



A Converted Democrat? Profiling the Attacks on Nigerian Journalists During Buhari's Civilian Regime (2015-2017)

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Abstract: This study investigates the attacks on Nigerian journalists during the first half of President Muhammadu Buhari's civilian administration (2015-2017). Buhari had promised during his electioneering campaign to be a "converted democrat", implying that the new democratic rule would not take after his dictatorship of 1983 to 1985 when he harassed and jailed reporters as a military head of state. In spite of his government's recent press freedom claim, our findings show succinctly that no fewer than 38 newsmen and women were arrested or harassed and at least one killed by gunmen in the two-year period. Interestingly, none of the cases was linked directly to Buhari personally, unlike his term as a military dictator. Nevertheless, the cases of abuse recorded so far is an indication that Mr. Buhari should initiate actions that safeguard the social responsibility credential of journalists.

Keywords: Journalists, harassment, freedom, Nigeria, democracy, Buhari

Introduction

The study documents for two years the number of journalists whose rights have been infringed upon by the civilian government of President Mohammed Buhari in Nigeria since his assumption of power on May 29, 2015, after defeating the incumbent President Goodluck at the polls. Buhari had been a former Military President from 1983 - 1985. He led a coup that overthrew the democratically elected Government of President Shehu Shagari. His rule was characterized by a poor human rights record where many Nigerians, mainly politicians and journalists were arrested, charged with sedition and given lengthy jail sentences varying from 20 to 300 years! (Vourlias, 2015; Osu & Pate, 2011; Adeyemi, 1998).

Seng & Hunt (1986) report that during a press conference, General Buhari lashed out at journalists, insisting he would tinker with press freedom. He referred with anger to articles in the press which claimed that huge amount of cash had been found missing in the oil ministry he headed in the late 1970's. He warned that he would not hesitate to shut down any newspaper found to have published any 'false' information about the government. In furtherance of its anti-press stance, the Buhari led military government, on March 29, 1984, promulgated the Decree No.4: which punished any person who published in any form, whether written or otherwise, any

message, rumor, report or a statement which is false ... or which brings or is calculated to bring the Federal Military Government or the Government of a state or a public officer to ridicule or disrepute.

After failing three times in 2003, 2007 and 2011, Buhari contested again and won as a presidential candidate in 2015, promising Nigerians and the international community that he was a "converted democrat" and had dropped his tyrannical and dictatorship tendencies associated with his military background (Leadership, 2015). Two years into his presidency, his government, represented by Information Minister, has claimed that not a single journalist has been detained or harassed (Kanayo, 2016; Ezeamalu, 2016). This work investigates the veracity of this claim.

Press and Press Freedom

Seng and Hunt (1986), citing various scholars, posit a checkered history of press freedom in pre- and post-colonial Nigeria. During the colonial era and in the build-up to independence in 1960, press freedom was curtailed but journalists, including such prominent nationalists as Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo, engaged their newspapers in the combat mode and confronted the colonialists in their quest for independence, which the country

eventually achieved in 1960. Between 1960 and 1965, the concept of press freedom was tolerated by the new government as private ownership of newspaper blossomed. This continued until the 1966 coup which saw young military officers taking over power. Dictatorship has always been the main feature of military regimes and that of Buhari was not an exemption. During civilian regimes, including the current Buhari's, journalists do exercise liberty to practice their profession and Nigeria, is often claimed, has probably the freest press in Africa.

In Africa, the experience of journalists with government in terms of press freedom is largely unimpressive. There are records of threats, raids, confiscation of properties and proscription of media outlets experienced by reporters and publishers in the hands of government agents. In some cases, Gestapo-style kidnap and death of journalists are visible (Osu & Pate, 2011; Adeyemi, 1998; Seng & Hunt, 1986). These attacks sometimes are not limited to the journalists; they are extended to family members. Dictators use these to serve as a deterrent to other journalists (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2016; Tukur, 2012; 2013).

There are provisions in the constitution on the freedom of the

press in Nigeria. Section 24 (1) of Nigeria's 1960 Constitution state that: "every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including the freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference" (Akinola, 1998). Correspondingly, Section 39 of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution affirms the right to the freedom of expression and of the press (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). The Freedom of Information Act of 2011 was also signed into law to help make government information more accessible to citizens who may request for it. How effective the Act has been is still subject to debate and varied interpretations. However, the important thing is that laws exist that support the journalist in the practice of his or her profession. Akinwale (2010) notes that press organizations are vibrant and restive institutions which provide platforms for power negotiations in the public arena. They set the stage for public discourse on trendy issues and enjoy wide circulation which is why governments are afraid of the media. Bruns (2008), corroborated by other scholars (Oyeleye, 2004; Kuper & Kuper, 2001) point out that fundamental features of media organizations include critical independence, democratic constructiveness and commercial viability.

Statement of the Problem and Research Questions

President Buhari claims he is a “converted democrat” and that the actions of his government are guided by the rule of law. His government also claims it has not detained or harassed any journalist since its inception. This appears contrary to counterclaims by reporters that Buhari’s behavior is reminiscent of his dictatorial attitude when he was military head of state in 1985. This paper puts the government’s claims to the test by recounting the ordeals of journalists under Buhari’s civilian administration.

Hudgens and Trillo (1999) state that since 1979, media organizations have increased significantly in Nigeria. There were two government television broadcasting stations, 14 licensed private TV, 82 AM, 35 FM and 11 SW stations in Nigeria in 1999. No fewer than 50 stations have been added in all the categories as of 2010. Freedom House (2015) adds that there are currently more than 100 national and local news publications. The increase in media organizations means there are more journalists than before. It is important to determine if journalists, with regard to government’s claims, truly enjoy the freedom to carry out their tasks between 2015 and 2017 which is the first half of Buhari’s civilian regime.

This elicits the following research questions:

1. Has the Buhari administration infringed on the rights of journalists in their course of duty?
2. If in the affirmative, what are the details of the journalists involved?
3. Has any journalist lost his or her life in the line of duty in Nigeria?
4. If yes, what are the details of the journalist(s) involved?

Significance of the Study

Several attacks, acts of intimidation and arrests of journalists have been reported in Nigeria, a country with probably the most vibrant media environment in Africa (Tettey, 2008). But government claims the contrary. The question then arises: In which domain does the truth lie (Omojola, 2008; 2011): Government or journalists? This works enables the determination of the integrity of either claim. It also puts on record details of arrests, harassments and death of Nigerian journalists. Furthermore, the study will serve as a reference material for researchers, journalists, civil society organizations and other multilateral organizations that are interested in the safety and freedom of journalists.

Agenda Setting Theory of the Press

This research paper is hinged on the agenda-setting theory of the press.

The theory was first proposed by McCombs and Shaw (1972) to document media influence on the presidential election in the United States and has been expounded by other scholars over the years (Yu, 2005; Soroka, 2002; Rogers, 1993; Kieffer, 1983). McCombs (2005) asserts that the agenda-setting theory focuses on the transfer of salience from the media agenda to the public agenda. That is, the media give an issue prominence with repeated features in news and editorial until the public starts discussing it. Lang and Lang (1981) declare that the media have the power to direct attention to certain issues, build up public image for political figures by constantly presenting them in their narratives, thereby giving the audience what to think and talk about.

This, in a way, gives the media the ability to sway public opinion on matters of public and national interest and has made authoritarian and dictatorial regimes very wary of the press. Quick-tempered regimes have exerted political powers to curtail the influence or as some will say the excesses of the press. Dictatorial military regimes in Nigeria have gagged the press and threatened reporters over the reporting of information purportedly classified. Military governments of Buhari (1983-1985), Babangida (1985-1992) and Abacha (1993-1998) were very repressive resulting

in the death and arrest of several journalists without trial.

Their main reason for media clampdown is that if they were given freedom and space to work, their narratives could lead to civil disobedience, insurrection and toppling of the government through coup d'état. Buhari in 1984 together with his Supreme Military Council (SMC) promulgated Decree No. 4 to stop the press from 'negatively' criticizing the government and preventing the publication of unsubstantiated reports. Defaulters faced prison or death.

Tunde Thompson and Nduka Irabor of *The Guardian* spent eight months in prison for publishing the list of ambassadorial appointments before its official release date by the Buhari government. Dele Giwa, the co-founder of *Newswatch Magazine* was charged to court by the Babangida regime over his refusal to reveal the source of a story he published. He was later killed by a parcel bomb in October 1986 during the same regime. Most journalists went underground and on exile during the Abacha regime. In spite of this, many were still arrested and killed for alleged anti-government reporting (Udomisor & Anayo, 2013; Osu & Pate, 2011; Nwokegi, 2009).

Lippman (1922) emphasizes that the media set the agenda by putting situation, circumstance, etc. as

pictures in the heads of the audiences. Stimuli from pictures can be very persuasive as they engender cognitive elaboration. If the media view a regime as incompetent and the cause of the suffering of the populace, these pictures will be created by the media. Continued projection of these pictures to the minds of the citizens could lead to the stage where they begin to call for regime change.

The media played a major role in turning public opinion against the former President Goodluck Jonathan in Nigeria, thereby making him lose the presidential election in Nigeria in 2015. Hitherto, it was unthinkable for an incumbent to lose an election with his control of the armed forces and ministerial arms of government. The media set the agenda for voters by framing him as weak and condoning corruption. His academic credentials were frequently queried. Reporters would wonder in their narratives why his PhD degree could not translate to good governance.

Regardless his history of poor human rights record as a military ruler, the media framed Bhari as a no-nonsense character that does not tolerate corruption. There were controversies over his secondary school certificate prior to the 2015 presidential election. The media downplayed it and rather came up with the argument that his military

training abroad could be the equivalent of a master's degree at least (Premium Times, 2015; Godwin, 2015). Since his victory at the polls, inflation has heightened with prices more than double for several items. The exchange rate of the United States dollar that was hovering around N170 skyrocketed to N500-560 at the parallel market (Yafugborhi, 2017) within six months of his rule.

The aggregate media narrative was that corruption under Jonathan was the genesis of the problem and Buhari should not be blamed. These comments show that reporters were generally not antagonistic. It is possible that the statement by Buhari's government that no journalist has been jailed or harassed was as a result of the euphoria created by the supposed support from the press. In spite this elation, it is necessary to prove the Buhari's assertion of converted democrat by detailing the arrest and death of journalists in the first half of his rule.

Research Methodology

This work involves the collection of data over the internet from the websites of several newspapers and blogs that were considered relevant to the study. Ndinojuo and Ihejirika (2015) state that internet research utilizes only the internet and other internet related applications for data gathering and collection. They may

include but not limited to web pages, applications and search engines. Data gathering and collection may occur over internet-enabled devices like computers (desktop and laptops), tablets, smartphones etc. and also internet services like emails, social media (*Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat* etc.)

The population for this study consisted of all the web pages of newspapers and blogs in Nigeria that showed up in Google search results. The study period covered: May 29, 2015, to May 29, 2017. The following search query Buhari + Arrest + Journalists + Nigeria + 2015 + 2016 + 2017 was entered into a search engine and the results displayed were selected with those from newspapers prioritized over blogs because they are deemed more reliable compared to blogs that are less formal and sometimes a one-man or -woman operation. The

results are presented below using tables.

Presentation of Findings

This study was conducted to ascertain the claim that no journalist has been imprisoned by President Buhari of Nigeria, a self-professed converted democrat since he won the presidential election in 2015. The findings are presented below.

RQ1. Has the Buhari administration infringed on the rights of journalists in the line of duty?

The Buhari administration from the data in Table 1 has infringed on the rights of journalists in the line of duty in Nigeria. Some 38 journalists were recorded to have either been brutalized, arrested and charged to court because their reporting clashed with the interests of government officials or security forces who must take command from President Buhari.

Table 1: Journalists who have clashed with Nigeria government between 29th May 2015 to 29th May 2017

No.	Name of Journalist	Organization	Date of Incident	Source	Action *
1	Muhammad Atta-Kafin-Dangi	Radio Nigeria	01 – 06 - 2015	Ezeamalu, 2016	B
2	Yomi Olomofe	Prime Magazine	25 – 06 - 2015	“	B
3	Seun Oloketuyi	Blogger	08 – 2015	“	AC
4	Chris Nwandu	Blogger	08 – 2015	“	AC
5	Emmanuel Ojo	Blogger	09 – 2015	“	AC
6	Emmanuel Elebeke	Vanguard	11 - 2015	“	B
7	Gideon Ekere	Global Post	3 – 02 - 2016	Ukpong, 2016	AC
8	Obioma Oburuoga	AIT	20 – 02 - 2016	Ezeamalu, 2016	BA
9	Nnamdi Ofonye	Silverbird TV	20 – 02 - 2016	Ezeamalu, 2016	BA
10	Tope Kuteyi	Channels TV	20 – 02 - 2016	Ezeamalu, 2016	BA
11	Jacob Dickson	Authentic News	27 – 04 - 2016	<i>Premium Times</i> ,	AC

		Daily		2016	
12	Samson Unamka	The Nation	12-05-2017	Media Foundation for West Africa	AC
13	Abubakar Usman	Blogger	8 – 8 - 2016	“	A
14	Desmond Ike	Blogger	08 – 2016	“	AC
15	Ahmed Salkida	Freelance	5 – 09 - 2016	Ogundipe, 2016a	A
16	Emenike Iroegbu	Abia Facts	6 – 09 - 2016	Ogundipe, 2016b	A
17	Jamil Mabai	Cliqq Magazine	19 – 09 - 2016	Tukur, 2016	AC
18	Bashir Dauda	Blogger	19 – 09 - 2016	“	AC
19	Umar Faruq	Blogger	19 – 09 - 2016	“	AC
20	Tony Abulu	Watchdog media	21 – 09 - 2016	Ogundipe, 2016c	BA
21	Richard Hasley	Watchdog media	21 – 09 - 2016	“	BA
22	Opara Uche	Watchdog media	21 – 09 - 2016	“	BA
23	Handy Romeo Eze	Watchdog media	21 – 09 - 2016	“	BA
24	Kelvin Torvila	Watchdog media	21 – 09 - 2016	“	BA
25	Lanre ogunleye	Watchdog media	21 – 09 - 2016	“	BA
26	Balogun Ehigie	Watchdog media	21 – 09 - 2016	“	BA
27	Kenneth Danpome	Watchdog media	21 – 09 - 2016	“	BA
28	Matthew	Watchdog media	21 – 09 - 2016	“	BA
29	Joe Epi	Watchdog media	21 – 09 - 2016	“	BA
30	Aku Obidinma	MyRadio 101.1 FM	21-11-2016	Sahara Reporters, 2016	BAC
31	Nsibiet John	The Ink	5 – 01 - 2017	Ukpong, 2017	AC
32	Jerry Edoho	Ibom Nation	06 – 01 - 2017	Ukpong, 2017	A
33	Dapo Olorunyomi	Premium Times	19 – 01 - 2017	Premium Times, 2017	A
34	Evelyn Okakwu	Premium Times	19 – 01 - 2017	Premium Times, 2017	A
35	Kemi Olunloyo	Blogger	13-03-2017	Azubuike, 2017	AC
36	Samuel Walson	Rivers Today	13-03-2017	“	AC
37	Famou Giobaro	Glory FM 97.1	16-04-2017	Agency Report, 2017	K
38	Midat Joseph	Leadership	19-04-2017	Mohammed, 2017	AC
39	Lekan Adetayo	The Punch	23-04-2017	Daka, 2017	B

The “Action *” column on Table 1: Arrested (A), Brutalized/Beaten (B), Arrested and charged to court (AC), Killed (K). Color codes indicate different years.

RQ2. If yes, what are the details of the journalists involved?

The details of the journalists involved are outlined in Table 1. They show that the government does not go after only freelance journalists but also those who work full time with the mainstream media organizations - private or government-owned. The table

shows that 38 journalists have had altercations with government’s security officials since Buhari’s inauguration on May 29, 2015, to May 29, 2017. Table 1 also shows that 10 of the affected journalists work with *Watchdog Media*, two with *Premium Times*, while *Radio Nigeria*, *My Radio 101.1*, *Glory FM*, *Rivers Today*, *Prime Magazine*, *The Punch*, *Leadership* newspaper,

Vanguard, *Africa Independent Television* (AIT), *Silverbird TV*, *Channels TV*, *Global Post*, *Authentic News Daily*, *Abia Facts*, *Clique Magazine*, *The Ink*, and *Ibom Nation* all have one each. The list also has one journalist as freelance and eight as bloggers.

From the data presented in Table 1, we hereby refute the claim by Lai Mohammed, Buhari's Minister of Information, that no journalist has been detained or harassed in Nigeria since Buhari became president in 2015. This is in consonance with the findings of Kanayo (2016) and (Ezeamalu, 2016) who have also disputed the converted democrat claim and proved that many reporters have been thrown into detention over accusation of slander. A democrat will ensure that the rule of law is applied in all disputes. Libel and slander are offences that do not necessarily require the accused person to be held incommunicado for days by security agents before being charged to court. Rather, notice is simply served to the accused person and his or her organization to retract or apologize for any false report or claim damages where it applies. Where these don't work, the respondent may seek redress in a

law court as enshrined in the constitution.

RQ3. *Has any journalist lost his or her life in the line of duty during the first two years of Buhari's presidency in Nigeria?*

Table 1 shows that one journalist was killed during the study period. The claim by the Buhari's administration that no journalist has lost his or her life is hereby rebutted.

RQ4. *what are the details of the journalist who was killed?*

Table 1 again shows that the murdered journalist - Famou Giobaro - worked at *Glory FM 97.1* Yenagoa, Bayelsa state, in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. He was killed in his house by unknown gunmen. Government forces have not been directly linked to the act but the report on his death states that nothing was taken from his home after he was shot and as such could not be attributed to robbery attack. The killers are yet to be apprehended.

Discussion

Data from Table 1 were mined further to show the location where the journalists were arrested, their gender and the government agencies that executed their arrest, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Breakdown of Journalists' arrest by location, arresting and gender

No	Name of Journalist	Location of Arrest	Agency Concerned	Gender
1	Muhammad Atta-Kafin-Dangi	Abuja, FCT	Federal	M
2	Yomi Olomofe	Lagos	Federal	M
3	Seun Oloketuyi	Lagos	Federal	M
4	Chris Nwandu	Lagos	Federal	M
5	Emmanuel Ojo	Abeokuta, Ogun	State	M
6	Emmanuel Elebeke	Abuja, FCT	Federal	M
7	Gideon Ekere	Uyo, Akwa Ibom	State	M
8	Obioma Oburuoga	Owerri, Imo	Federal	M
9	Nnamdi Ofonye	Owerri, Imo	Federal	M
10	Tope Kuteyi	Owerri, Imo	Federal	M
11	Jacob Dickson	Kaduna	State	M
12	Samson Unamka	Lagos	Federal	M
13	Abubakar Usman	Abuja, FCT	Federal	M
14	Desmond Ike	Lagos	Federal	M
15	Ahmed Salkida	Abuja, FCT	Federal	M
16	Emenike Iroegbu	Umuahia, Abia	State	M
17	Jamil Mabai	Kaduna	State	M
18	Bashir Dauda	Kaduna	State	M
19	Umar Faruq	Kaduna	State	M
20	Tony Abulu	Benin, Edo	Federal	M
21	Richard Hasley	Benin, Edo	Federal	M
22	Opara Uche	Benin, Edo	Federal	M
23	Handy Romeo Eze	Benin, Edo	Federal	M
24	Kelvin Toryila	Benin, Edo	Federal	M
25	Lanre ogunleye	Benin, Edo	Federal	M
26	Balogun Ehigie	Benin, Edo	Federal	M
27	Kenneth Danpome	Benin, Edo	Federal	M
28	Matthew	Benin, Edo	Federal	M
29	Joe Epi	Benin, Edo	Federal	M
30	Aku Obidinma	Owerri, Imo	Federal	M
31	Nsibiet John	Uyo, Akwa Ibom	State	M
32	Jerry Edoho	Uyo, Akwa Ibom	Federal	M
33	Dapo Olorunyomi	Abuja, FCT	Federal	M
34	Evelyn Okakwu	Abuja, FCT	Federal	F
35	Kemi Olunloyo	Ibadan, Oyo	Federal	F
36	Samuel Walson	Port Harcourt	Federal	M
37	Famou Giobaro	Yenagoa, Bayelsa	Unknown	M
38	Midat Joseph	Kaduna, Kaduna	State	M
39	Lekan Adetayo	Abuja, FCT	Federal	M

From Table 2, 37 of the arrested journalists were male representing 94.9% while 2 were female representing 5.1%. We can hypothesize that the reasons for the low arrest of females compared to males may be that the journalism profession in Nigeria is dominated by men, or women journalists tend to avoid narratives that could get them in trouble with the government. This perspective is subject to further testing to ascertain its acceptability.

In Nigeria, the federal government controls all the security outfits. A state government, however, can influence the activities of the security agencies in its domain relative to the relationship that exists between the particular state and the president. Where the relationship is cordial, he can skew the activities of security agencies in his favor than when is not cordial.

Table 2 shows that 29 of the actions were carried out by federal agencies under President Buhari while nine were executed by the same agencies but this time under instructions from state governments. The executor of one was unknown. Further breakdown of the nine incidents shows that Kaduna state government ordered the arrest of five journalists, Akwa Ibom government ordered two, while Abia and Ogun state governments effected one each. Note, however, that Katsina state government

ordered the arrest of three journalists even though the order was executed in another state (Kaduna). This shows the kind of cooperation that exists among the ruling governors when it comes to contesting the rights of journalists. Incidentally, governors of both Kaduna and Katsina states belong in the same party with President Buhari. In fact, Katsina is also his home state.

Essentially, President Buhari has been in power for 24 months while 39 journalists have either been brutalized, arrested, charged to court or killed under his watch. This represents an average of 1.5 journalists every month. This is worrisome as Buhari is only halfway into his four-year tenure. If this trend continues, then journalists are in for an ordeal in the next two years. If Buhari gets another four-year term, then we are looking at a whopping 152 journalists ready to face fire under him!

It is interesting to note, however, that none of these 39 cases was linked directly to the person of Buhari. It is construable that overzealous security officials may have taken laws into their hands to deal unkindly with newsmen and women whose reporting does not conform to their interests or in order to earn commendation or promotion. Cases of federal government's intervention during journalists' altercation with hyperzealous

security agents also exist. That of The Punch reporter expelled from the state house in Abuja by chief security officer comes to mind. The Buhari's presidency waded in and had the journalist recalled (Tukur, 2017), but observers assert that the fear and intimidation which could be the main objectives for expelling the journalist in the first instance, had already occurred. He was left with the psychological trauma that could affect his future performance. Journalists should be allowed to carry out their information provision and surveillance function in the society as proposed by McCombs and Shaw (1972; McCombs (2005)), as a way of holding government accountable. It is important to report that the US Department of State, in its Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017, had blamed the Buhari government for its reluctance to investigate allegations of abuses against security officials and top government functionaries, in addition to non-prosecution of the indicted ones (Ibekwe, 2018; Nwachukwu, 2018).

Specific Cases

Jamil Mabai was arrested by the police under instructions from the Katsina state government because he criticized the decision of the state governor to buy 3000 metal coffins for distribution to different mosques

in the state. The blogger questioned why buying coffins should be prioritized over other sectors like education, housing, healthcare etc. Security agents trailed him to Kaduna state where he was arrested and charged to court for posting a "misleading" article (Tukur, 2016).

Gideon Ekere was arrested for linking the Akwa Ibom Governor to a sex scandal in a story while his deputy ordered the arrest of John Nsibiet for writing that he earns about N250 million (\$900,000) monthly as security vote. Both are examples of the abuse of power by those in authority. The courts exist to recompense for libellous publications without subjecting the journalists concerned to intimidation or harassment (Ukpong, 2016; 2017). The governor could have sued Mr Ekere to prove his innocence while the Deputy Governor could have published how he earns and expends his security vote before taking the journalists to court. The security vote is taken from the tax proceeds from the citizens. It is the job of journalists to report how the money is spent. Lekan Adetayo, The Punch's state house correspondent was harassed by the chief security officer to the President for publishing an article that questioned the anti-corruption fight of the Buhari government. During his ordeal, he was barred from entering Aso Rock Villa (state house) for having a dissenting

opinion from that of the government (Daka, 2017).

It is going to be difficult for President Buhari to wash his hands off the foregoing cases. This is because the security apparatuses belonging to the government were deployed to intimidate these journalists. In some cases, like that of Aso Rock Villa, the office of the chief security officer is directly responsible to Buhari who experts claim cannot claim ignorance of the ordeal of the *The Punch* man. However, opponents of this view counter the argument, asserting that the reporter was recalled after all and that the intervention leading to his recall might have come from Buhari himself. The counteraction is that even if the intervention came from Buhari, the 39 listed cases of harassment and death of journalists were visible enough to render to naught the converted democrat claim.

Remarks

Journalists in Nigeria today face a lot of harassment in the course of trying to inform the public especially about government's activities and expose those individuals and groups that pose threats to the society. The 39 listed cases attest to this. The president as part of his election campaign to Nigerians and the international community had claimed to be a

“converted democrat” while his minister of information Mr Lai Mohammed also trumpeted that no Nigerian journalist had been arrested or harassed by the Buhari-led civilian government. These claims are groundless.

An accusation from human rights activists is even rife that one of the main reasons why the government go after journalists is to damage them financially, with the aim that it will serve as a deterrent to others. This scenario made the interim director of a multilateral agency in Nigeria, Makmid Kamara, conclude that the escalation in the harassment of journalists and bloggers recently seems to be little more than a barefaced attempt by the Nigerian government to muzzle dissenting voices (Amnesty International, 2016). There has been no significant response to this allegation from Buhari's administration.

Importantly, the judiciary of today is more independent than the judiciary of 1984 that was easily pressured by dictators in the military government to hand out lengthy jail terms to journalists and opposition figures. Journalists were treated as though were terrorists (Morah & Omojola, 2011). The opinion is popular today that government should cultivate the habit of taking journalists who have overreached to court rather than harassing them. Some observers say politicians do

not want to take this route because most of the cases against journalists either are dropped after a short time in court or continue as lengthy trials in which the journalists will eventually be discharged for lack of evidence (Ogundipe, 2017; Ibrahim, 2016). President Buhari has complained severally about lack of cooperation from the judiciary (Soniya, 2016; Odunsi, 2015). This, the observers assert, is partly the reason why some judges have also been intimidated, suffering the same way as journalists. A number of judges have been arrested and charged to court for corruption (Adesomoju, 2016; Egbas, 2016), although most of them have been discharged, acquitted and resumed work (Oloyode, 2017; Ozekhome, 2017).

Recommendation

There is little or no evidence to attest President Buhari's conversion to democratic tenets in his working relationship with journalists who, according to former US president George W. Bush, are indispensable

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to democracy (Joyella, 2017). The Nigerian government needs to start treating journalists as partners in development, not adversaries. Government should safeguard reporters' social responsibility credential as part of the efforts to make democracy produce the necessary dividend for the citizens.

Suggestion for Future Research

One of the upshots of this work is the discovery that none of the 39 cases of harassment and death was traceable to the person of President Buhari. Was this a strategy by the Federal Government or Buhari himself? Was this a serendipitous outcome of a government's working relationship with journalists? How healthy are journalists and their prison environment while being detained? How does government take care of them health-wise during detention? (Oresanya, et al., 2017) These questions and conjectures are good grounds for a fresh investigation on how journalists have been treated under the Buhari administration.

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