the sole area of emphasis in their governance strategy. Another significant aspect that they vigorously pursued was the implementation of an anti-corruption campaign, both within the confines of their domestic jurisdiction and on the international stage. This strong stance against corruption naturally exerted a substantial influence on Nigeria's foreign policy, as the administration sought assistance from various foreign counterparts in the noble endeavour of repatriating stolen funds and augmenting cooperation to effectively combat the heinous crime of financial corruption that was plaguing the nation.

Furthermore, President Buhari placed a notable emphasis on the concept of economic diplomacy, with the primary objective of attracting foreign investments and fostering trade, particularly in light of the prevailing economic challenges that Nigeria was facing due to the plummeting prices of oil. The administration, under his astute leadership, ardently aimed to diversify the Nigerian economy and forge stronger economic ties on the international stage, thereby mitigating the adverse effects of the economic challenges facing Nigeria.

Olutayo and Olukoya (2015) assert that despite the domestic challenges President Buhari had to cope with, his administration continued to play a significant role in AU. Nigeria's historical involvement in the AU, and the developments leading up to President Buhari's administration, demonstrate the country's commitment to African unity and cooperation (Obi, 2012). Nigeria's foreign policy in Africa has been shaped by its historical commitment to regional leadership and pan-Africanism. The country has played a significant role in the continent's political, economic, and social spheres. Nigeria's foreign policy in Africa has been characterized by its commitment to pan-Africanism and the promotion of African unity (Alemazung, Joy Asongazoh, 2009). On this, Ibeanu (2010), concludes that Nigeria's foreign policy, particularly regarding Africa has been active and consistent.

The commitment to maintaining peace and security in Africa remained a central pillar of Buhari's administration, as evidenced by their continued involvement in peacekeeping operations across the continent. This unwavering commitment was manifested through Nigeria's active contribution of troops to both AU and UN missions, thereby reinforcing its dedication to upholding peace and security throughout Africa such as peacekeeping missions and conflict resolution efforts in countries like South Sudan and Mali. Olaleye (2019) corroborates these assertions, highlighting President Buhari's proactive engagement in conflict resolution efforts on the African continent. Nigeria, under his adept leadership, played a pivotal and indispensable role in mediating conflicts, such as the crisis that unfolded in Gambia between 2016 and 2017. The military intervention and diplomatic endeavours spearheaded by Nigeria were instrumental in peacefully resolving the political crisis that had gripped the nation during that period, thereby further substantiating the administration's commitment to fostering peace and stability. ((Saliu & Oshewolo, 2018).

This assertion is corroborated by the findings of Ekeh & Ekeh (2003), who highlight Nigeria's consistent engagement in mediation roles in various conflicts, underscoring the country's leadership in diplomatic endeavours aimed at resolving disputes. Notably, Nigeria, under the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari, played a pivotal role in mediating the political crisis in Gambia from 2016 to 2017. Through skilful diplomacy and negotiation, Nigeria facilitated a peaceful transition of power, ensuring the preservation of democracy and stability in Gambia. Nigeria has been actively involved in diplomatic efforts to resolve conflicts in Sudan and South Sudan, underscoring its commitment to fostering peace and stability in these nations. By contributing to peace negotiations and engaging in dialogue with conflicting parties, Nigeria has played a significant role in mitigating tensions and promoting reconciliation in these conflict-ridden regions.

Despite the criticism voiced within Nigeria about the country's perceived "Big Brother" role in the AU agenda without tangible achievements, the recognition bestowed upon Nigeria's endeavors in combating corruption under President Buhari's stewardship represents a beacon of hope in a foreign policy that has consistently exhibited an unwavering sense of prudence and caution. This commendation has played a pivotal role in elevating the stature and prominence of the country on the global stage, providing a distinct identity for an administration that was desperately in need of one. Given its significant influence and contributions, Nigeria would be deemed a permanent member of the Security Council of the African Union (AU) if a parallel between the AU and the United Nations (UN) is drawn. The AU, similar to the UN, operates under the governance of a Commission consisting of diverse commissioners who are responsible for overseeing specific portfolios. These positions are highly sought after by countries, as they provide an opportunity to have their nationals appointed. Throughout the history of the African Union, Nigeria has consistently produced commissioners for Political Affairs, starting from its establishment in 2001 until 2017. However, in 2017, the incumbent commissioner was not reappointed, and Nigeria decided not to compete for the position. Instead, Nigeria chose to contest for the position of Commissioner for Peace and Security, but unfortunately, its bid was unsuccessful. That did not erase the respect Nigeria enjoyed in the African Union during Buhari's administration (Adeniji, 2020). The substantial involvement of Nigeria in the political landscape of the African continent can be traced back to its independence in 1960, and over time, its influence has only grown stronger.

Nigeria played a crucial role in the formation of both the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the African Union (AU), highlighting its immense dedication to advancing Africa's aspirations and serving as a generous benefactor during times of crisis. Nigeria's unwavering commitment to the development and progress of the continent is even enshrined in its constitution, which mandates an Afrocentric orientation. In this context, the administration led by President Buhari followed in the footsteps of its predecessors, demonstrating a steadfast dedication to championing Africa's interests and aspirations (De-waal, 2017).

Nigeria's influence and contributions to the AU's security council would position it as a permanent member, aligning with its historical production of commissioners for Political Affairs. The country's involvement in the political landscape of Africa dates back to its independence, and its commitment to advancing the continent's aspirations has only grown stronger over time. Nigeria's role in the formation of the OAU and the AU further underscores its dedication to Africa's development. President Buhari's administration continues to carry the torch, upholding Nigeria's commitment to championing Africa's interests (Badmus, 2017).

3. Method

The study employs a qualitative research design to investigate its chosen case study, the research design for this study in other to achieve the primary data is interview. The interview was an open ended interview, that provided a guide for members of the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the one hand and the ECOWAS Secretariat all domicile in Abuja, on Nigeria's involvement in the African Union

during the tenure of the Buhari administration spanning the years 2015 to 2023. The data that was gathered from the meticulous examination and analysis of pertinent and related documents, served as a crucial and indispensable resource to further enhance and augment the credibility and reliability of the information acquired through the personal, direct, and in-depth interviews with the participants involved, by employing the triangulation technique, which is a methodological approach widely adopted and utilized in academic research and studies, to corroborate, substantiate, or refute the assumption and assertions put forth in the research investigation.

The population of this study stem from the three areas that was used, i.e the Federal Ministry of Foreign, Affairs has 1007 population, according to Oblivion Magazine of Foreign Affairs 2021 (unpublished), African Union Office, Asokoro, has 23 population according to Union Hall Handbook, 2022 (unpublished), while ECOWAS has some populations of 58, according to ECOWAS commission handbook, 2023 unpublished by this we meant that the population is the totality of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African Union Office, and ECOWAS Secretariat all in Abuja, therefore the population is 1088. Using the Taro Yamane 1967, the sample is therefore 400. The investigation was carried out using face-to-face interviews with thirteen (13) interviewees from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and ECOWAS Secretariat, located in Abuja. All of the interviewees possessed a solid foundation and extensive knowledge regarding the subject being investigated, and they demonstrated proficiency in the English Language. Moreover, to supplement the data obtained from the in-depth interviews and effectively accomplish the objectives of the study, additional data was derived from a variety of sources including AU documents, government documents, textbooks, journals, published and unpublished works, as well as the internet sources obtained from both the University of Abuja Library and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Library in Abuja.

The method of analyzing data used in this study was through the use of tables and percentages. Under the table information from the field work was presented in various table properly labeled and numbered to report a particular outcome from the field work. However, items like variables, frequency and percentage were used as yardstick in judging a particular table in line with the proposition stated in this study, with a view of discussing the findings associated with each questions asked during the interview section.

4. Result and Data Analysis

Table 1 Reporting the answer to the question raised during interview section.

S/N	Questions	Response			Remarks
1	Did Nigeria Play any Role in the formation of African Union 1963	Yes	Fre	%	On whether Nigeria play any role in the formation of the African Union in 1963, 69.2% from the interviewee agree that Nigeria played a role.
		Yes	9	69.2	
		No	4	30.8	
		Total	13	100	
2	Has Nigeria contributed to the Agenda of African Union Under Buhari's Administration	Yes	Fre	%	Nigeria has contributed to the Agenda of African Union under the Buhari's Administration in the view of 64.5%.
		Yes	8	61.5	
		No	5	38.5	
		Total	13	100	

Before the coming of OAU now African Union there were three regional blocs that is the Casablanca group made up of Ghana, Egypt, Morocco, Guinea, Mali and Algeria. The second bloc was the Brazzaville group made up of Cameroon, Congo Brazzaville, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Niger Republic etc; the third group is the Monrovia Group this group include Nigeria, Sieria Leone, Ethiopia etc, all these group play a significant role in the coming of OAU on the 25th of May, 1963, it was OAU that metamorphosed into AU in 1992 (Tar, 2020).

Again, Nigeria has been able to make valid contributions to the AU under President Muhammadu Buhari through regional economic co-operation and the Integration of member states and singular contribution of the administration of Muhammadu Buhari between 2015 to 2023 has made it possible for the African Union to collectively build integrative infrastructures and this has help the African Union in competing with the world in this era of globalization (Ordu, 2019).

4.1 Discussion of Findings

There where two findings that was associated with this study and they are;

- i. In line with proposition one, this study find out that Nigeria play a role in the formation of OAU in May, 25, 1963 which is now AU, Nigeria through one of the blocs that is the Monrovia bloc was very instrumental for the birth of non African Union as a moderate bloc Nigeria demanded for a gradual political integration of Africa States and this was collaborated by table 5.1.6 of those interviewed.
- ii. In line with proposition two, Nigeria contributed immensely to the agenda of the AU under the Buhari's administration, the working of several economic integration and infrastructural development through the AFDB is a pointer to this fact and the evidence provide from the field survey as captured by table 5.1.6 is an evidence for this position to be taking.

4.2 Conclusion and Recommendations

The primary aim of this research endeavour is to assess the magnitude and importance of Nigeria's role within the African Union (AU) during the tenure of President Muhammadu Buhari, which spans from 2015 to 2023. Nigeria's approach to foreign policy within the African continent has been profoundly influenced by its historical commitment to regional leadership and the ideological tenets of pan-Africanism. The nation has played a momentous and multifaceted role within the political, economic, and social realms of the African continent. Nigeria's foreign policy in Africa has been distinctly characterized by an unwavering dedication to the principles of pan-Africanism and the relentless promotion of African unity. Nigeria has consistently and actively participated in peacekeeping missions and conflict resolution endeavours across various African nations. Its substantial contributions to peacekeeping missions in countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Sudan have been instrumental in fostering stability and tranquility within these regions (Oyewumi, 2013).

Given the identified challenges that are affecting Nigeria's engagement in the African Union (AU) during the administration of President Buhari, it is therefore recommended that for Nigeria to maintain its leadership position within the AU and derive maximum benefits from the organization:

- (1) The government should enhance the capabilities of the military and law enforcement agencies to effectively combat Boko Haram and other extremist groups, Nigeria should collaborate with AU member countries and international partners to share intelligence and coordinate efforts in the fight against terrorism and the defeat of Boko Haram.
- (2) The government should decrease its reliance on oil exports by diversifying the economy into sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and technology, to promote sustainable economic growth.

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