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Popular Diplomacy in an Autocracy – Public Opinion and Foreign Policy Decision-Making under the Military in Nigeria

Chukwuemeka Ojieh

Abstract

Democracy is believed to allow greater and popular participation in governance than authoritarian regimes. It follows that democracy would increase the influence of public opinion on the foreign policy making process of nations. This being so, public opinion as a factor in the government decision-making process has become contemporaneous with democratic regimes such that there is a general notion that autocratic regimes act independent of popular opinion in foreign policy decision-making. Using public opinion as an expression of popular view, this article contradicts such notions by establishing that non-democratic (military) regimes could be malleable to public opinion in foreign policy decision-making. This it does in a content analysis of selected Nigerian newspapers, using the Babangida military regime's decision on an IMF loan as a case study and submits that non-democratic regimes could lay claims to popular diplomacy. More so, because evidence in this study does not show that democratic regimes in Nigeria have necessarily increased the influence of public opinion on foreign policy decision-making, it submits that the manifest of democratic ethos such as popular diplomacy in governments' foreign policy decision-making would not necessarily be a product regime-type.

Keywords: Public Opinion, Foreign Policy, Decision-Making, Regime-Type, Military Rule in Nigeria.

Introduction

The popular wisdom stating that the worst of civil democracies are preferred to the most benevolent military dictatorships justifies and perpetuates many failing democracies. This saying assumes

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that no matter how popular military regimes may be or no matter how "nationalist their programmes may be, they can never be substitutes for democratic regimes."[1] It is commonplace to hear such comments among Nigerians, who say that despite the shortfalls of the present democratic regime (in Nigeria) it is better than the military era. Democratically elected regimes are said to "have a wide scope and more leeway in policy decisions than regimes resulting from military coups d'etats because they are legitimate."[2] This has led to the contention that democratic regimes are more malleable to public opinion in foreign policy decision-making, since they are believed to be better guarantors for the expression of public opinion.

This view pervades available literature; hence, Aluko credits the civilian (democratic) administration of Nigeria's First Republic with "more organized political institutions through which different opinions could be expressed."[3] Ogwu equally agrees with the superiority of democratic regimes' malleability to public opinion in foreign policy decision-making because, given that foreign affairs were salient to the political parties and their leaders, they attempt "to exert influence on policy."[4] This corresponds with Holsti, who states that "foreign policy officials tended to regard congressional moods as the relevant manifestation of public opinion."[5] In addition, Foyle notes that government "officials relied most often on. . .elected representatives as indicators of public opinion. They used mass opinion (such as polls and letters) to a lesser extent and other elites and interest group activity least of all."[6] Such representatives, he opines, "may view their position as agents of the public sent to pursue certain policies or as acting as the public would want on any given issue."[7] From the foregoing, the general consensus therefore, is that public opinion would always count as a factor of decision-making in democratic regimes.

No wonder on the question of whether public opinion affects foreign/public policy, Roskin et al. write that "as a primary input to the people into the political system [. . .], in a democracy [. . .] it certainly should."[8] This is because "in democracies which provide freedom to express dissents in bold and dramatic form, strategies for bringing grievances to public attention can be very effective in exciting widespread sympathy."[9] Wheeler went further to exemplify the contention that nations' foreign policies would be influenced by reactions of the home population when

he linked the U.S. military interventions in Iraq 1991 (Operation Provide Comfort) and Somalia 1992 (Operation Restore Hope), with the domestic conditions at home (i.e. in the United States).[10] Here, "the principal force behind intervention. . .was the media and domestic public opinion which pressurized policymakers into. . .actions [and he concluded that] liberal states will launch humanitarian rescue missions if sufficient public pressure is mobilized."[11] Chaturvedi bluntly declares that "a democratic government is responsive to the public opinion [because] the parliamentary form of government seeks to correspond to the desires of the electorate. The members of the legislature represent the prevailing tendencies and opinions of the nation."[12]

As there appears to be a consensus for a place for public opinion in foreign policy, extant literature creates the impression that it is a democratic dividend. This is so because, as seen above, the notion of popular power or people-centered governance appears contemporaneous with democratic regimes. But this kind of thesis is based on a faulty premise because the tendency for governments to be responsive to the peoples' interests or yearnings in policy formulations is not exclusive to democratic regimes, as is popularly assumed. In fact, evidence abounds that democratic regimes would not always increase the influence of public opinion on Nigeria's foreign policy decision-making. This is just as there are equally pieces of evidence that non-democratic regimes, like the military in Nigeria, are malleable to public opinion in foreign policy decision-making.

However, in comparative politics, the analyses of military regimes as aberrations have "achieved the status of institutionalized topic."[13] Military regimes are often perceived as bereft of "ideology or considered political programme,"[14] hence, "disdainful of informed commentary and cultural discourse,"[15] and have in fact "subverted the growth of democracy by their enthronement of authoritarianism and a general atmosphere of terror in the Nigerian society."[16] As pariahs, military regimes are believed to be unresponsive to popular opinion in foreign policy decision-making. No wonder Professor Aluko noted that it was "out of place to write about public opinion and its impact on foreign policy. . .under military rule"[17]—a skepticism that must have derived from the perceived absurdity and incompatibility between the two extremes of order and brute force as represented by public

opinion and military rule respectively. Since military regimes are seen as aberrations, studies hardly acknowledge their performance and this is particularly unfortunate since it is the performance of a regime rather than its origin (i.e., whether it emerged as a consequence of an election or a coup), which is of greater significance when assessing the regime's effect on the processes of economic and social change.[18] The foregoing notwithstanding, the military in Nigeria as undertaken in this article can be credited with evidence of deferring to public opinion in foreign policy decision-making and thus lay claim to popular diplomacy.

Actually, this article's findings contradict the initial assumption that non-democratic regimes like the military regime in Nigeria would not show concern for popular opinion in foreign policy decision-making. This research sets out to establish that in Nigeria, popular diplomacy was manifest in regimes that were not democratic, like the Babangida military junta (1985-1993) and contrary to general assumptions. Through using content analysis of selected Nigerian newspapers and using the IMF Loan Debate (1985) as case study, this theory is validated. A statistical computation of the available data (see the "Interpretation of Data" section of this article) gave a 79%, or *preponderance level,* of Nigerians' opposition to the IMF loan project and validated the regime's claim not to have taken the loan on account of "the massive opposition to it from the Nigeria public,"[19] meaning that "Babangida [a military dictator who ruled Nigeria] succumbed to the people's wishes on the International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan."[20] The study thus turns inside-out such contentions that, within the bureaucracy of military regimes in Nigeria, final policy decisions were conditioned by the personality of the people running the system.

Theoretical Considerations

In the roots of realist tradition, radical or extreme realism is hinged on the notion of the supremacy of the state in international politics. This idea is well captured most notably by Nicollo Machiavelli in his famous *raison d'etat* thesis. The raison d'etat idea was founded specifically on the notion of the primacy of national interest in explaining the actions of the state. It further goes on to legitimize whatever means that were deployed by nations to justify

such actions, so that "anything is justified by reason of state."[21] By so doing, the power political consideration got its foundation laid by Machiavelli to guide the future realists' ascription to the state as the principal focus of relations among nations. It is in this light that Sabine and Thorson contend that "Machiavelli more than any other political thinker created the meaning that has been attached to the state in modern political usage."[22]

This research, which seeks to establish that public opinion would count in the foreign policy decision-making of Nigerian rulers in an autocracy, therefore, falls headlong and gets turned inside-out if it were to be premised on the foregoing realist assumption, that is, that states are the principal actors in the international system with their chief concern being the pursuit of their self-interest. This would be so because the core interests of the state such as "national survival and self preservation"[23] would gain precedence over a secondary one like public opinion, which counts "very little."[24] This actually fits Morgenthau's assertion that decision makers should

> use their own best judgment as the first cut in the determination of a sound foreign policy [and afterwards], attempt to lead the public to gain support for their preferred option. . . . [Thus] you should study the problem carefully in terms of the national interest and decide on the ideal course. . .then should you consider congressional and public opinion with an eye towards educating such opinion in the necessities of the situation.[25]

In the light of the foregoing, the extant contention that popular diplomacy would be exclusive to democratic regimes appears to gain validity. Hence, Shapiro and Page note that "the key to understanding relationships between public opinion and policy making in the context of democratic theory"[26] lies in the examination of the "collective public opinion, at the aggregate or macro level."[27] The notion of democracy as popular power implies governments' responsiveness to citizens' aspirations in policy decision-making. When transposed to foreign policy, it becomes popular diplomacy where government's responsiveness to the wishes of its citizens in foreign policy decision-making ought to be paramount. In a study on popular diplomacy, a test of opinion-policy relation implies that "where public opinion is well-informed

and deliberative, democratic theory would seem to call for responsiveness by policy makers."[28]

Within the populist democratic behaviour the assumption is that the government responds not only directly, but immediately to the wishes of the citizens upon whom power actually devolves and with the government only holding same in trust. Where this does not happen, that is, where government fails to respond to the wishes of its citizens, there becomes a disconnect between opinion and policy. Page and Barabas say that when this occurs, like it often does, it "constitutes *prima facie* evidence. . .that democracy is not working well."[29] From the foregoing, therefore, there seems to be a consensus as to where the custodianship of public opinion in the foreign policy decision-making of nations often exists and going by extant literature, it is no doubt located within the purview of liberal democracies. But can this always be so? In Nigeria, evidence abounds to the effect that democratic regimes are anything but democratic. This is because whatever existed, and currently exists, as democracy may not be properly speaking so termed having been described as nothing short of the Prebendal[30] politics which has existed since independence in 1960. And because the democratic regime of the current Fourth Republic Nigeria have been characterized by several breaches of the democratic ethos in both domestic and foreign policies, Al-Bashir refers to it (the present democratic government in Nigeria) as a "militocracy," a term he says means a "democracy without the rule of law."[31]

Nigeria's democracy may have been disparaged, but the military regimes are not better either. Rather, their case is often worse. Aluko, re-echoing the position of *African Confidential* notes that "nobody knows who takes decision in Nigeria [under the military]."[32] Whereas, Fawole locates the powers of decision-making under the military to be "largely [in] the domain of the military head of state backed by his major advisers in the ruling council."[33] Alli wondered who such major or "valued advisers were and whose regional or group interests persuaded his [junta leader's] action."[34] Alli's worry had stemmed from the fact that although he was a prominent member of the ruling caucus under General Abacha (1993-1998), but, like many of his colleagues, he was ignorant of how most of the regime's decisions were made and by whom.

Overall, Ojieh[35] notes that it is still unclear in statutory terms who exactly took major national decisions under the military regimes of Nigeria. Even though a "shadowy clique of army officers"[36] in conjunction with the head of the junta was believed to have been often responsible for most of the decisions of government under the military in Nigeria, this does not equate to a statutory body. Yet the Babangida military regime here-studied showed deference to public opinion in its decision on the 1985 IMF loan project. The issue is even more problematic given that decision making under the military is not deliberative[37] – a situation that increased the credibility crisis of the military regimes in Nigeria in addition to the aberration usually associated with their coming to power. Was there really a correlation between the military government's decision on the IMF Loan Project and the popular thinking on it by Nigerians? It is against this background that we proceed on an evaluation of our case study—the military government's decision on the IMF Loan Project in 1985—with a view to providing evidence of a military government's malleability to popular opinion in foreign policy decision-making.

The Research Case Study – The Babangida Military Government's Decision on the IMF Loan Debate (1985)

At the turn of the last century, crude oil had earned Nigeria approximately $280 billion.[38] Nigeria acquired $104.06 billion from oil between 1979 and 1985 alone.[39] Consequently, Nigeria had become a wealthy nation, with its leaders persuaded to assume "that finance was no longer a constraint to economic growth and development."[40] Hence, one of its former military rulers is famed to have once declared that Nigeria's problem was not money but what to do with money, so that government embarked on spend-thrift projects in and outside the shores of Nigeria. A combination of poor economic management by various Nigerian administrations coupled with a later decline in oil earnings, which reached its lowest ebb in the 1980s, put Nigeria in a quagmire of economic crises.

As the oil boom era came to an end and recession set in, matters were not helped by the steady decline in the value of the Nigerian currency, the Naira (₦). It nose-dived "from ₦2.02 to $1.00 in 1986, to ₦7.39 to $1.00 in 1989, ₦9.91 to $1.00 in 1991 to

₦21.89 to $1.00 in 1994, ₦81.25 in 1996 to ₦92.34 in 1999, ₦101.65 in 2000 to ₦130.00 in 2003."[41] Then, it only marginally appreciated to ₦116 in 2008, but went down to an all-time low as it has oscillated between ₦150 and ₦160 since 2009. The oil boom of the 1970s and up to the middle of the 1980s had given rise to a culture of the government outspending its revenue. Thus, the government's annual budgets started recording deficits on account of the declining fortunes of the late 1980s and "in order to meet rising demand for imports of both capital and consumer items, Nigeria began to borrow from the Euro-dollar market."[42] This marked the beginning of Nigeria's steady decline to the club of the world's debtor nations. Thus, whereas, by 1980, Nigeria's debt stood at only $8.9 billion, this became $18.3 billion in 1985 when the IMF loan debate took place. It was $20.9 billion in 1986, over $30.00 billion by 1988, and averaged at $32.00 billion in 1995.[43] By June 2005, just before Nigeria received a debt reprieve of 60 percent or about $20 billion from the Paris Club of creditors, its debt was $34 billion.[44]

The debt reprieve from the Paris Club in 2005 was the crowning height of a series of economic reform strategies at getting Nigeria out of the debt quagmire. Many such fiscal reforms had begun from the mid-1970s. One of such is our case study—the contemplation of a support loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which a military administration had rejected due to public outcry. Before the IMF loan debate of 1985, there was the Obansanjo military regime's (1976-1979) austerity measures code-named 'Low Profile' and 'Tighten Your Belt,' and also the fact that the issue of Nigeria's declining economic prospects were articulated by President Shehu Shagari in 1982 when he presented the Economic Stabilization Act to the National Assembly. The same Shagari administration had introduced some austerity measures which "became the focal point of debate throughout the 1980s."[45] Despite these measures, the recession in the economy continued, reaching "crises point in the 1983-1984 period when oil prices declined precipitously by 45 percent of the 1980 level."[46] Exacerbating the economic malaise was the rampant corruption in the Shagari period (1979 to 1983) and during which period an estimated between $5 billion and $7 billion was alleged to have been illegally transferred out of the country.[47] The situation was such that by 1979 when the Shagari administration came on board,

Nigeria's debt profile stood at ₦2.1 billion, whereas by 1983 when he left office, it was between ₦11 and 12 billion.[48]

Major-General Muhammadu Buhari, upon sacking the Shagari government in a coup d'etat on December 31, 1983, was to reverse most of the World Bank-friendly economic stabilization policies of the preceding civilian regime. In fact, in April 1983 the Shagari regime had made an application for and started negotiating an IMF support loan facility of about $2.2 billion. This was to be continued by the Buhari military regime, but was stalemated on the grounds of the new regime's "claim that the conditionalities attached to the loan facility were designed to further wreck than reverse the prostrate economy."[49] For three years, that is, from April 1983 when the Shagari regime first applied for the IMF loan up to September 1985 when the Babangida regime put the matter to public debate, there had been several arguments for and against borrowing from the IMF. In his maiden broadcast to the nation on August 27 1985, Babangida stated that the IMF loan issue would be thrown to the court of public opinion in order to

> break the deadlock that frustrated the negotiations with a view to evaluate more objectively both the negative and the positive implication. . .[Thus,] At all times in the course of discussions, representatives would be guided by the feelings and aspirations of the Nigerian People.[50]

On September 25, 1985, the Armed Forces Ruling Council (the nation's military regime's highest decision-making organ) inaugurated the Presidential Committee on IMF Loan to conduct a national debate on the desirability or otherwise of Nigeria obtaining the IMF loan.

This article will not commit the error of assuming that merely putting the IMF loan issue to public debate should confer on the military regime a claim to being people-centered in its foreign policy decision-making. Such a fallacy had provided a fertile ground for critics of the military regime's decision on the loan project to thrive. Rather, this study will interrogate the intricate factors at play in the IMF loan project before ascribing novelty to the Babangida-regime's sponsored nationwide debates on the contentious issue of the IMF loan facility and, subsequently, validate the capacity of public opinion (as represented in the debates'

outcome) to influence a military government's policy decision. This is notwithstanding the fact that Oyejide et al. have noted that the misleading impression created by the assumption "that the bulk of public opinion is against the loan"[51] gave rise to the debate. For the purpose of this study, the focus is on the extent to which the outcome of the public debate conditioned government's policy decision on the IMF loan. So, the considerations are on political grounds and the count of numbers for or against the loan, in terms of referential issues relating to the case study and as contained in the research sample (that is, the content-analyzed newspapers) and validated by secondary sources.

Research Design and Methods of Data Collection

The research design is a content analysis of a sample of some Nigerian newspapers for referential issues pertaining to the IMF loan debate in order to establish evidence of the military government's malleability to public opinion in its subsequent decision on the loan project. The sample is made up of three Nigerian elite/national newspapers: *The Punch, The Guardian,* and *Vanguard*. Though clips from just three newspapers are being used to represent popular opinion in this study, this is compatible with social science research and validated by existing studies.[52] Actually, this sample (of 3 newspapers) was systematically arrived at having been adjudged valid out of 71 Nigerian newspapers where the Federal and State Governments controlled 36 and the privately owned press 35.[53] This was done using the *purposive* also called *judgmental sampling design*—a "sampling method in which the researcher uses his or her own judgment in the selection of sample members."[54] This is in order because according to Babbie, "it may be appropriate for you to select your sample on the basis of *your own knowledge* of the population, its elements, and the nature of your research aims"[55] (emphasis added).

The knowledge that already existed of the newspapers informed the sample choice because they are acclaimed to be the most popular newspapers in Nigeria.[56] Also, with a research aim of testing popular participation in foreign policy decision-making, these (three) newspapers, given their non-government affiliations, would ensure greater unbiased reporting. This fits the contentions of Fab-Ukozor (2004)[57] and Angell (1964) when the latter would

not use Soviet periodicals in the content analysis of elite media in a study because the "[Communist government] exercises a close surveillance over Soviet periodicals."[58] He actually described the contents of Soviet periodicals as "a case of one voice speaking through a hundred mouths."[59] This contention of Angell is nearly true of all government owned media in Nigeria and possibly elsewhere. Also, these three newspapers just caught the researcher's attention, given their acclaimed popularity. After all, they have been adjudged by African Media Directory (1996) as quoted by Fab-Ukozor "as the most widely read newspapers in Nigeria and indeed Africa."[60] This sample-choice pattern fits Babbie where out of more than 1700 magazines, Funkhouser Ray, a communication researcher, seeking to find the key public opinion issues in the U.S. in the 1960s, "chose to examine the three most popular weekly news magazines: *Newsweek, Time,* and *U.S. News and World Report*" (emphasis added).[61] Fab-Ukozor, in a study using content analysis, selected a sample of the same newspapers as in the present research because they are "the most widely read newspapers. . . ."[62] In light of the foregoing, it stands to reason that the sample choice for this research finds justification, given the scientific process that brought it about.

From the sample there were a total of 244 editions of the three newspapers that made up the *sample frame*—that is, "the actual list of the elements comprising the survey population."[63] These 244 editions (29 editions were not available) were published on a daily basis during an average period of three months (September – November, 1985). During this period the IMF Loan Debate was the dominant national discourse—that is, between September 25, 1985 when the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) inaugurated a seven-man Presidential Committee on the IMF Loan headed by Alhaji Abubakar Abdulkadir to conduct a national debate on the desirability or otherwise of Nigeria obtaining the IMF loan, up to December 4, 1985, when the Committee submitted its "Interim Report."

From each of these 244 newspaper editions making up the sample frame, the researcher sought articles or referential issues in forms of editorials, news coverage, features, and cartoons pertaining to the case study. A total of 198 were identified, which make up the *Observation Unit/Unit of Analysis*. The information so collated from the 198 referential issues (elements or responses) that make

up the Observation Unit/Unit of Analysis were systematically classified into the following seven traits, or variable contents, which, essentially, equals two categories of arguments that is, *for* or *against* the loan: why were Nigerians opposed to the loan project, and what were the justifications for it? The seven variable contents were;

(i) IMF is another colonialism
(ii) IMF is poison
(iii) The experience of other countries
(iv) Home-grown recovery measures preferred
(v) Consonant with sound economic strategies
(vi) Not the loan, but the political will
(vii) Nigeria—don't be an outlaw

These seven traits or variables were classified from a total of 356 cases and deciphered from a total of 198 referential issues or write-ups from 244 newspapers. Note that within each of the 198 referential issues, there could be multiple variable contents, thus explaining the higher number of variable contents, that is, 356, as against the 198 referential issues. The researcher then proceeded to find the frequency of each variable's occurrence, so as to test the level of influence on decision-making. The details of how these were worked out are as shown below in the analysis of data.

Analysis of Data

As stated elsewhere, the statistical thrust of this study is sheer numbers—that is, in terms of the frequency and percentages of the attributes in the variables *for* or *against* the policy issue in question. There were seven variables identified for the case study. From the unit of analysis, the researcher sought the frequency (f) of each of the variables—the number of times the attributes in a particular variable manifested or were mentioned within the framework of all the variables put together ($N = 356$). Second, the researcher found the percentage of each variable within the context of all the variables put together with

$f =$ Frequency, i.e., the number of occurrences of an attribute, or the number of times a reference was made to a particular variable, or the level of repetition of a particular variable in the observation unit/unit of analysis.

N = Number, i.e., the total number of cases identified in the articles.

The percentage values of all the variables were summed up according to the response patterns which were essentially, *against* and *for* (the loan project). This was in a bid to evaluate the two sides of the argument concerning the case study—the issue at stake being sheer numbers. The percentage outcomes were premised on what the researcher calls Holsti's four-level template for gauging public response to policy, which Holsti based on percentages as follows;

(a) Level of *majority* (50 – 59%)
(b) Level of *consensus* (60 – 69%)
(c) Level of *preponderance* (70 – 79%)
(d) Level of *virtually unanimous* (80%).[64]

The outcome of this exercise was then used to evaluate the validity of the contention that popular diplomacy could be discerned in an autocracy using this case study.

Descriptions of the Variable Classifications and their Percentage Values

Table 1 is the breakdown of the frequencies and percentage strengths of the various variables as observed in the unit of analysis.

Table 1. *Frequencies and Percentages of All Variables (N =356)*

		f	% of N
(i)	IMF is another colonialism	137	38.50
(ii)	IMF is poison	36	10.00
(iii)	The experience of other countries	44	12.00
(iv)	Home-grown recovery measures preferred	65	18.00
(v)	Consonant with sound economic strategies	41	11.50
(vi)	Not the loan, but the political will	17	5.00
(vii)	Nigeria – don't be an outlaw	16	5.00

Variable (i) – IMF is another colonialism. This included objections to the IMF loan on grounds of its conditions and the implications of same for Nigeria's sovereignty. This variable objected to the IMF loan project on grounds that its conditions (which

included the devaluation of the Naira, import liberalization and the removal of petroleum subsidy), were capable of undermining Nigeria's sovereignty.

Variable (ii) – IMF is poison. These were objections to the IMF loan on grounds of the sinister motives imputed from the drive of the international community on Nigeria to take the loan and the conflicting signals this posed as the advanced economies continue to initiate protective trade measures for themselves. This variable's objection to the IMF loan is rooted in "the conspiracy theory that there's something fishy about the IMF [when Western countries appeared to have] expressed so much joy when there seemed to be a shift in Nigeria's stance [to accept the loan after the IMF had refused other] proposal tabled by Nigeria."[65] Another assumption of the conspiracy theory is that "which perceives the Western nations [as] attempting to punish Nigeria for its attempt to attain some elements of economic self-sufficiency."[66] This led to the contention that the IMF is poison.[67]

Variable (iii) – The experience of other countries. These were objections to the loan on the ground that examples of nations who initially took the loan became worse-off. Here, the critics agree that taking the loan based on its conditions would produce massive economic dislocation to the extent of producing even political instability. The basis upon which they argued was the experience of nations that took the loan in the past yet not better or even became worse-off. In this regard, Nahamya queried why IMF programmes did not solve "balance of payment problems in Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Jamaica, Tanzania, Uganda, Zaire, etc."[68] Thus, because "experience had shown that countries which subscribed to the IMF conditionalites were often worse off",[69] this opposition group to the IMF loan "based on the fear of further massive economic/political dislocation that may arise from the acceptance of IMF conditionalities"[70] kicked against the loan.

Variable (iv) – Home-grown recovery measures preferred. Here, alternatives to the loan package were canvassed to include: (i) the diversification of Nigeria's exports from a mono-product economy; (ii) borrowing from rich Nigerians, and (iii) adopting the IMF prescriptions/conditions but not taking the loan, etc. The IMF loan was rejected in preference for home-grown economic

recovery measures. To this end, critics of the loan project contended that if in the two to three years (1983-1985) that talks on the loan application were stalemated Nigerians did not perish, they would "never perish, in which case, we can do without the loan."[71] Other alternatives to the loan included, and as was canvassed by the then labor leader, Adamu Chiroma, "cuts in defense spending and the portion of our foreign earnings devoted to debt servicing. . . ."[72] It was in this light that Luguja opined that "rather than take the loan, it is better . . . to subject ourselves to sacrifices . . . [after all], we have been cutting ourselves to size for the past two years. We would continue to do so and forget about IMF."[73]

The prospect of borrowing from wealthy Nigerians who have money abroad was considered as an alternative to the IMF loan. In doing this, Professor Alaba Ogunsanwo, as quoted by Abutiate, suggested that

> the government can float bonds denominated in convertible currency, it can ask a respected African development bank to buy them up, the government will thereby be indebted to the bank, not the IMF, at much reasonable terms and the bank, not the government, will be indebted to Nigeria's citizens from whose huge fortunes abroad the nation can benefit.[74]

Olashore contends that this category of oppositions to the loan was influenced by

> ideological precepts . . . rooted in the belief that the economy has largely functioned as an appendage of international capitalism and . . . would prefer to see the nation seize the present opportunity to disengage from the established trade and financial flows pattern, and substitute with a completely new structural economic arrangement, which is predicated on the generation of an internal economic dynamism.[75]

Variable (v) – Consonant with sound economic strategies. The protagonists of the loan project insisted that taking the loan and adhering to the IMF prescriptions were in consonance with known and genuine claims to adjustment by any state that was in Nigeria's position of dire economic straits. This is a converse of

> a country with a chronic balance of payments surplus [which] should adjust by revaluing its currency, because its currency has been undervalued. If necessary such a country should lend money to the IMF to such a tune as will initiate a sufficient outflow of capital to effect the readjustment in exchange rate.[76]

It therefore follows that a country with a chronic balance of payment deficit requires devaluation because "its currency having been overvalued. . .the IMF should loan money to such a country (capital inflow) to the extent that harmony in rates is re-established."[77] Nigeria qualified because it recorded "persistent deficit. . .for two years and more"[78] and thus, required the loan). Essien, summing up, insists that empirical studies by authorities on this subject have shown that countries that followed such economic prescriptions—for example, devaluation of currency—achieved recovery in the form of the desired trade balance.[79] This variable generated the highest response of the three adduced by the protagonists of the loan to urge government to decide in its favor by ignoring the sentiments of the opposition.

Variable (vi) – Not the loan, but the political will. The protagonists to the loan insisted that the problem was not the loan but the political will of leadership to ensure best economic practices. This laid the problems on the doorstep of policy makers who may "not be disciplined enough to embark on economic development."[80] Within this context, the contention was that for countries which took the IMF loan as in variable (iii) and whose fortunes were not bettered by it, the problem was that rather than immediately pursuing "complementary domestic monetary and fiscal policies (contraction of public expenditure and incentives to local small scale industries and agriculture) after receiving the loan," they went on spending spree, giving tax holidays, etc.[81] The crux of the matter within the context of this variable "is that everything depends very much on "management" which involves choosing the right domestic monetary and fiscal policies directed at certain objectives either to mitigate the impact effect. . .or to enhance the desired productive effects."[82]

In Nigeria, as in other Third World nations, "economic management has never been given the serious attention it deserves. . .primarily because the political elite. . .has been far too

short-sighted to realize that production should be encouraged before going on a consumption spree."[83] Thus, the whole essence of the argument here in the words of Ogundipe is "the corporate and political will of Nigeria to adjust, the preparedness of Nigerian leaders to live personal frugal lives and be frugal in their public engagements, their ability and willingness to influence the life patterns of fellow Nigerians down the ladder."[84]

Variable (vii) – Nigeria – don't be an outlaw. Variable (vii) contains responses that contended that as long as Nigeria remained a part of the Bretton Woods terms of global trade, then it was "still bound by the regulations of the institutions of Bretton Woods."[85] Here the argument of those in support of the loan was that the package was in consonance with the regulations of Bretton Woods Institutions to which Nigeria is a signatory. Thus, should Nigeria "refuse to follow the adjustment procedures prescribed by the IMF [while hoping to continue trading with other countries under the same IMF guidelines, protagonists of the loan project, within the context of this variable, feared that Nigeria stood] more to lose than to gain."[86] To those who argued in this regard, the IMF does not need Nigeria to work rather it was Nigeria that needed "the loan and international financial credibility the IMF would confer."[87] This variable turned out equally unattractive on the IMF debate in general and also within the context of the loan protagonists. It turned out to be the least referred even though, it seemed important in terms of sound economic reasoning. It does appear that Nigerians would rather prefer any other alternative than be encumbered by loans of the IMF kind.

Interpretation of Data

Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage values of the cases that were in opposition to taking the IMF loan for each variable, and it establishes that popular diplomacy thrived in an autocracy during a military dispensation in Nigeria.

Table 2. *Frequencies and Percentages of the Variables in Opposition to the IMF Loan*

		f	%
(i)	IMF is another colonialism.	137	38.50
(ii)	IMF is poison.	36	10.00
(iii)	The experience of other countries.	44	12.00
(iv)	Home-grown recovery measures preferred.	65	18.00
	n	282	78.50

There were four variables representing opposition to the loan project and are numbered (i) – (iv). With their frequencies (*f*) summed up, they gave a total of 282 responses or mentions in opposition to the IMF Loan Project. This number was out of the total responses of the variable contents in the unit of analysis ($N = 356$).

The percentage is calculated which came to 78.50 79%. On Holsti's template,[88] 79% is a near *virtually unanimous* level of response (i.e., 80% +). It is actually at a *preponderant* response level (i.e., 70-79%), meaning that there was little doubt that public opinion was against government obtaining the IMF Loan. When Babangida announced that the government was discontinuing the negotiations with the IMF for a support loan he said that this was in deference to the opinions of Nigerians.[89]

Research Result

With 79 percent of mentions in opposition to the loan project and only 21 percent in support of the same, and given the government's eventual abandonment of the loan project on the grounds of public opposition, this study establishes that public opinion did count as a determinant in the foreign policy decision-making of a Nigerian military regime. Thus an autocracy is credited with malleability to popular diplomacy in its policy decision-making and contrary to the general contention that this would not be so because of its undemocratic type of rule. It invalidates the view that within the bureaucracy of military regimes in Nigeria, final policy decisions were conditioned by the personality of the people running the system.

It may be argued that correlation would not always indicate causation. Basic statistical tenet supports this. But from this study, it is established that there is a plausible connection

between public-will and government policy decision resulting in an extended hypothesis of the public opinion/foreign policy decision-making nexus. Again, while this suffices, it does not preclude opposing contentions to this claim.

Critique

It suffices to note some opposing contentions to the claim of malleability to public opinion by the Babangida regime when it abandoned the IMF Loan. Such included those that suggested that opposition to the loan was "not based on objective considerations but on either sentiments or misplaced nationalism."[90] This made the then Finance Minister, Dr. Kalu Idika Kalu, insists that the issue in the IMF Loan debate is not in the volume of its opposition but the quality as "the question is not one of vote counting."[91] Oyejide et al., in the same vein, insist that "it may not be enough to count the number of Nigerians for or against the IMF option; it may be necessary to weigh the substance of relative contributions. . .the issues go beyond to be or not to be."[92] They went on to query "the wisdom of public debate [on the loan project]. . .from the average Nigerian who probably knows next to nothing about IMF."[93]

These contentions may be valid, but let them not detract from the focus of this very study. Again, focus must not be lost of government's declared purpose for setting up the IMF debate committee and its work. General Babangida's second-in-command, the Chief of General Staff, Commodore Ebitu Ukiwe, while inaugurating the Presidential Committee on the IMF Debate, had distinguished between the committee's work and "those of the Federal Ministry of Finance which remains the accredited government agency for negotiations with the IMF [where he noted that] your [IMF Debate committee] report will provide government with sufficient basis for a decision on the issue."[94] This was to be done through a public debate and "also analyze some of the public opinion it has so far collated on the issue with the view of reaching a viable conclusion."[95]

When the committee called for memoranda, the first question it asked contributors to address was: "Does Nigeria need the IMF loan?" Every other thing was to be premised on this question, which for the purpose of this study, required a yes or no answer and counts were taken *for* or *against*. The debate "predictably enough. . .returned an overwhelming verdict of 'No' to the

enslaving package,"[96] and which this research result of 79 percent rate of references in the unit of analysis attests to. On its part, the government, with the intention that the debate would assist it "to arrive at a decision that would be in the interest of the greater number of Nigerians,"[97] endorsed the no-loan report of the committee. In his address to the nation on the rejection of the loan, Babangida *inter alia* noted that the IMF loan debate has

> helped to awaken the conscience of the nation and raise our democratic ideals. . . [hence] after due consideration of opinions expressed by Nigerians. . .as embodied in the Interim Report on the IMF loan, government has come to the conclusion that for now the part of honor and the essence of *democratic* patriotism lies in discontinuing the negotiations with the IMF for a support loan. This is clearly the will of majority of our people on the issue.[98] (Emphasis added).

This claim, that is, of a military regime claiming deference to popular opinion in decision-making, is rather paradoxical. This is especially so, given the general notion that decision-making under Nigerian military regimes were anything but deliberative. Thus, it becomes pertinent to look beyond the decision-making structure of the military under Babangida in seeking to unravel the intricacies that informed the manifestation of popular diplomacy in a command state system. While the evidence of our case study validates the prospects of popular diplomacy thriving in an autocracy, just as it is possible in a democracy, it should not be inferred that regimes, whether democratic or autocratic, would often defer to the populace an influence in the nations' foreign policy decision-making in a country like Nigeria, where obvious breaches of democratic ethos are not unusual, be it in a democracy or under military rule.

It is true that going by this military case study and given the regime's resolve to allow the outcome of the IMF debate guide its decision on the loan, this, the government did because of the *preponderance* level of public opposition to it. This notwithstanding, it was inferred from some of the secondary sources in this research that there was the possibility of the IMF Debate being "a subterfuge for railroading an already chosen course of action."[99] This is because when Babangida "turned around and announced a homegrown Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP)" in place of the

IMF loan, the SAP was "every bit as austere as the IMF recommendations, and [government] dressed it up in nationalist rhetoric."[100]

No doubt, the government may have won the hearts of Nigerians by throwing open the debate on the IMF, but why did the government not do same for Counter Trade and the 15-month State of Economic Emergency declared by Babangida in his Silver Jubilee broadcast to the nation, or even over the SAP that the regime eventually adopted?[101] If it had, the fate of the IMF loan would have been replicated. This is because of the attendant crisis of public disturbances that followed the pains of SAP. By 1991, five years into SAP, a *Tell Magazine* nation-wide survey as to whether Nigerians were better off under SAP turned in "a resounding NO."[102]

The subterfuge notion ascribed to the whole idea of the IMF loan debate appears valid when it is recalled that in his maiden broadcast to the nation, Babangida had noted that "austerity without structural adjustment was not the solution to our economic predicament,"[103] and this was sufficient for the SAP that the administration eventually adopted not to have come as a surprise. The foregoing must not take away from the military regime the fact that it put a policy programme to public scrutiny. However, if the eventual public opinion merely corresponded with an already thought-out regime's line of action, this is a moot point.

Conclusion

Overall, this whole issue of deference to public opinion in foreign policy decision-making is not necessarily a factor of the regime-type in office. This is because the present democratic dispensation in Nigeria could be said to be anything but a true democracy. This is so given the gross breaches of democratic norms that have attended the policies of the democratic administrations since the 1999 return to civilian rule. This validates Gutteridge's contention that in Africa "the difference in behaviour [and policies] between military and civilian governments" [104] have not been obvious. Gutteridge notes that "such qualities as the ability to. . .mobilize a consensus of support within the country are on the evidence available as likely or unlikely to be possessed by military as by civilian governments."[105] Gleditsch and Hegre, in a study of peace and regime type, sought to investigate the relationship between democracy and peace at three levels of analysis: dyadic, nation and system. When at the

national level they sought to investigate whether "democracies more frequently maintain peace overall,". ."the broad consensus is that there is no significant relationship between democracy and war participation."[106] In a similar vein, Shively[107] talks of the work of Adam Przeworski, Michael E. Alvarez, Jose Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi[108] which sought to look "at the question of how democracies compare with autocracies in economic growth and in the overall quality of life as measured by life expectancies."[109] Their findings put the average performance of both regime-types at par. Also, Maoz and Abdolali, in their study on the relationship between regime-type and conflict involvement, concluded that their empirical findings are largely mixed.[110]

Contentions like these, that is, of Gutteridge; Maoz and Abdolali; Gleditsch and Hegre; as well as Shively, provide a safe landing for this study to conclude that an undemocratically elected regime would not necessarily diminish the influence of public opinion on foreign policy decision-making in Nigeria. And neither would a democracy necessarily increase the influence of public opinion on foreign policy decision-making in Nigeria.

Notes

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[26] Robert Y. Shapiro and Benjamin I. Page, "Foreign Policy and the Rational Public," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 33, no. 2 (1988): 213.
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[28] Benjamin I. Page and Jason Barabas, "Foreign Policy Gaps between Citizens and Leaders," *International Studies Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (2000): 339.
[29] Ibid., 340.
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Separation of Powers," in *Democracy, Good Governance and National Development in Nigeria: Actualizing the People's Mandate. Proceedings of a National Seminar,* eds. Ibrahim Y Lame and Haruna Dabin [Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2000], 182.) As a concept, it was "first used by Richard Joseph to aggregate the disparate elements of pervasive corruption and corrupt practices in Nigerian political economy and government. But it has acquired popular and widespread usage in African social science." (Ibid., 197.)

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