

OPINION AND ANALYSIS

The child of an elephant would not be a dwarf: a look at the challenges facing Nigeria's Buhari

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THE 2015 Nigerian elections took many by surprise with the seamless transition of power and not much of the expected contestation from the former incumbent. Since the state's creation the blood of its citizens has watered the Nigerian political landscape. Now that Muhammadu Buhari has taken office the true test of the maturity of Nigeria's politics is about to commence.

In Yoruba, one of the largest spoken native languages in Nigeria, there is a proverb that says: 'the child of an Elephant would not be a dwarf'. Undoubtedly, the sheer weight of the challenges that Buhari has to surmount, to provide Nigeria with the stability he promised, reaches near mammoth proportions. He is faced with many difficulties including an ailing infrastructure, rampant corruption and weakened institutions. Further adding to the challenges facing the new administration is Nigeria's level of debt. The transition committee chairman, Ahmed Joda, announced that the administration has inherited a debt burden of over US\$63 million. There have been talks about further devaluing the Nigerian Naira closer to 200 Naira to the US dollar to further reduce inflation. But, that may ultimately cause huge unrest as such a devaluation will increase the cost of living while simultaneously decreasing the value of wages - many of which haven't been paid in months.

Another major challenge facing the Buhari administration is ensuring security within the state. Kidnap for ransom has become quite a lucrative enterprise. While many militant groups have existed over the years, an increase in militancy is another major challenge faced by state. This includes groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and maritime piracy. Religious fundamentalist extremism is another blight on the face of security in Northern Nigeria. There have been a number of extremist groups that have popped up in recent times such as Ombutse and Boko Haram.

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Reflections on AU summit

The way forward for Nigeria's economic woes is one of governance reform, more specifically rebuilding and strengthening its institutions. Weak institutions arguably provide an opportunity for corruption to take place without impunity, causing further contraction of the economy. The Buhari government needs to steer away from the path of his predecessors, as well as a number of developing economies, in 'isomorphic mimicry'. Lant Pritchett, Michael Woolcock and Matt Andrews, in a December 2010 working paper for the Centre for Global Development, define this practice as: "the adoption of the forms of other functional states and organizations which camouflages a persistent lack of function."

In developmental economics, scholars refer to the 'isomorphic mimicry' as one of the major challenges of developing nations. It is this 'persistent lack of function' that is pervasive in all parts of society and gives room for groups such as Boko Haram to exist and act with impunity.

The challenges facing Nigeria are massive, many of which have historical root, but real and lasting changes are not impossible. The people of Nigeria have shown that they are ready for change with their votes, what they need is a political leadership that has the political will to make structural changes. The first 100 days of Buhari's time in office will be a harbinger of the rest of his term - hopefully this would be what the citizens Africa's most populous country have been fighting for.

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