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From Anti-corruption to Anti-anti-corruption: Why the Masses Turned against Nigeria's Post-2015 War on Corruption

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From Anti-corruption to Anti-anti-corruption: Why the Masses Turned against Nigeria's Post-2015 War on Corruption

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Abstract

It is considered axiomatic that, as victims of public corruption, the masses will support anti-corruption policies. However, Nigeria's anti-corruption campaign initiated in 2015, faced stern rejection by sections of the masses who, through the 'Bring Back Our Corruption' counter-campaign, blamed the anti-graft programme for deepening socioeconomic misery. Why did the same segments of the masses who called for anti-corruption measures during the 2015 election as victims of corruption turn around to resist the war on corruption? This study claims that while there has always been the potential for popular hostility to anti-corruption policies in Nigeria, only in the post-2015 period have all necessary conditions intersected to provoke mass resistance on the scale of the Bring Back Our Corruption pushback. These conditions include the degree to which the masses have become embedded in patron-client relations, the extent to which the subsistence of the masses depends on patronage from political patrons, and the intensity and coverage of the anti-corruption campaign.

Keywords: Neopatrimonialism, Corruption, Functional Corruption, Anti-corruption, Bring Back Our Corruption.

1. Introduction

A common notion, and one much in tandem with intuition, is that, because the subaltern classes (artisans, peasants, low-income workers and the unemployed) recognise a widening infrastructure gap, high levels of unemployment, poverty, insecurity, etc., as consequences of public corruption, they are inclined to support anti-corruption efforts (Kos 2014; Transparency International 2017). Nigeria's post-2015 anti-corruption campaign initiated in response to popular clamours for stringent anti-corruption measures, however, suffered resistance by the same masses. The opposition was expressed through the 'Bring Back Our Corruption (BBOC)' counter-campaign.

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The BBOC resistance is anomalous in two ways. First, citizens' opposition to anti-corruption efforts in Nigeria had typically been elite-instigated. To undermine anti-corruption proceedings instituted against them, politicians often applied a blend of the appeal to ethnic sentiments and crowd-hiring to trigger subversive protests (Ramon 2017). Second, such demonstrations have usually been isolated events in defence of particular politicians. The BBOC counter-campaign, however, was both citizen-led and extensive. The masses who demanded sterner anti-corruption enforcement blamed the anti-corruption programme for growing socioeconomic despair. The present study thus asks the question: why did the same segments of the masses who called for anti-corruption measures during the 2015 election as victims of corruption turn around to resist the war on corruption?

Since the available literature holds no answers to this question, this study's goal is to determine the factors that triggered the BBOC resistance. The study draws crucial insights from the neopatrimonial theory, which explains political elites-masses relations steeped in reciprocity that often entails corruption. However, while the neopatrimonial theory helps to understand how political elites and the masses form complicit relationships to share illicitly removed government resources, the theory does not provide clues to understanding when and why the masses will and can support or resist anti-corruption efforts. Thus, the case of the BBOC resistance presents a unique scenario where the presence of patronage politics cannot alone sufficiently explain the occurrence of such rare popular hostility to anti-corruption efforts.

To fill this gap in the neopatrimonial theory, the study identifies three essential conditions, the convergence of all of which, triggered the BBOC counter-reaction. The first condition is the degree to which the masses are embedded in neopatrimonial relations. The second is the extent to which the subsistence of vulnerable masses[1] depends on patronage from politicians. The third is the intensity and coverage of the anti-corruption campaign and the adverse impact on the availability and flow of patronage.

This study is an attempt to expand the current margins of the neopatrimonial theory from a qualitative empirical case study on the functionality of corruption and implications for anti-corruption enforcement in Nigeria. Field research was conducted between July 2017 and March 2018 and relied on oral interviews, netnography (data collection on social media) and personal observation. Although the study analyses the masses' public attitude to the post-2015 war on corruption, it is not a behavioural study as such a study would have required stricter tests on the behaviour of citizens and the presentation and analysis of empirical data of a different kind.

The next section provides a review of the literature and identifies three conditions that provoked popular resistance to the post-2015 anti-corruption campaign. Following that, is an analysis of anti-corruption enforcement in Nigeria, and why only recently were the conditions fulfilled to trigger such mass hostility to anti-graft efforts. The following section discusses the post-2015 anti-corruption campaign and the BBOC

resistance. The final section concludes the study.

2. When is Corruption Functional?

2.1. Corruption and the Two Lenses

Studies often cast corrupt public officials as the sole beneficiaries of public graft and embezzlement and the masses as hapless victims. This viewpoint, regarded as the 'non-functional' or 'moralistic' perspective, associates corruption in public governance, mostly with dysfunctional consequences for the masses. The non-functional/moralist viewpoint became prominent in the 1950s and 1960s when concerns over the impacts of corruption on the development of nations began to occupy a major spot in social science discourses. Edward Banfield is among early influential scholars to call attention to the dysfunctional outcomes of corruption. His study on familism (family-centric social organisation) in Italy's Basilicata region found that the tendency among nuclear families (most of whom were the Italian mafia in its embryonic form) to sacrifice public good for narrow family interests produced adverse outcomes for society (Banfield 1958). In another study, he proved how the commission of bribery, nepotism and misappropriation of resources by individuals wielding public power produced fatal outcomes for society (Banfield 1961).

Nye (1967) also attributed the development woes of most African, Asian and Latin American states that by the 1950s and 1960s had emerged from colonial rule primarily to pervasive corruption in public governance. Subsequent studies (Rose-Ackerman 1978; Klitgaard 1988) identified the absence of control measures for public officials as a critical factor for the pervasiveness of deleterious forms of corruption in developing countries. As a remedy, researchers proposed legal and institutional reforms to enable citizens (the principal) to keep public officials (the agent) in check. The 'principal-agent' theory, as this approach became known, informed recommendations for anti-corruption reforms in the developing world. Underlying the theory are, first, the recognition of the masses as victims of public corruption, and second, the belief that if enabled with structures and agency, the victims can overturn the status quo inimical to their wellbeing.

Some scholars, however, differed from this convention. They approached corruption from a 'functional' point of view. The 'functionalists', as they became known, argued for the positive role of corruption in political and economic development. They contended that although corruption could undermine progress, it also has the potential for promoting wealth redistribution and stimulating economic growth beneficial to marginalised individuals and groups in dysfunctional states. According to Samuel Huntington, a leading proponent of this perspective:

> Corruption provides immediate, specific, and concrete benefits to groups which might otherwise be thoroughly alienated from society. Corruption may thus be functional to the maintenance of a political system in the same way that reform is (Huntington 1968: 64).

Huntington was concerned with excessive public sector regulations, inaccessibility of government officials, bureaucratic red-tapism and the hurdles these posed to alienated people and groups. Bribes, according to him, could help bypass stringent regulations, enhance bureaucratic efficiency, prompt service delivery and facilitate access to government officials in ways that promote economic growth. Later studies (Girling 1997; Khan 2002) have also demonstrated that corruption in dysfunctional states could catalyse economic growth with utilitarian outcomes. Worthy of note, a central element of the traditional functionalist viewpoint is the measurement of the functionality of corruption by its contribution to economic growth and utilitarian outcomes. Deducible, therefore, is that when corruption does not lead to economic growth that benefits wider society, its functionality to the masses may be questioned. This understanding is limited as it overlooks the nuanced ways corruption could be functional.

Corruption may be functional even when it does not facilitate economic growth leading to happiness for the greatest number of citizens. Where corruption undermines economic growth and causes widespread misery, it may also perform an immediate-term cushioning function for the masses. Among scarce studies that have attempted to examine the functionality of corruption through this prism, Walton's (2012) study on Papua New Guinea provides useful understandings. As his study found, due to the failure of formal welfare measures, rural Papua New Guineans considered petty and grand corruption to be functional where they perceived it to produce material benefits to alienated people, and dysfunctional where it provided no immediate benefit for the ordinary people. By implication, where scholars regard corruption as dysfunctional, ordinary people may find it functional, and vice versa.

As the overwhelming tendency remains to correlate pervasive corruption with lethargic development and increasing socioeconomic despair in the developing world (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012), overlooked is the informal welfare function corruption performs to the poor and vulnerable in states pervaded by neopatrimonial politics. Also ignored is how, due to the criticality of patronage to the short-term livelihood of vulnerable masses, their perceptions of the dysfunctionality or functionality of corruption may differ from dominant notions that influence the design and execution of government anti-corruption policies.

2.2. Neopatrimonialism and Informal Redistribution

To understand how corruption could be functional to the masses, we need to turn to the neopatrimonial scholarship. The theory describes a system of vertical relations where governing elites (patrons) utilise

resources derived from the privatisation of the state to secure the loyalty of the subaltern masses and social groups (clients). Though informal, patron-client relations often permeate formal governance processes and the bureaucratic system meant to function along the lines of rational-legal authority (Scott 1969; Eisenstadt 1973; Bratton and Van de Walle 1994).

As Migdal (1988) famously argued, neopatrimonial practices in much of the developing world is a consequence of colonisation and capitalism which created powerful competing social forces in colonised areas and weakened traditional mechanisms for social and political order. These social forces became stronger than the modern states forged through colonisation, thus opening the way to state capture.[2] Johnston (2005: 3) uses the term 'Official Moguls' to describe state captors – public officials and affiliate groups who, under cover of public power or private influence, loot the state with impunity. While not necessarily the case, state capture undermines formal welfare provision. Therefore, neopatrimonial states may not be welfare states, that is, states that consciously utilise public power 'through politics and administration' to guarantee a minimum acceptable standard of living for the citizens (Andersen 2012: 4). As the state loses its public character, elite-masses relations assume a personal and transactional form.

In the African context, the absence of the welfare state has been linked to state capture (Kawabata 2006; Wai 2012). For citizens most impacted by the state's insouciance to public welfare as in the case of Nigeria, there are inadequate social security measures (Thovoethin and Ewalefoh 2018). The failure of formal welfare provision thus provides veritable grounds for transactional relations between the governing elites and vulnerable masses. As politicians embark on support mobilisation (especially where a semblance of election is obligatory to legitimise access to public power and wealth as well as give a veneer of public acceptability to politicians' formal roles), patronage exchanges such as those described in Scott (1969) become deeply-rooted. However, largely unaddressed in the literature is how, under such a circumstance, patronage could function to support the subsistence of the poor in the short term but at the cost of longer-term and more stable benefits. Also, unexamined is how the dependence of vulnerable masses on proceeds from corruption distributed through patron-client schemes could affect their reception to anti-corruption measures and practically cause them to antagonise such measures as the BBOC retort exemplifies.

2.3. Conditions for Popular Anti-anti-corruption Reaction

Given the unprecedentedness of the BBOC counter-response not only in Nigeria but in the developing world, queries may arise about the sufficiency of conditions to trigger such a citizen-led counter-response or what this study terms 'anti-anti-corruption reaction'. Three conditions, the intersection of all of which, provoked the rare mass anti-anti-corruption reaction in Nigeria, and the fulfilment of which can potentially trigger a similar outcome in other national contexts.

The first condition is the extent to which the masses are embedded in patron-client relations. Some analytical questions include: how much are the masses immersed in patronage politics? How many channels of patron-client relations are open to the masses to draw patronage? The extent of the masses' immersion in patron-client relations, it is crucial to point out, depends hugely on regime type. By their very exclusionary nature, dictatorial regimes may not allow elite-masses patronage exchanges to thrive as much as elective regimes, except among the narrower circle of elites and their core supporters who are essential to the survival of dictatorships.

The second condition is the relative dependence of the masses on patron-client relations for their livelihood. A question here is: to what extent does the subsistence of the masses depend on patronage from political patrons, among other resources? Where the formal welfare system is functional, and income (earned pay or other forms of income) is stable, the masses may be less dependent on patronage. Conversely, where formal welfare measures are weak, and other forms of income are unreliable, the masses may rely crucially on patronage.

The third condition is the intensity and coverage of the anti-corruption programme. Salient questions here include: does the war on corruption observably restrict politicians' illicit access to public resources? Does the restriction adversely impact the regularity of the flow of material support from patrons to clients?

As we shall find, the BBOC pushback emerged with the fulfilment of all three conditions: the masses were embedded in patronage exchanges following democratisation in 1999; their subsistence relied crucially on patronage due to increased unemployment and underemployment; the anti-graft war curtailed politicians' illegitimate access to government funds, thereby disrupting patron-client exchanges. The study emphasises that although there has always been the potential for popular anti-anti-corruption reaction in the magnitude of the BBOC pushback, only in the post-2015 period have all three conditions been fulfilled to trigger such a reaction.

3. Anti-corruption Enforcement and Popular Reaction in Nigeria

3.1. Colonial to Post-independence Democratic Era (1900-1966)

Colonisation and state-building laid the foundation for an elite-masses bond steeped in corruption and clientelism and sustained by politicians' illicit access to state resources. Ekeh's (1975: 93-100) argument of the 'Two Publics' ('Civic Public' and 'Primordial Public') suggests that from early colonisation, the livelihood of poor Nigerians began to rely on patronage. The Civic Public was the colonial state with its non-welfare attributes, while the Primordial Public was an indigenous informal welfare system to cushion the impact of the colonial state's insouciance to public welfare. The Primordial Public consisted of ethnic-based socio-political and trade organisations financed by ethnic elites who aimed to, through informal

welfare outreaches, win the devotion of co-ethnics to boost their competitiveness in the struggle to succeed the British at independence. Ethnic elites initially provisioned the Primordial Public from personal resources. When eventually they occupied government offices, they began the diversion of public resources to the Primordial Public, a trend that continued into the first post-independence democratic period (1960-1966) as indigenous elites strove to sustain ethnic loyalties.

Anti-corruption enforcement – the third necessary condition – was weak, and therefore had no significant impact on patronage exchanges to provoke the masses to an anti-anti-corruption reaction. The colonial state's reluctance to respond severely to corruption, some have suggested, might have been due to fears of popular unrests given the bond that existed between indigenous elites and their ethnic base which gave the former tremendous capacity to command the obedience of the latter (Osoba 1996; Nwaodu, Adam and Okereke 2014). In the early post-independence period, the fear for unrests also prevented intensive and comprehensive anti-corruption programmes (ibid). As the elite-masses bond steeped in corruption stayed intact, anti-corruption enforcement remained restrained throughout this period (Nwaodu, Adam and Okereke 2014). The brazenness of corruption and lack of capacity for stringent anti-corruption enforcement interwoven with elite-led political violence paved the way for a military coup in mid-1966.

3.2. Military Juntas (1966-1999)

The more than three decades of military rule in Nigeria, one could conjecture, weakened the elite-masses bond, and this is ascribable to the restriction of elective politics and civilian elites' participation in public governance. Elective politics and civilian elites' access to public power and resources are essentials for elite-masses patronage exchanges. Unlike elective regimes that rely on mass mobilisation, the military acquired and exercised power by coercion, and were mostly involved in administrative patron-clientelism (Ikpe 2000). Although formal welfare measures remained inadequate and socioeconomic misery persisted, due to the conceivably weakened elite-masses patronage relations, patronage could not have provided the crucial safety net for vulnerable masses.

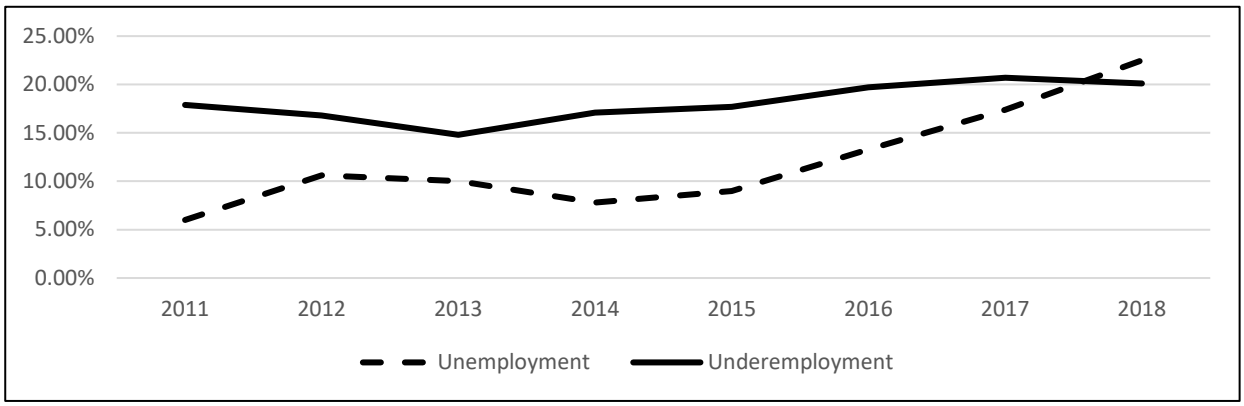
Importantly, a tiny band of military elites maintained a monopoly on corruption, and like the civilians before them, failed on anti-corruption enforcement. The exceptions were the short-lived regimes of Generals Murtala Muhammad (1975-1976) and Muhammadu Buhari (1983-1985) that executed Nigeria's only known intense anti-corruption programmes during this period (Nwaodu, Adam and Okereke 2014). Nonetheless, the intensity of the regimes' anti-graft wars could not have provoked popular anti-anti-corruption sentiments given that proceeds from corruption performed no significant function to the poor in the first instance. Corruption would flourish under successive military regimes until 1998, but the proceeds mostly circulated among a small band of military elites as the restriction on elective politics remained largely

in place for much of the period.

3.3. Post-Military Democratic Era (1999 to Present)

The return to elective governance in 1999 has seen the re-emergence of elite-masses patronage relations on a larger scale. While clientelistic relations enable politicians to maintain a vast political support base, they offer the masses the platform to barter votes and political devotion for material handouts from political patrons. The 'politics of stomach infrastructure' is a term in the Nigerian political lexicon referent to pervasive elite-masses exchanges involving the distribution of food, money, and other forms of material support to the poor in return for political support (Ojo 2014). The persistent deterioration in the socioeconomic wellbeing of the masses expedited the entrenchment of stomach infrastructure politics. By 2014, unemployment and underemployment – the major causes of economic vulnerability in Nigeria – reached a new high despite macroeconomic growth (Figure 1; Magnowski 2014). No fewer than 61% of the population became poor, placing Nigeria third among five countries that accounted for more than 60% of the world's extremely poor. The World Bank attributed the problem to macroeconomic growth unaccompanied with policies to distribute the gains to the poor (Gabriel 2014).

Figure 1 Unemployment and Underemployment in Nigeria



Note: From 2011 to 2014, about 25% of the 82 million workforce comprised unemployed and underemployed citizens. From 2015 to 2018, the figure increased dramatically, as 43% of the 90 million workforce had become unemployed or underemployed.
Source: National Bureau of Statistics (NBS 2016: 4; 2018: 21-23).

As it seems, faced with growing despair, the masses found a crucial safety net in patron-client exchanges. The multiplicity of patronage-seeking structures (cultural associations, religious associations, student unions, trade unions, intra-political party support groups, etc.) allowed the masses to access political patrons in manifold ways and draw patronage from diverse patronage schemes (T. Abolade, interviewed on July 13, 2017). Another interviewee informed the study that since 1999, most members of his political constituency had organised themselves into various cooperatives and political support associations patronised by

politicians. Patronage, according to the respondent, often goes toward offsetting tuition fees, medical bills, cost of organising wedding, child christening and funeral ceremonies, traditional festivities, setting up small-scale farms, corner shops, beauty parlours, grain and grocery stores, transportation business in rural and semi-urban locations, unauthorised sports screening centres, and many other forms of informal economic activities (W. Mbakwe, interviewed on August 17, 2017).

From 1999 until 2014, anti-corruption efforts mostly went through the motions, and thus lacked the intensity and coverage to undermine patronage exchanges enough to trigger a citizen-led anti-anti-corruption reaction of significant proportion. Notable anti-corruption measures during this period include the establishment of two anti-corruption agencies – the Independent Corrupt Practices Offences Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). Other measures include the ratification of international anti-corruption agreements like the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption and the United Nations Convention Against Corruption. Nigeria joined the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, and in 2007, enacted the Nigerian Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative Act to tackle corruption in the domestic oil sector. However, as Amenaghawon and Ilo (2016) have noted, these efforts did little to stem corruption. It is estimated that nearly $200 billion was pilfered during this period alone, making it the most corruption-tolerant period in Nigeria's history (Hoffmann and Patel 2017: 1).

The ruling party during this era – the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) – played a significant role in the allocation of opportunities for looting and in defining the intensity and coverage of anti-corruption efforts. The PDP was the foremost coalition of ethnic elites from across Nigeria and governed from 1999 until 2014. Anti-corruption programmes mostly targeted the opposition within and outside the party (Inokoba and Ibegu 2011). Due to the multi-ethnic configuration of the party and inclusivity of corruption at the elite level, the 'opposition' was defined not by ethnicity, but antagonism to the party's dictates, particularly on access to power and resources. Obedience to the party's dictates opened access to corrupt wealth accumulation as it provided immunity from anti-corruption activities. As corruption thrived, so did patron-client exchanges.

4. From Anti-corruption to Anti-anti-corruption

4.1. The Demand for a Tougher Response to Corruption

The 2015 electoral cycle witnessed an unprecedented clamour for tougher anti-corruption measures, which can be explained by two factors. The first is the enormous reach of digital anti-corruption activism by social media influencers made possible by rapid internet penetration. The second is the surge in donor-funded good governance and anti-corruption enlightenment campaigns driven by local civil society groups

and mass media. The messages were the same: the growing socioeconomic misery despite positive macroeconomic indicators was a consequence of unrestrained public corruption. As the masses took control of the demand for sterner anti-corruption measures, curbing corruption became a defining issue in the 2015 presidential election.

Seizing on the public mood, the then main opposition party equally multi-ethnic in makeup – the All Progressives Congress (APC) – built its campaign rhetoric around the massive corruption that characterised the PDP government, particularly the administration of the then incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan (2010-2015) when much sleaze occurred. The nomination of General Muhammadu Buhari (whose 1983-1985 military junta executed one of Nigeria's fiercest anti-graft campaigns) as the APC's presidential candidate resonated with a vast section of the masses. The retired General had earned repute among the common people as an upright and fearless individual – one untainted by corruption despite having been in major public offices in the past (Fabiyi and Ameh 2018). Inspired by his no-nonsense anti-corruption campaign while as a military ruler, the majority of the electorate rallied behind Buhari who in return vowed to end the regime of looting. The enormous public support propelled him to victory over President Jonathan in the 2015 presidential election (Mark and Smith 2015).

4.2. The Post-2015 Anti-corruption Programme

With the coming of the Buhari war on corruption, all three conditions for popular anti-anti-corruption reaction eventually converged. By 2015, the masses had been embedded in patronage politics for sixteen years. Also, due to a weak formal welfare system and widespread despondency, the masses' short-term material wellbeing relied on the availability of patronage. More importantly, the post-2015 anti-corruption campaign took off with unparalleled intensity and coverage in the post-1999 period. Like its forerunners, the anti-graft war cannot be said to push an ethnic agenda. Elites of all ethnicities, including the President's ethnic group, have had to contend with the limitation the campaign placed on public looting.

The first anti-corruption measure taken by President Buhari was to centralise the revenue flow of the national government through the Federation Account as stipulated in sections 61(1) and (2) of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution. This was achieved with the implementation of the Treasury Single Account (TSA) policy, which blocked revenue leakages that in the past allowed corruption and spoils politics. The TSA is hailed as one of the administration's major achievements (Akinyemi et al. 2018). Before the TSA, government revenue receipts were held in commercial banks with little oversight. The TSA policy helped the government to save millions of dollars that would otherwise have been plundered (*Punch* 2017).

The anti-corruption agencies – the EFCC and ICPC – that were no more than spectators in the years preceding the Buhari administration, awakened with fresh vigour. While the ICPC retained its leadership,

President Buhari appointed a police officer Ibrahim Magu as the new head of the EFCC. The EFCC under Magu's leadership began the prosecution of politicians implicated in corruption scandals in the Jonathan administration, an unprecedented move in the post-1999 era. It was customary for a new administration not to pry into the activities of its predecessor. The probes led to the recovery of cash and fixed assets worth over $3 billion, some abandoned by individuals whose identities remain unknown (Nwaubani 2017). The anti-corruption programme also targeted the 'Constituency Development Fund', a pork barrel fund officially provided in the national budget since 1999 for legislators to develop their constituencies. This political compensation fund which greatly finances 'stomach infrastructure' was prone to abuse due to lack of oversight. Also, key politicians, including the Senate leadership, had to answer to allegations of corruption.

The anti-corruption campaign earned commendations, particularly from the Government of the United States (Bada 2016) and the African Union (*Premium Times* 2018). The approbations were in recognition of the campaign's early successes. However, at home, the anti-graft war faced enormous resistance. While hardly contesting corruption claims for which its principal elites were probed, the former ruling party – the PDP – vilified the anti-corruption campaign for exclusively targeting the party's elites (Campbell 2017). However, in the President's party (the APC), there was even greater opposition, particularly from the twin chambers of the national parliament where the party held a majority (Ameh and Baiyewu 2018), ostensibly a protest against the shrinking access to pork-barrel and other political settlement funds. Elite resistance may not have come as a surprise given that the political class constitutes a constant danger to anti-corruption policies in Nigeria (Adebanwi and Obadare 2011). However, the anti-graft war also lost legitimacy among the same masses on whose demand it was initiated.

4.3. Anti-anti-corruption Reaction – The BBOC Counter-campaign

Dissimilar to ethnic elite-instigated citizens' resistance to anti-corruption measures chronicled in Ramon (2017), the BBOC counter-campaign was spontaneous, countrywide, and had no discernible ethnic undertone. The BBOC catchphrase became the rallying call for citizens' denunciation of the anti-corruption campaign which they claimed exacerbated socioeconomic uncertainty. The further deterioration in the wellbeing of the masses following President Buhari's inauguration in 2015 was partly the outcome of the fall in global oil prices in the same year, which threw the Nigerian economy into its worst recession in thirty years (Olakoyenikan 2017).

Unemployment and underemployment took a further dive (see Figure 1), and other forms of income tied directly or indirectly to the oil economy declined. Nigeria moved from third to the number one spot on the global extreme poverty headcount (Kharas, Hemel and Hofer 2018). With the safety net of patronage undermined by the impact of the anti-graft war on illicit outflow of government money, the masses blamed

the Buhari anti-corruption programme for the raging despair. The BBOC sentiment was widespread on social media,[3] public transportation, talkback radio programmes, in daily conversational spaces, and music. Though lacking a visible structure and leadership, the anti-anti-corruption sentiment gained countrywide sympathy.

It is perversely counterintuitive that the masses – most of whom voted for President Buhari in 2015 to tackle corruption – turned around to assail the anti-corruption campaign. Also unusual is the spontaneity and scale of the counter-campaign. To reiterate, nothing suggests that the BBOC campaigners were opponents or supporters of President Buhari. Rather, promoters of the BBOC sentiments were united in the view that the anti-corruption campaign multiplied misery. The use of the possessive determiner 'Our', suggests the masses' acknowledgement of how the regime of corruption and patronage politics served a function to them. A professor of African History at Tennessee's Vanderbilt University believes that the BBOC pushback emerged when most vulnerable Nigerians eventually woke up to the realisation that their livelihood somehow depends on proceeds from corruption:

> many Nigerians are now paradoxically yearning for the corruption that they and their leaders blame for their economic woes…theirs is not a nostalgia for corruption per se but for a period in which, despite or because of corruption, the flow of illicit government funds created a sense of economic opportunity and prosperity (Ochonu 2016).

A law lecturer at the University of Ghana contends that the BBOC resistance is proof that the masses are 'secondary' and 'tertiary' beneficiaries of corruption where formal wealth redistribution and social safety measures are inadequate:

> I just returned from Nigeria [and] everybody is chanting 'Bring back corruption!'…addressing corruption without understanding the political economy of corruption is dangerous…Buhari did a very…suboptimal theorisation of corruption in Nigeria and…the critical role of corruption in keeping the scope, structure and success of the Nigerian economy in the near term. If you eliminate corruption in Nigeria or Ghana today, many will starve, and in Nigeria, people are dying of starvation…the only way to avoid this is to find a social safety net for those who depend on corruption on the secondary and tertiary levels for survival and implement that simultaneously with the crackdown on corruption… (Atuguba n.d).

It is vital to note, following from Atuguba's position, that the administration introduced four cardinal social security programmes in 2016, one year after the anti-corruption campaign began (Table 1). However, it is uncertain if these social welfare initiatives shown in the table below were a response to the BBOC resistance.

Table 1 Social Investment Programmes

Programme	Goal	Target
N-Power	The programme seeks to equip young people with knowledge and technical skills for inclusive economic participation. Trainees are given practical experiences in diverse sectors of the economy to prepare them to run their businesses. The programme's overall goal is to reduce youth unemployment.	Place 500,000 trained graduates on employment with a monthly stipend of about $83 monthly. Support about 100,000 non-graduates to develop innovative ideas in different sectors of the economy.
Conditional Cash Transfer	A cash transfer to poor and vulnerable individuals. The programme combines the cash support and skills acquisition to help beneficiaries become financially independent.	About $14 dispensed monthly to an unspecified number of extremely poor Nigerians.
Government Enterprises Empowerment Programme	The programme provides soft loans to small-scale business owners, farmers, artisans etc.	Dispense $27 to $278 interest-free loans to an unspecified number of small business operators, farmers, artisans, etc.
Home Grown School Feeding	Daily provision of food for school-age children at public schools.	Lessen the financial burden on poor households, help nourish school kids, and stimulate local agriculture and job creation.

Note: Four main social welfare initiatives begun by the government in 2016.
Source: Author.

These welfare programmes, however, failed to assuage the anger of the masses. According to a recent government announcement, the programmes have benefited about seven million vulnerable Nigerians (Premium Times 2018), but the figure represents only a fraction of the extremely poor. In spite of these programmes, the evidence shows that more Nigerians have fallen into abject poverty (Akinkuotu 2019). Critics, including the wife of the President, Aisha Buhari, cite the limited coverage as the main reason the welfare schemes have failed to ensure economic security for the majority of poor Nigerians (Ogundipe 2019). As it seems, the administration failed to realise that amidst the hardship, patronage from politicians is to the poor, akin to basic income critical to their immediate-term economic wellbeing. Hence, in the opinion of a respondent, the BBOC pushback was to be expected:

> "…This is not to glorify corruption. …in a dysfunctional country…corruption has its advantage, …if you have a lot of people who have [illicit] access to the public treasury as you do in Nigeria, there is a ripple effect to that access. …A government comes in and in less than a year says, 'No more!'. And, in a cold turkey manner [sic] tries to cut people off. That reaction was [to be] expected." (T. Abolade, interviewed on July 13, 2017)

By implication, when vulnerable masses come to recognise corruption as crucial to their livelihood and anti-corruption policies counterproductive to the same, they are not only likely to resist such policies but may become apathetic to moral governance and anti-corruption altogether.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to address the question: why did the same segments of the masses who called for anti-corruption measures during the 2015 election as victims of corruption turn around to resist the war on corruption? As the study has attempted to demonstrate, the presence and intersection of three conditions in the post-2015 period triggered the BBOC reaction by the Nigerian masses. These conditions include the immersion of the masses in patron-client exchanges; the masses' dependence on patronage for their subsistence; and the intensity and coverage of the post-2015 anti-corruption campaign which adversely impacted the availability of patronage from political patrons.

The BBOC pushback appears to have no parallel beyond Nigeria. The reason may be that in the context of other developing states similar to Nigeria, all three conditions have not converged. Where the masses are embedded in patron-client relations and rely considerably on patronage to get by, a final condition necessary to provoke popular resentments such as the BBOC sentiment is an anti-corruption policy comprehensive enough to disrupt elite-masses patronage exchanges. The BBOC counter-reaction showed no apparent signs of elite-level mobilisation. It was instead a citizen-led anti-anti-corruption mobilisation. However, given that this is not a behavioural study, no authoritative conclusions can yet be made about how citizens perceived the Buhari anti-corruption campaign or their general perceptions on the functionality of corruption. It is a limitation to this study that future studies can address with a more precise methodology.

Notes

1 Also 'vulnerable masses/Nigerians', the term is used in reference to citizens in the subaltern classes, who due to the failure of formal welfare, live in extreme socioeconomic misery. The term covers the unemployed, underemployed, the physically and mentally-challenged and senior citizens who are most in need of social security.

2 A regime of corruption where state resources are privatised and used to service the interest of an oligarchy at the expense of public welfare (Wong 2010).

3 The BBOC campaign also trended on Twitter. The conversation is available at https://twitter.com/search?f=tweets&vertical- =default&q=%23bringbackourcorruption&src=typd.

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