

Governance, social stability, and unionism in Nigeria: An analysis of the Buhari and Tinubu administrations

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Abstract

This paper reconnoiters governance, social stability, and unionism in Nigeria, with a focus on the administrations of Presidents Muhammadu Buhari and Bola Ahmed Tinubu. It scrutinizes the socio-political challenges that have molded Nigeria's governance, including political instability, economic oscillations, and security crises, heightened by historical legacies of colonialism and military rule. Labor unions, chiefly the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC), have played a crucial role in influencing government policies and sustaining social discourse. Both Buhari and Tinubu faced strong disapproval from unions, largely due to contentious economic reforms such as fuel subsidy removal. The study compares Buhari's centralized and rigid approach to labor relations with Tinubu's more mollifying stance, highlighting how both administrations navigated issues of security, economic governance, and public discontent. The paper concludes that successful engagement with unions and careful management of socio-economic reforms are essential for maintaining holistic stability in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Governance, social stability, unionism, analysis, administration.*

Introduction

Nigeria, as Africa's most populous nation and its prime economy, occupies a momentous place on the continent's socio-political and economic space. The country's intricate and dynamic socio-political landscape is shaped by multiple forces, such as governance, labor unionism, and efforts to maintain social order. Throughout its modern history, Nigeria has experienced numerous challenges, including political instability, insecurity, economic fluxes, and widespread social unrest, which have all contributed to the shaping of its governance frameworks. These challenges are exacerbated by a legacy of colonialism, military dictatorship, and post-colonial democratic experimentation, which continues to define Nigeria's political institutions and socio-economic realities (Falola, 2021). Within this milieu, governance and the interplay between labour unions and state authority become critical in understanding the trajectory of social and economic reforms in the country.

Labour unions in Nigeria have long played essential role in the country's political economy. Historically, they have been at the vanguard of major political movements, determining public discourse on governance and social justice (Otobo, 2016). For instance, the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and other labour unions have been influential agents in opposing ostracized government policies, chiefly in areas like fuel subsidy removal, wage negotiations, and pension reforms. These unions serve as a link between the working class and the political elite, often channeling the grievances of the masses and staging protests or strikes that significantly impact Nigeria's socio-economic atmosphere. Governance, therefore, cannot be fully understood without examining the role of labour unions in advocating for workers' rights and swaying public policy.

Over the past two decades, Nigeria's governance structures have been tested by a series of socio-political upheavals, especially under the administrations of President Muhammadu Buhari (2015–2023) and his descendant, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu (2023–present). Both leaders have presided over periods of economic uncertainty, rising inflation, and mass protests, with labor unions being key actors in these tempestuous periods. Under Buhari's administration, the country faced severe economic challenges, driven by changing oil prices, inflation, and denigrating currency, which worsened unemployment and poverty rates. The Buhari regime's handling of labor disputes, particularly during times of economic dips and social

unrest, highlighted the government's method to social order, often leading to tense relations with unions and widespread protests (Akhaine, 2020).

In contrast, the Tinubu administration, though relatively novel, has already signaled a exit from Buhari's economic policies, focusing on subsidy removal, tax reforms, and market liberalization. These changes have kindled significant responses from labor unions, which argue that such reforms, while essential for long-term economic stability, could exacerbate the short-term privations faced by ordinary Nigerians. Union strikes and protests continue to be a powerful instrument in resisting government policies perceived as detrimental to the wellbeing of the people, raising queries about the balance between governance, economic reform, and upholding social synchronization (Aremu, 2023).

This paper delves into the governance styles of Buhari and Tinubu, analyzing how their approaches have affected social order and the role of unionism in shaping Nigeria's political discourse. The contrasting governance strategies—particularly in the areas of economic policy, labor relations, and social stability—offer valuable insights into the relationship between state authority and civil society in Nigeria. Additionally, the study will explore the outcomes of these governance styles on Nigeria's social fabric, including the extent to which labor unions have influenced policy decisions and public sentiment during times of crisis. By examining the interactions between governance, unionism, and social order under these two administrations, this paper aims to contribute to a broader understanding of Nigeria's political and social dynamics in the 21st century.

Theoretical consideration

Social contract theory

This theory, rooted in the works of philosophers like Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, posits that individuals' consent, either explicitly or implicitly, to surrender certain freedoms and accept authority in exchange for protection of their remaining rights. In the context of governance, the theory emphasizes the mutual obligations between the government and the governed. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762) in *The Social Contract* argues that society functions based on a mutual agreement between the government and the people, where individuals give up some personal freedoms in exchange for protection and the general good. This theory underpins how governance is supposed to ensure the security and welfare of citizens in Nigeria. The Buhari and Tinubu administrations' failures to uphold parts of this "contract" through economic challenges and insecurity directly violate the expectations of the populace, leading to unrest and union action, as witnessed during various labor strikes and protests (Rousseau, 1762).

John Locke (1689) in *Two Treatises of Government* elaborates on the idea of natural rights and the role of the government in safeguarding these rights. In the Nigerian context, Locke's ideas about the role of governance in protecting life, liberty, and property are relevant, as failures in governance (such as poor economic management or corruption) can result in protests and strikes by unions. The Buhari and Tinubu administrations' policy decisions, such as the removal of fuel subsidies, could be seen as a breach of the social contract, sparking resistance from labor unions (Locke, 1689).

Application of the theory to this work

Governance: The Buhari and Tinubu administrations, like all governments, are evaluated based on how well they uphold the social contract by ensuring security, welfare, and economic opportunities for citizens. Failures to meet these obligations can lead to social instability, discontent, and unrest.

Social Stability: The social contract theory helps explain how governance can influence social stability. When the state fails to meet the basic expectations of its citizens—such as job creation, security, and economic stability—citizens may react through protests or union activism. Nigeria has witnessed several such events under the Buhari and Tinubu administrations, driven by perceived failures in governance.

Unionism: Labor unions and other civil society organizations can be seen as actors trying to hold the government accountable to its social contract obligations, especially regarding workers' rights, wage negotiations, and social welfare.

Elite theory:

Elite theory, developed by thinkers like Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca, suggests that a small minority, consisting of the political, economic, and military elite, holds the most power, regardless of democratic or other systems in place. This theory helps analyze how power is concentrated in the hands of a few and how this affects governance, social stability, and union responses. Vilfredo Pareto (1935) in *The Mind and Society* offers insights into how a small elite dominates political power, which is crucial for understanding the concentration of political influence in Nigeria. The role of elites in shaping policy decisions that affect the welfare of the broader populace is evident in the governance style of both the Buhari and Tinubu administrations. Elite Theory helps explain the limited representation of workers and unions in decision-making processes, often leading to policies that favor the powerful few (Pareto, 1935).

Gaetano Mosca (1939) in *The Ruling Class* provides further context for Elite Theory by arguing that every society is divided between a ruling class and those who are ruled. This is especially applicable to Nigeria, where a select few individuals or families hold political and economic power, thereby influencing governance and perpetuating inequality. The response of unions in Nigeria can be seen as a reaction to this concentration of power, particularly under the Buhari and Tinubu administrations, where policies are seen as benefiting elites over the working class (Mosca, 1939). Alubo (2012), in "Elites, Ethnic Minorities, and Governance in Nigeria," explores the intersection of elite control and governance, noting how ethnic and regional elites dominate Nigeria's political landscape. This aligns with Elite Theory in explaining how governance under the Buhari and Tinubu administrations has been shaped by a small, powerful group, leading to dissatisfaction among the broader populace and increased union activism as a form of resistance (Alubo, 2012).

Okojie (2011), in "Governance and Social Stability in Nigeria," examines the relationship between governance failures and social unrest. Okojie's work supports the application of Social Contract Theory, highlighting how governance failures—such as poor economic policies—disrupt social stability. The frequent protests and strikes by unions in response to policies implemented by the Buhari and Tinubu administrations illustrate the breakdown of the social contract and the subsequent instability that follows (Okojie, 2011).

Application of the theory to this work

Governance: Both the Buhari and Tinubu administrations reflect elite control in Nigeria, where political power is often centralized within a few individuals or families. Elite theory can be used to analyze how these individuals shape policies that affect governance outcomes and their role in either maintaining or disrupting social stability.

Social Stability: The actions of elites, such as policies on subsidies, taxation, and infrastructure development, directly impact the lives of the masses, potentially leading to instability when the masses feel alienated or marginalized. The theory helps explain the concentration of power and the resultant social challenges.

Unionism: Union movements often emerge in response to elite-dominated decision-making that ignores the needs of the broader populace. Elite theory can explain the struggle of unions to redistribute power and advocate for social justice and workers' rights under such administrations.

Theoretical synthesis

Combining Social Contract Theory with Elite Theory, you can analyze how the Buhari and Tinubu administrations have navigated the complex relationships between governance, social stability, and unionism in Nigeria. The social contract is often strained when elites hold disproportionate power, leading to social instability and union agitation.

Governance under Buhari

Political Structure and Policy Direction

Muhammadu Buhari's administration, which covered from 2015 to 2023, was molded by a political narrative of reform, economic regaining, and anti-corruption. His presidency marked the reoccurrence of a former military head of state to Nigeria's democratic leadership, and with it came a set of policy directions designed at addressing the country's most tenacious challenges. Upon taking office, Buhari swore to address three primary issues: insecurity, corruption, and economic torpor. These masts defined his administration's approach to governance, resulting in famous but controversial outcomes across diverse sectors of Nigerian society.

Buhari's administration inherited a politically disjointed and economically strained nation. He positioned himself as a robust, centralizing figure, sketch from his military background to ox Nigeria through its complex crises. Upon assuming office, Buhari launched several initiatives aimed at attaining economic recovery and social reform. One of his flagship policies was the *Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP)*, introduced in 2017. This plan was calculated to resuscitate Nigeria's economy following the 2016 recession, concentrating on diversifying the economy away from oil dependency, indorsing agriculture, and advancing infrastructure development (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2017). The ERGP set go-getting goals for expanding growth in segments such as agriculture, manufacturing, and technology, pointing at stabilize the economy and reduce poverty.

Under the ERGP, Buhari's administration achieved modest successes, mainly in the agricultural sector. Nigeria witnessed progress in agricultural production, with a visible increase in rice and maize farming, as well as government funding for local food production through policies such as the Anchor Borrowers' Programme. This program aimed to lift credit availability for smallholder farmers, making agriculture more attractive to the youth and the broader population (Olomola, 2018). Additionally, Buhari's focus on infrastructure development, such as the revitalization of road and rail networks, was a noticeable aspect of his administration's policy track. These efforts echoed a broader commitment to creating a more workable and diversified economy.

Despite these gains, Buhari's economic policies confronted significant criticism, mostly in their ability to address the country's broader structural challenges. While agriculture and infrastructure saw some improvements, other key sectors—such as manufacturing, education, and healthcare—remained backward. Critics argued that the ERGP, though well-meant, was not necessarily impactful in curbing the rising rates of unemployment and inflation that beleaguered the country. Nigeria's youth unemployment surged to unprecedented levels, and inflation further eroded the purchasing power of the average Nigerian, fueling public displeasure (Akintunde, 2020). The gap between policy goal and practical outcomes was widened by the administration's difficulty in responding to the dynamics of global economic

landscape, exacerbated by the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and the shifting global oil prices that had a direct bearing on Nigeria's oil-dependent economy.

Buhari's presidency and the brawl with insecurity: A comprehensive analysis

President Muhammadu Buhari's presidency (2015-2023) coincided with an era of significant insecurity in Nigeria. His administration was patent by efforts to curb insurgency, fight rising crime rates, and address numerous socio-political issues. However, despite some noteworthy successes, many of these energies were met with mixed results, leaving a legacy of both progress and unsettled tensions.

The Rise of Boko Haram and Insurgency in the Northeast

One of the weightiest security challenges during Buhari's tenure was the insurgency led by Boko Haram in the northeastern part of Nigeria. Before Buhari assumed office, Boko Haram had already inflicted havoc in the region. Upon his election in 2015, Buhari's administration took steps to confront this threat, and to some extent, succeeded in debasing Boko Haram's capabilities. Nigerian military forces, supported by international associates, recovered several territories that were formerly controlled by the group. However, Boko Haram proved resilient. The rise of factions, including the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), further intricate counterinsurgency efforts. These groups continued to carry out attacks on civilians and security forces, stress the persistence of the threat despite military gains (Nkereuwem, 2023).

Banditry and Kidnappings in the Northwest

While progress was made in the northeast, a novel security challenge arose in the northwest: banditry and kidnapping for money. Armed groups, referred to as "bandits," commenced to terrorize rural communities through mass abductions, violent attacks, and cattle rustling. This scenario particularly affected states such as Zamfara, Kaduna, and Katsina (Nkereuwem, 2023). Efforts to negotiate with the bandits saw restricted success, and military operations, though initially effective, often led to only momentary reductions in violence. The rise of banditry presented a national security crisis, straining Nigeria's already overstrained security apparatus (Nkereuwem, 2023).

Farmer-Herder Conflicts in the Middle Belt

Another significant security challenge was the conflict between nomadic herders and sedentary farmers, particularly in Nigeria's middle belt region. This conflict, chiefly driven by struggle over land and resources, escalated during Buhari's presidency, resulting in extensive violence, deaths, and displacements (Aluko & Fashola, 2020). Critics accused the administration of derisory and biased responses, with some asserting that Buhari, an ethnic Fulani, favored herders, who are largely Fulani. Efforts to create grazing reserves and ranching were met with resistance from local communities, who saw them as land grabs. As a result, the conflict continued to impend Nigeria's social cohesion (Aluko & Fashola, 2020).

The End SARS Movement and Social Unrest

Buhari's presidency also witnessed substantial social unrest, particularly during the End SARS protests in 2020. Originally a protest against police brutality and the abuses of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), the movement evolved into a broader mien of dissatisfaction with the government's handling of economic, social, and political issues. The controversial response to the Lekki Tollgate incident, where security forces were accused of using excessive force against protesters, drew widespread domestic and international criticism. While SARS was swiftly disbanded, the government's broader crackdown on demonstrators raised questions about Buhari's commitment to human rights (Umeakuka & Ikpeze, 2021).

President Buhari's presidency was defined by significant efforts to address Nigeria's multifaceted security challenges. However, the sundry results of these efforts underscore the exertion of maintaining national security in the face of evolving intimidations like insurgency, banditry, and social unrest. Boko Haram's insurgency, banditry in the northwest, farmer-herder conflicts, and social dissatisfaction all posed grave challenges to Buhari's administration. The legacy of these security problems will likely continue to impact Nigeria's political and security landscape for years to come.

Security, bureaucratic crime and anti-corruption efforts

Buhari's method to governance also prioritized national security, with his administration focusing deeply on combating insurgency, banditry, and terrorism. Upon assuming office, Buhari made the fight against Boko Haram, a jihadist terrorist group that had terrorized the northeastern region of Nigeria, a upper importance. The administration, through increased military action and regional cooperation with neighboring countries, attained some success in degrading Boko Haram's stronghold, reclaiming territories that had been lost to the insurgents (Campbell, 2021). However, despite these early gains, insecurity in Nigeria persisted, with new threats emerging, such as the rise of banditry and farmer-herder clashes, particularly in the northern and central parts of the country.

One of the defining aspects of Buhari's governance was his anti-corruption stance. Corruption had long been a significant obstacle to Nigeria's development, and Buhari's administration sought to tackle it through the establishment of stronger anti-corruption bodies and the prosecution of high-profile cases. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) under his tenure was tasked with investigating and prosecuting corrupt individuals within both the public and private sectors. Some notable arrests and convictions were made, signaling the administration's seriousness in confronting corruption (Ogundiya, 2020). However, critics pointed out that the anti-corruption drive was selective and politically motivated, accusing the administration of using it as a tool to silence political opposition while sparing allies from prosecution (Ezeani, 2021).

Centralized Governance and Policy Criticism: A Recast Analysis

A significant point of contention during Buhari's presidency was his centralized style of governance, which critics argued stifled democratic processes and delayed critical decision-making. Buhari's administration was often perceived as slow to respond to urgent national issues, including the numerous protests against police brutality, known as the #EndSARS movement, which erupted in October 2020. The government's heavy-handed response to the protests, including the deployment of military force against demonstrators, drew widespread condemnation both domestically and internationally, highlighting deep-rooted issues in the administration's handling of civil unrest (Adesina, 2021). Buhari's reliance on centralized decision-making, often within a narrow circle of trusted military and political allies, further alienated many Nigerians, particularly younger generations demanding reforms in governance and police accountability.

Furthermore, Buhari's tenure was marked by a slow pace of implementing reforms that could have improved the business climate and enhanced private sector participation in the economy. His government's reluctance to embrace market-oriented reforms, particularly in terms of deregulating the oil sector and improving the ease of doing business, was seen as a major hindrance to economic growth (Adekoya, 2022). While some regulatory reforms were eventually implemented, such as the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) in 2021, many felt these measures came too late to offset the economic damage caused by the earlier hesitancy to make critical decisions.

In summary, Buhari's administration was characterized by a strong focus on security, anti-corruption, and economic recovery, but it was also marked by challenges in governance, particularly in addressing economic inequality and managing social unrest. While the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan and other initiatives helped make progress in certain sectors like agriculture and infrastructure, the administration struggled with high unemployment, inflation, and public dissatisfaction. Buhari's centralizing governance style, along with his inability to respond swiftly to crises, left a mixed legacy, with some successes in combating corruption and terrorism, but significant shortcomings in economic management and social stability.

Unionism and labor relations

During Buhari's tenure, labor unions played a critical role in responding to government policies, particularly in relation to wage reforms and fuel subsidies. The *Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC)* and the *Trade Union Congress (TUC)* were at the forefront of pushing back against several of Buhari's economic policies, including the removal of fuel subsidies in 2020 and hikes in electricity tariffs. Despite strikes and protests organized by labor unions, the Buhari administration maintained a firm stance on economic reforms, often citing fiscal constraints and the need to reduce government spending. However, the relationship between the government and unions remained tense throughout his presidency, with unions criticizing the administration for failing to adequately address workers' welfare.

Unionism and labor relations during Buhari's tenure

During the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari, labor unions in Nigeria were crucial in advocating for the rights and welfare of workers, mainly in response to economic policies that impacted the nation's workforce. Two of the most prominent labor organizations, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC), played paramount roles in pushing back against key government policies, including wage reforms, electricity tariff hikes, and the removal of fuel subsidies.

One of the key flashpoints in the relationship between the Buhari administration and labour unions was the removal of fuel subsidies in 2020. This policy, which was part of a broader effort to reform the Nigerian economy, was met with huge criticism from labour unions and the public alike. The removal of fuel subsidies led to a high-pitched increase in the price of petrol, which in turn throng the cost of living for many Nigerians. The NLC and TUC were at the vanguard of organizing protests and strikes to demand a reversal of the policy. The unions argued that the government's decision disproportionately affected the poor and working-class citizens who were already struggling with economic hardship. Despite these protests, the Buhari administration maintained a rigid stance, justifying the removal of fuel subsidies on the grounds of fiscal sustainability. The government argued that it could no longer afford the subsidy, which had cost the country billions of dollars annually, and that the funds could be better used in other sectors of the economy, such as infrastructure development.

In addition to the fuel subsidy issue, the Buhari administration also faced resistance from labor unions over its handling of electricity tariffs. In 2020, amid the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Nigerian government approved an increase in electricity tariffs. This decision was met with strong antagonism from labor unions, who argued that it would further burden citizens already rassing with high inflation and job losses due to the pandemic. Once again, the NLC and TUC mobilized workers and organized strikes to push for a reversal of the tariff hike. The unions contended that the government's decision to increase electricity costs without corresponding improvements in power supply was unjust. Despite several rounds of negotiations, the government remained firm, asserting that the tariff hike was necessary to attract investment into the power sector and improve electricity supply in the long run.

Labor unions were also critical in their criticism of the Buhari administration's handling of wage reforms, particularly regarding the implementation of the new minimum wage. In 2019, after years of bargaining, the Nigerian government signed into law a new minimum wage of ₦30,000 (approximately \$83 at the time). While this was a significant increase from the preceding minimum wage of ₦18,000, labor unions criticized the government for delaying its implementation across all sectors and states. The NLC and TUC accused the Buhari administration of failing to ensure that state governments adhered to the new wage policy, leaving many workers without the promised pay raise. The unions argued that the delay in implementing the new wage had worsened the economic conditions of workers, particularly in light of rising inflation and the increased cost of living. Despite these criticisms, the Buhari administration continued to face constrained in enforcing the minimum wage across the country, citing fiscal constraints faced by many state governments.

The relationship between labour unions and the Buhari administration remained tense throughout his presidency. While the government consistently cited fiscal constraints and the need to diminish public spending as justifications for its economic policies, labor unions criticized the administration for not doing enough to prioritize the welfare of workers. The Buhari administration's economic reforms, including fuel subsidy removal, electricity tariff hikes, and wage reforms, were seen by most unions as being out of reach with the realities faced by ordinary Nigerians. The strikes and protests organized by the NLC and TUC were a reflection of the wider frustration among workers who felt that their voices were not being heard by the government.

Unionism and labor relations during Buhari's era were characterized by regular clashes between labor unions and the government over economic policies that directly affected workers' welfare. The NLC and TUC played a critical role in advocating for workers' rights, organizing protests, and negotiating with the government on key issues such as fuel subsidies, electricity tariffs, and wage reforms. However, despite their efforts, the Buhari administration largely upheld its stance on economic reforms, citing the need for fiscal discipline and economic sustainability. This resulted in a strained relationship between labor unions and the government, with unions continuing to criticize the administration for not sufficiently addressing the wants and welfare of workers.

Critical analysis of economic policies during Buhari's tenure: Implies on unionism and labour relations

During President Muhammadu Buhari's tenure (2015–2023), labor unions in Nigeria played a critical role in responding to various government policies, particularly concerning wage reforms, fuel subsidies, and other economic measures. The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC), two of the most prominent labor organizations in the country, were consistently at the forefront of challenging several of Buhari's key economic policies. These confrontations reflected broader tensions between the government and workers, especially regarding the administration's economic reforms aimed at addressing Nigeria's fiscal challenges.

Wage reforms and the struggle for workers' welfare

A key issue during Buhari's presidency was the push for wage reforms, particularly the demand for an increase in the national minimum wage. In 2019, after years of negotiations and protests by labor unions, the Buhari administration agreed to increase the minimum wage from ₦18,000 to ₦30,000 (Nkereuwem, 2023). However, the implementation of this policy faced delays in many states, with several state governments claiming insufficient funds to pay the increased wages. This further strained relations between the government and labor unions, as workers accused the administration of failing to prioritize their welfare.

The NLC and TUC organized multiple strikes and protests to push for the full implementation of the new wage structure across all levels of government. Despite these efforts, many workers continued to struggle with delayed payments and underpayment, fueling dissatisfaction with the administration (Nkereuwem, 2023). This episode underscored the broader issue of economic inequality and workers' welfare, which became a persistent source of tension throughout Buhari's presidency.

Fuel subsidies and economic reforms

One of the most contentious policies during Buhari's tenure was the removal of fuel subsidies, a longstanding issue in Nigerian politics. In 2020, the Buhari administration made the controversial decision to remove fuel subsidies, citing the need to reduce government spending and address fiscal deficits (Umeakuka & Ikpeze, 2021). The decision, which led to a significant increase in fuel prices, sparked widespread protests and strikes organized by the NLC and TUC.

Labor unions argued that the removal of subsidies disproportionately affected low- and middle-income Nigerians, many of whom rely heavily on affordable fuel for transportation and daily necessities. The unions accused the government of imposing austerity measures that placed undue burdens on workers and the poor, while failing to address issues like corruption and mismanagement in the petroleum sector (Umeakuka & Ikpeze, 2021). Despite the protests, the Buhari administration maintained its position, arguing that fuel subsidies were unsustainable and contributed to Nigeria's economic instability.

Electricity tariff hikes and union opposition

In addition to the removal of fuel subsidies, Buhari's administration also faced backlash over the hike in electricity tariffs. In 2020, the government approved a significant increase in electricity rates as part of broader economic reforms aimed at attracting investment in the power sector and reducing government expenditure on subsidies (Nkereuwem, 2023). As with fuel prices, this decision was met with strong opposition from labor unions, who argued that the increase in electricity costs would further exacerbate the economic hardships faced by many Nigerians.

The NLC and TUC organized protests and threatened nationwide strikes, demanding that the government reverse the tariff hike and consider the economic realities of ordinary citizens. While some concessions were made in the form of temporary suspensions and negotiations, the underlying issue remained unresolved, with unions continuing to criticize the administration's approach to economic reform (Aluko & Fashola, 2020). This period highlighted the deep-rooted mistrust between labor unions and the government, particularly regarding the administration's willingness to implement policies perceived as detrimental to workers' welfare.

Tensions between labor unions and the Buhari's administration

Throughout Buhari's presidency, the relationship between labor unions and the government remained tense. While the administration defended its economic reforms as necessary measures to stabilize the economy and reduce fiscal deficits, labor unions consistently argued that these policies were implemented at the expense of workers' welfare. Strikes, protests, and public criticism became frequent occurrences, with unions accusing the government of failing to adequately address the needs of Nigerian workers (Nkereuwem, 2023).

Despite these tensions, labor unions remained a powerful force in shaping public discourse around economic policies during Buhari's tenure. Their protests and strikes not only highlighted workers' grievances but also raised broader questions about governance,

accountability, and the distribution of economic resources in Nigeria. As Buhari's presidency came to an end, the unresolved issues between the government and labor unions left a lasting legacy of labor unrest and dissatisfaction, with many workers continuing to call for more inclusive and worker-friendly policies in the future.

The relationship between labor unions and the Buhari administration was marked by ongoing tensions over economic reforms, particularly concerning wage increases, fuel subsidies, and electricity tariffs. While the government sought to implement policies aimed at reducing fiscal constraints and promoting economic stability, labor unions challenged these measures, arguing that they disproportionately harmed workers and failed to address underlying issues of inequality and welfare. This dynamic shaped much of the labor unrest during Buhari's presidency, underscoring the complex interplay between governance, economic reform, and workers' rights in Nigeria.

Governance under Tinubu

Economic reforms and governance style

Bola Tinubu, who assumed office in May 2023, has method of governance with a focus on economic liberalization and transformation. His administration's instantaneous priority has been tackling Nigeria's economic challenges, mostly those exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and global economic swings. One of Tinubu's most substantial actions upon assuming office was the removal of the fuel subsidy, a policy that had long been a point of contention in Nigeria. While seen as an essential step to reduce fiscal burden, the removal of the subsidy activated widespread protests and discontent. Tinubu's administration also floated the naira, which caused sharp currency devaluation but was aimed at enticing foreign investment and stabilizing the economy in the long term.

Tinubu's governance style has been labelled as pragmatic, though he has faced criticisms for exacerbating social upheavals by implementing reforms that unduly affect low-income Nigerians. The administration has promised compensatory policies to cushion the effects of subsidy removal, such as conditional cash transfers and transport subsidies, but the accomplishment of these measures remains to be seen.

Social order and public reactions

Like Buhari's administration, Tinubu's tenure has faced noteworthy social unrest. The abrupt outcome of subsidy removal led to protests, strikes, and public demos, reminiscent of the resistance Buhari faced in similar conditions. Social cohesion has been further strained by rising inflation, unemployment, and poverty, all of which contribute to a fragile social order. Tinubu has also inherited Nigeria's persistent security challenges, with ongoing concerns about insurgencies in the northeast, banditry in the northwest, and separatist movements in the southeast. His administration's capacity to address these problems is likely to be a key determinant of whether social stability can be restored.

Comparison of Buhari and Tinubu's regimes

Economic policies and governance

Both Buhari and Tinubu prioritized economic reforms to reduce Nigeria's dependence on oil revenues and address deep-rooted structural inefficiencies. Buhari's economic policies, often cautious and focused on gradual reforms, were characterized by an emphasis on state-led interventions and protectionist measures such as foreign exchange restrictions. Buhari's administration initiated the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) in 2017, which aimed at economic diversification and fiscal consolidation, but critics argue that it lacked bold reforms needed to stimulate rapid growth has taken more decisive steps towards economic

liberalization. The removal of the fuel subsidy in 2023, a long-standing policy that shattered public finances, was a bold move that had been avoided by Buhari due to public opposition. While this policy has been widely unpopular and glinted protests, Tinubu's government has defended it as a necessary measure to free up resources for infrastructure development and social programs. Tinubu's economy appears more focused on market-driven reforms and private sector engagement, a shift from the more thoughtful economic approach of his predecessor.

Security and social stability

Buhari's administration principally focused on military responses to security challenges, particularly the insurgency by Boko Haram. While the influence of Boko Haram was reduced, new threats emerged, including increased banditry, kidnappings, and communal conflicts, particularly in the Northwest and Central regions. Buhari was credited within the Northeast to some degree, but critics argue that his administration failed to address the root causes of insecurity, such as poverty and unemployment, which continue to fuel unrest across Nigeria.

Tinubu inherits this security and his administration is expected to develop innovative stratagems to combat not only the violent insurgencies but also the socio-economic conditions driving insecurity. Some early signals suggest Tinubu may adopt a more comprehensive approach that includes economic development and social interventions alongside military operations. However, the effectiveness of these strategies remains to be seen.

Unionism and labor relations

Labor Nigeria have been staunch critics of economic reforms that disproportionately impact the working class, including subsidy removals and austerity measures. Under Buhari, labor unions often clashed with the government, particularly during fuel price hikes and public sector reforms. Buhari's administration was often apparent as confrontational in dealing with unions, opting for hardline approaches during negotiations, which led to frequent strikes and disruptions.

Tinubu's relationship with labour unions compare to Buhari's administration has shown a greater willingness to negotiate and seek compromise. In the aftermath of the fuel subsidy removal, for instance, Tinubu's government entered into negotiations with labor unions to mitigate the effect of the policy on workers, including offering palliatives such as wage increases and transportation subsidies. While this may signal a more conciliatory approach to labour whether this leads to lasting congruence between the government and unions will depend on the effectiveness of these measures in addressing workers' concerns.

Conclusion

Governance, social order, and unionism in Nigeria remain profoundly interconnected, with successive administrations fronting the challenge of balancing economic reforms with the need for social stability. Under Buhari, Nigeria saw substantial efforts to fight corruption and insecurity, but these were often marred by economic hardships and social unrest. Tinubu's regime, while still in its early stages, has continued the trend of economic liberalization but faces similar challenges in dealing with public discontent and union antagonism. The coming years will be crucial in determining whether Tinubu can successfully pilot these issues and restore both economic and social stability to Nigeria. The role of labour unions will continue to be pivotal in redirecting public discourse, and the government's ability to engage constructively with these unions will play a key role in determining the success of its policies.

Policy recommendations

1. Government should establish institutionalized channels for regular and transparent dialogue between her organs and labor unions like the NLC and TUC. This could take the form of a National Labor-Government Roundtable to discuss critical socio-economic reforms. Such platforms would help preempt strikes, resolve conflicts more amicably, and involve unions in the policy development process early.
2. To cushion the impact of economic reforms, mostly subsidy removals and tax increases, the government should implement beleaguered social safety nets, including cash transfers, food subsidies, and health insurance for susceptible populations. These buffers would help diminish short-term economic hardships, which labour unions frequently gripe, while fostering long-term social stability.
3. Unions as well as government should provide training and capacity-building programs for union leaders to enable constructive negotiations. This would help labour unions lucid their demands more strategically and collaborate with the government on reforms that benefit both the working class and the wider economy.
4. Government should develop inclusive economic policies that prioritize job creation and wage protection in both the formal and informal sectors. Special focus should be given to sectors heavily reliant on labour, such as agriculture, manufacturing, and services.
5. Decentralized approach should be encouraged by government to handle labour disputes at federal, state and local government levels. This decentralization would enhance awareness to the specific needs of workers in many states.

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