



Temperament And Executive Decision-Making: a Comparative Analysis Of The Buhari

And Jonathan Administrations

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ABSTRACT

Recognizing that leaders' innate behavioural patterns significantly shape their approaches to governance. This study examines the relationship between temperament and executive decision-making through a comparative analysis of former Presidents Muhammadu Buhari and Goodluck Jonathan administrations in Nigeria. It investigates how the differing temperaments of the two former presidents influenced their policy preference, and administrative style. While no formal psychological assessment was conducted, the study adopts a qualitative comparative analysis. It draws on existing literature, historical records, and publicly available materials to infer the temperamental profiles of both former leaders through the Four Temperament Theory. It then examines how these inferred temperaments may be reflected in policy decisions across key areas such as security, anti-corruption, and national unity. Findings indicate that policy preferences under Jonathan's administration are characterized by tolerance, negotiation, and symbolic unity, while Buhari's administration exhibits preference for assertive intervention and institutional enforcement, reflected in a shift from democratic style administration to authoritarian leaning execution. The study concludes that understanding presidential temperament is crucial for comprehending policy outcomes and offers insights for future leadership selection and training in Nigeria. Key recommendations include incorporating temperament assessments into presidential candidate selection processes and providing tailored leadership training for prospective national leaders.

KEYWORD- *Temperament, Decision-Making, Political Psychology, Policy Preference, and Administrative Style.*

Introduction

Leadership effectiveness is intrinsically linked to the quality of decisions made, and probing into the factors that guide presidential decision is essential for the Nigerian political arena. This is because these preferences shape policy direction, influence governance, and ultimately determine the well-being of the nation and its citizens. Decision-making is a fundamental aspect of governance and leadership, with profound implications for policy outcomes and societal well-being. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2025) defines decision making as the process by which governments use leadership, institutions, evidence, and public input to set goals and choose and approve policies and actions. This process involves weighing alternatives, forecasting outcomes, and evaluating trade-offs to make the most effective choices (Abbas, 2024).

In this study, decision making is expressed through two key dimensions: policy preference and administration style. Policy preference refers to the orientation and priorities actors, especially local governments, show when selecting and prioritizing specific policy tools, goals, or approaches over others (Hu et al., 2026). Martinez (2022) describes it as the process through which actors identify

problems and select authorized instruments such as laws, directives, and programmes to achieve policy goals. It represents the outcome oriented dimension of decision making, where choices are translated into formal actions. The success of policies hinges on the decisions taken by leaders who identify and interpret these problems. Therefore, the solution to the problem is often closely tied to the behaviour and qualities of those who represent the citizens. Thus, effective leadership, especially at the highest levels of government demands more than intelligence, it requires a blend of critical thinking, emotional awareness, and strong character to formulate policies (Kumar, 2025). This is essential because these representatives, as the architects of public policy, hold significant influence over a country's direction. For example, Saalfeld and Kyriakopoulou (2010) found that the makeup of legislative bodies, including the backgrounds, identities, and experiences of their members, determines which issues receive attention and are brought forward for debate. This means that having representatives with diverse perspectives in government can lead to a broader range of societal concerns being addressed. Furthermore, research by Clayton and Zetterberg (2018) demonstrates that politicians' characteristics also impact the policies

passed into law. In other words, the people crafting the rules directly influence not only what gets talked about but also what gets done.

Beyond formal policies, decision making is also reflected in administrative style. Administrative styles can broadly be defined as sticky informal routines that characterise the behaviour and activities of public administrations in the policy-making process (Knill 2001). This includes consistent way it carries out its activities, including how it makes decisions, communicates, delegates authority, responds to crises, and organizes control over time (Howlett, 2002). While policy preference represents the "what," administrative style represents the "how" of governance. Administrative style shapes how policies are implemented and how institutions function on a daily basis. It determines whether governance is inclusive or centralized, consultative or directive, flexible or rigid. As such, it represents the operational dimension of presidential decision making. However, the way this dimension functions is contingent on who occupies the executive office.

Therefore, the personality of a leader becomes a crucial filter through which even established agendas are applied. For instance, Gandhi's leadership, marked by patience, humility, and

nonviolent resistance, inspired social change through empathy, discipline, and unwavering commitment to peace (Marques, 2007; Mattone, 2025). This illustrates how a leader's temperament can be pivotal in decision-making, especially in high-pressure situations where empathy and emotional intelligence pave the way for an innovative solution. Moreover, there are debates that Donald Trump's personality, characterized by distrust and a need for power, shaped his presidency. His suspicion led to dismissing officials, media clashes, and an "America First" policy. Immigration restrictions and withdrawn agreements mirrored his perception of external threats, with rhetoric that framed immigrants as societal dangers. (Turner & Kaarbo 2021; Seisdodos, 2026).

Nigeria is not left out, as history shows that even when the same party stays in power, a new leader can lead to noticeable differences in how policies are carried out. A good example of this is the transition from President Olusegun Obasanjo to President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua in Nigeria. Although both belonged to the same party, their approaches to dealing with the Niger Delta agitators were quite different. While Obasanjo often relied on military force, Yar'Adua preferred dialogue and introduced the amnesty program (Ajibola, 2015).

These examples show how a leader's way of thinking, feeling, and acting can influence the decisions they make in office. It suggests that understanding what leaders value, how they process information, and how they respond to challenges is important when trying to explain their policy choices. It is essential to recognize that they are, first and foremost, individuals with their unique temperaments. Temperament can be defined as a biologically based aspect of personality that begins to emerge in early infancy, reflecting innate patterns of emotion, attention, and activity (Gartstein & Ramirez Gonzalez, 2025). It is partially shaped by genetic factors and environmental influences, but unlike many other personality traits that may shift over time, temperament tends to remain relatively stable throughout a person's life (Strelau, 2020). These consistent patterns form the foundation for how individuals typically react to situations, manage stress, relate to others, and make decisions.

The choices leaders make often reflect internal compass points rooted in temperament rather than external pressure alone. It's this internal psychological makeup that scholars worldwide argue must be accounted for in assessing political behaviour. This gap in research is particularly noticeable in Nigerian political studies, where the intersection of psychology and political decision-

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making is still underexplored. For instance, Agbude et al. (2014) have emphasized the importance of psychological factors in political processes, warning that sidelining psychology in Nigeria's political discourse undermines national development, urging a merger of psychology and politics in policymaking and leadership training. Perhaps, in response, Nwankwo et al. (2020) examined the psychological profiles of Nigerian politicians and their impact on democratic practices and found that common psychological traits like superiority, godfatherism, and narcissism among politicians fuel corruption, social division, and public cynicism. Their findings show that a mismatch between a leader's psychological disposition and the demands of democratic governance might lead to poor policy-making or policy failure.

These findings not only validate Agbude et al. (2014) and Asikhia, (2025) call for a psychological-political synthesis but also demonstrate the real-world costs of ignoring psychological dimensions in policy making in Nigeria. Thus, a shift toward person-centred political analysis appears both timely and necessary. The central problem addressed by this research revolves around the lack

of a comprehensive analysis of how temperament influences presidents' decision-making in Nigeria.

Former President Muhammadu Buhari

Muhammadu Buhari is a Nigerian politician and retired Nigerian Army Major General born on December 17, 1942, in Daura, Katsina State, Nigeria. He served as the President of Nigeria from 2015 to 2023 and previously ruled as military Head of State between 1983 and 1985 (Salihu, 2024). His political career is strongly rooted in military service and a reputation for discipline and anti-corruption.

Buhari first came to national prominence when he led a military coup that overthrew the democratically elected government of Shehu Shagari in 1983. This period established his image as a strict disciplinarian with a strong emphasis on order, accountability, and anti-corruption governance. His early leadership style during military rule influenced his later political identity in democratic governance.

Following Nigeria's return to civilian rule, Buhari transitioned into democratic politics, contesting several presidential elections before winning in 2015 under the All Progressives Congress (APC). His campaign was built around the slogan "Change," which reflected a reform agenda aimed at addressing corruption, insecurity, and governance

inefficiencies. His eventual electoral victory marked a significant military-to-civilian leadership transition in Nigeria's democratic history (Salihu, 2024).

Former President Goodluck Jonathan

Goodluck Ebele Jonathan was born on 20 November 1957 in Otueke, Ogbia Local Government Area of present day Bayelsa State (Okeke, 2017). His academic formation occurred at the University of Port Harcourt, where he studied Zoology and graduated with upper second class honours in 1981. He later obtained a Master's degree in Hydrobiology and Fisheries Biology in 1985 and completed a Doctor of Philosophy in Zoology in 1995 at the same institution (Okeke, 2017). Before politics, he worked as an education inspector, lecturer, and environmental protection officer. This bureaucratic background placed him within administrative institutions rather than partisan structures and influenced early perceptions of his restrained leadership style.

Jonathan entered politics in 1998 through the People's Democratic Party after being drawn into Bayelsa State campaign activities. Ezeamalu (2015) explains that his initial motivation was local development rather than national ambition. He later became Deputy Governor, Governor, Vice President

in 2007, and President in 2010 after Yar'Adua's death. His election in 2011 and concession of defeat in 2015 are widely cited as significant moments in Nigeria's democratic experience (Okeke, 2017).

In Nigeria, the contrasting regimes of Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari have been widely discussed in academic and policy circles (Augé 2015; Ikeh, 2021). Augé (2015) discusses the political transition in Nigeria from Goodluck Jonathan to Muhammadu Buhari and noted that Jonathan's administration was often characterized by a more passive, tolerant and less interventionist approach to issues such as corruption and insecurity, while Buhari's tenure has been marked for directness and a focus on anti-corruption, albeit with varying degrees of assertiveness. Their differing temperaments have been reflected in their policy priorities, diplomatic strategies, and responses to national challenges. For instance, Ineh-Dumbi (2021) analyzed Buhari's personality traits and their influence on Nigeria's foreign policy agenda during his first civilian rule. Similarly, Abdullahi (2023) examined Jonathan's character in relation to Nigeria's foreign relations. However, both studies focused only on foreign policy and were conducted in isolation. There is a paucity of research directly comparing the temperaments of both leaders and their distinct impacts on decision-

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making. This study aims to fill the gap by examining the influence of temperament on decision making of past selected Nigerian leaders using the Four Temperament Theory as an analytical framework.

Objectives

1. To infer the temperamental profiles of both leaders using the Four Temperament Theory
2. To investigate how the temperaments of both leaders influenced their policy preferences.
3. To investigate how the temperaments of both leaders influenced their administrative styles.

The lack of comparative studies is a critical oversight given the pivotal roles that individual leaders play in shaping national policy. By comparing the temperamental differences between Buhari and Jonathan, researchers could uncover how their unique psychological profiles and decision-making influenced pivotal moments in Nigeria's history. This research contributes to political science, leadership studies, and political psychology, offering valuable insights into Nigerian politics.

Concept of Temperament

Allport (1961), as cited in Rothbart et al., (2000, p. 123), defined temperament as “the characteristic phenomena of an individual’s emotional nature, including his susceptibility to emotional stimulation, his customary strength and speed of response, the quality of his prevailing mood, and all the peculiarities of fluctuation and intensity of mood.” This definition shows temperament as a core aspect of personality, rooted in emotional responsiveness and regulation. It encompasses not only how strongly and quickly an individual reacts to emotional stimuli but also the general tone of their emotional life. Temperament is defined as enduring patterns of behaviour that tend to remain consistent and relatively stable from infancy onward (Planalp & Goldsmith, 2020). The four-temperament theory focuses on observable traits from infancy reactions to discomfort. The classical four temperaments: sanguine, melancholic, choleric, and phlegmatic. For instance, infants who cry intensely and do not soothe easily may correspond to the choleric temperament, known for emotional intensity, reactivity, and persistence (Gartstein & Ramirez Gonzalez, 2025). These traits align with strong, prolonged distress and difficulty calming down. Those who cry intensely but are soothed with minimal effort resemble the sanguine temperament, characterized by high expressiveness and quick

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recovery, much like infants who react strongly but settle quickly. Infants who are not seriously distressed yet do not soothe easily may reflect the melancholic temperament, marked by emotional depth, sensitivity, and a tendency to dwell or resist change, even in low-stress situations. Finally, infants who are minimally distressed and easily soothed closely align with the phlegmatic temperament, known for calmness, low emotional reactivity, and easy adaptability. These early behavioural patterns suggest biologically rooted temperamental biases that echo the ancient theory of the four humors, linking innate emotional regulation to long-observed personality types (Kagan, 2014).

The four-temperament theory is a proto-psychological framework that proposes the existence of four fundamental personality types: sanguine, choleric, melancholic, and phlegmatic (Merenda, 1987; Mansurova, 2024). Each of these temperaments represents a distinct set of emotional and behavioural characteristics that are believed to influence how individuals interact with the world and with others. This theory has its roots in ancient Greek medicine, where it was closely associated with the concept of humourism a now-outdated medical theory that attributed human health and temperament to the balance of four bodily fluids

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(Yadav & Pandey, 2024).. According to this view, the predominance of a particular humor in the body not only affected physical health but also determined one's temperament and personality traits. (Merenda, 1987).

An excess of blood, linked to the sanguine temperament, was believed to produce a lively, energetic, and highly sociable personality, marked by cheerfulness, optimism, and a natural ease in social situations. In contrast, an excess of black bile, associated with the melancholic temperament, was thought to result in a more introspective and sensitive individual, prone to sadness, deep thought, and emotional depth. Those with an excess of yellow bile, connected to the choleric temperament, were seen as ambitious, assertive, and strong-willed, often taking on leadership roles but also displaying irritability and impatience (Yadav & Pandey, 2024). Meanwhile, an excess of phlegm, tied to the phlegmatic temperament, was said to give rise to a calm, steady, and compassionate disposition, with individuals being dependable, peaceful, and emotionally balanced, though sometimes perceived as passive or indecisive ((Yadav & Pandey, 2024)). These four temperaments, rooted in the ancient theory of humourism, were believed to shape not only personality but also behavioural tendencies and emotional responses. (Merenda, 1987)

Several scholars have criticized the theory because it had little scope for psychological causation and was eventually abandoned (Marks et al., 2015). They explained that the theory relies heavily on a simplistic, biologically deterministic view that links personality traits directly to bodily fluids (humors), without accounting for the complex psychological, social, and environmental factors that influence human behaviour and development

Administrative Style

Administrative style refers to the relatively stable patterns, routines, and behavioural orientations through which public officials and governing institutions carry out public responsibilities. Unlike formal legal structures, which specify what agencies are authorized to do, administrative style explains how those responsibilities are performed in practice. It includes the informal procedures, governing habits, and recurring modes of interaction that shape decision execution, coordination, and public action. Knill (2001) defines administrative styles as informal routines that characterize the behaviour and activities of public administrations in the policy making process, while Bayerlein and Knill (2019) similarly describe them as the distinct ways and procedures through which administrations accomplish daily tasks.

Viewed this way, administrative style concerns process rather than policy substance. It focuses on modes of governing such as consultation, centralization, flexibility, coercion, responsiveness, or procedural caution rather than the content of laws or policy outputs (Knill, 2001; Bayerlein & Knill, 2019).

The concept developed from broader scholarship on administrative culture. . Howlett (2002) explains that administrative styles are relatively enduring patterns shaped by formal institutions, norms, traditions, and values that channel official behaviour. This historical development is important because it distinguishes administrative style from temporary leadership tactics or isolated decisions. Administrative style implies continuity and repetition over time, not one off actions. It is therefore best understood as an institutionalized *modus operandi* that becomes embedded in governing practice through routinization and repeated use (Howlett, 2002; Knill, 2001).

Administrative style has several observable dimensions. One dimension is authority orientation, which refers to whether decision execution is centralized and directive or decentralized and participatory. A second is societal interaction, meaning whether governing actors rely on

consultation, bargaining, and accommodation or prefer distance and unilateral control. A third is procedural orientation, which concerns whether officials act with flexibility and innovation or strict adherence to rules and established routines. A fourth is responsiveness, which captures the speed and adaptability with which authorities react to crises, dissent, or emerging problems. Central terms include "servant," "advocacy," "consolidator," and "entrepreneurial" styles, defined along positional (institutional standing) and functional (policy effectiveness) orientations (Bayerlein, Knill and Zink, 2021). Servant style entails passive adherence to formal duties without proactive influence, advocacy prioritizes substantive policy goals over position, consolidator seeks autonomy expansion, and entrepreneurial combines both for active policymaking shaping. These dimensions help clarify what the concept includes: recurrent governing behaviour, institutional habits, executive coordination, and modes of state response. They also clarify what it excludes: personality traits alone, ideological beliefs, single policy outcomes, and constitutional powers in themselves. For this study, administrative style is specifically understood as the practical manner through which Nigerian presidents organize authority, respond to conflict, manage dissent, coordinate institutions, and implement

decisions within the executive arm of government
(Bayerlein & Knill, 2019 : Bayerlein, Knill and
Zink, 2021).

Policy Preference

Policy preference refers to the option individuals favour when faced with competing public actions, rules, or government proposals. The concept begins with choice. A recent author defines it as an individual's preferred action or regulation among available alternatives (WisdomLib, 2026). This definition treats preference as a clear ranking of options rather than a vague opinion. It involves comparison, judgment, and the selection of what appears most desirable. Fiveable offers a broader view by describing policy preferences as individual or collective inclinations toward policy options intended to achieve social, environmental, or political goals, with those inclinations shaped by values, beliefs, and everyday experience (Sustainability Directory, 2025). Preference therefore concerns not only what people choose, but why they choose it.

Shifting from selection to internal disposition, some scholars argue that policy preference is rooted in attitudes and evaluations. Fiveable also describes it as the opinions individuals or groups hold regarding policy issues or proposals (Fiveable Content Team, 2025). Attention moves inward: policies are supported, rejected, doubted, or accepted with varying levels of conviction. Pytlik Zillig et al.

(2018) define policy preference as an evaluative attitude expressed through liking, agreement, or support for a given policy. Consequently, the cognitive affective divide in political psychology suggests that belief and sentiment are inseparable in policy evaluation. Preference is formed through judgment, but judgment itself is rarely free from emotion.

Other scholars examine policy preference through ideological location. Tausanovitch and Warshaw (2012) describe preferences as ideal points within a policy space, where individuals favour options nearest to their own position and resist those farther away. In this formulation, preference becomes a measurable sign of broader political orientation.

Hornung and Bandelow (2024) challenge any purely rational reading of the concept. They argue that policy judgments are also influenced by group identity and emotional attachment. Citizens often respond to proposals through partisan loyalty, social belonging, and symbolic commitments before detailed policy calculation begins. This insight is especially relevant where political competition is strongly tied to identity, since preference may reflect attachment to groups as much as assessment of policy content.

Temperament and Policy Preference

Empirical evidence across political psychology indicates that political preference formation is structured by enduring dispositional tendencies that correspond closely with classical temperament categories, particularly when interpreted through behavioural regularities rather than surface level traits. Dewies, de Wit and Reisch (2025) report that cooperation based implicit beliefs significantly predict support for government intervention ($\beta = 0.20$), while behavioural malleability exerts a smaller effect ($\beta = 0.09$) and self-control remains statistically non-significant ($\beta = -0.04$). The explanatory power is modest at 7 percent variance. This configuration aligns most consistently with a phlegmatic temperament. The pattern suggests cognitive stability, preference for regulatory continuity, and reduced sensitivity to internal control narratives. The phlegmatic orientation here is not expressive but structural; it manifests as reliance on institutional mechanisms to stabilize behavioural expectations.

Ajazaj, Bundi and Mueller (2025) provide a more differentiated cross national profile across 8,749 respondents. Conscientiousness increases preference for central governance from 8 percent to 23 percent, while reducing regional preference from 23 percent to 11 percent. This is analytically consistent with a choleric temperament, defined by

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hierarchy orientation, control preference, and structured authority acceptance. Neuroticism, in contrast, increases regional preference from 9 percent to 23 percent, indicating a melancholic configuration characterized by heightened threat sensitivity and reduced tolerance for systemic scale. Agreeableness stabilizes support for shared governance at 66 to 71 percent, a distribution that reflects a sanguine phlegmatic synthesis in which social coordination and conflict minimization outweigh structural dominance. Openness and extraversion show no statistical effect, suggesting that exploratory sociability alone does not translate into governance scale preference.

Developmental evidence from Wegemer and Vandell (2020) reinforces this structure over time. Authoritarian parenting predicts conservatism ($\beta = 0.14$), anxious attachment increases it ($\beta = 0.21$), while avoidant attachment sharply reduces it ($\beta = -0.51$). These trajectories map onto melancholic and phlegmatic dispositions respectively. Melancholic patterns emerge through anxious attachment and threat vigilance; phlegmatic patterns appear where detachment reduces ideological rigidity. The coefficients are sufficiently large to indicate stable developmental imprinting rather than situational fluctuation.

At the dispositional aggregate level, Jost et al. (2003) report strong correlations between conservatism and death anxiety ($r = 0.50$), system instability ($r = 0.47$), and need for order ($r = 0.26$), alongside negative associations with openness ($r = -0.32$). This clustering is most coherently interpreted as melancholic temperament, where cognitive closure and threat monitoring dominate ideological structuring. Sanguine orientation appears at the opposite pole through openness, reflecting cognitive flexibility and reduced preference for constraint. Electoral behaviour further refines these mappings. Wang (2016) finds no direct effects of Big Five traits on vote choice; instead, effects operate indirectly through political attitudes. Openness increases support for Obama, consistent with sanguine exploratory cognition. Conscientiousness and emotional stability reduce support, aligning with choleric order orientation and phlegmatic emotional regulation respectively. Extraversion exerts indirect influence consistent with sanguine sociability, although without stable directional dominance.

Across these studies, temperament does not operate as a deterministic predictor; it functions as a latent structuring variable that conditions how individuals process authority, risk, and collective governance scale.

Temperament on Administration style

Empirical evidence shows that leadership style is shaped by organizational demands, although the strength of personality influences differs across settings. First, Dulewicz and Higgs (2005) examined leadership styles among managers and leaders drawn mainly from the United Kingdom public and private sectors. Using a quantitative survey of 222 respondents with a mean age of 38.3 years, of whom 70.2% were male and 29.8% female, the study applied the Leadership Dimensions Questionnaire alongside biographical and Five Factor personality measures. Results indicated a fairly balanced distribution of styles: 31% goal oriented, 28% involving, and 41% engaging. However, personality explained only 4.9% of the variance in engaging leadership and did not significantly predict leadership styles overall. The authors therefore concluded that leadership style was largely independent of personality variables.

Similarly, Agbai (2024) explored temperamental traits and leadership styles among political leaders across Africa through a mixed methods design involving surveys and case studies. , findings showed statistically significant relationships between conscientiousness, openness, agreeableness, and transformational or situational

leadership. These traits were linked with better decision making, stronger governance effectiveness, and greater political stability. Thus, the study argued that personality remains relevant in political leadership outcomes. A sanguine president, characterized by optimism, sociability, and enthusiasm, is typically charismatic and extroverted (Agbai, 2024). Their leadership style emphasizes public engagement and collaboration, often focusing on inclusive policies and community-building efforts. While their positive outlook can inspire confidence, it may also cause them to underestimate risks or overlook practical limitations. In contrast, a choleric president is assertive, driven, and results-oriented. These leaders often adopt a decisive and authoritative approach, prioritizing efficiency and swift action over consensus. This style can be effective in times of crisis but may alienate those who value collaboration. A melancholic president is thoughtful, analytical, and cautious, often emphasizing long-term sustainability and ethical governance. While their depth and attention to detail are strengths, they may struggle with indecision. Finally, phlegmatic presidents are calm, dependable, and peace-seeking, favouring diplomacy and unity, though sometimes at the cost of delaying tough decisions (Agbai, 2024).

In the Nigerian public sector, Bwese et al., (2026).investigated leadership style and conflict management in the Federal Inland Revenue Service, Abuja. From 425 staff targeted, 410 valid questionnaires were analysed using correlation and regression techniques. Democratic leadership had the strongest positive effect on conflict management ($\beta = 0.316$, $p = 0.000$), followed by transformational leadership ($\beta = 0.183$, $p = 0.000$) and transactional leadership ($\beta = 0.159$, $p = 0.001$). Autocratic leadership showed a negative effect ($\beta = -0.068$, $p = 0.028$). Overall, leadership variables explained 53.4% of variance ($R^2 = 0.534$).

Extending the perspective, Okal et al.(2012) used qualitative document analysis and found that over 60% of political campaign communication contained emotionally charged or directive speech acts, with choleric and sanguine temperaments strongly linked to electoral conflict escalation. This highlights how temperament driven communication can translate into large scale social instability. Complementing this, Fisher et al.(2015) analysed over 39,913 US participants and 70,000 international respondents aged 18 to 88. The study found a statistically significant correlation between the Cautious Social Norm Compliant scale and political conservatism ($r = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$), supporting the biological grounding of temperament

traits. Finally, Husni Salem found among 150 school principals in Jerash that democratic leadership ranked highest, while leadership style significantly related to communication practices

Method

Data Collection

Data were collected exclusively from secondary sources through a structured qualitative systematic review process. Sources included peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, official government publications, verified policy documents, and reputable international media archives. Selection criteria required that sources provide documented evidence of leadership decisions, policy implementation, or behavioural indicators relevant to temperament traits. Public speeches, interviews, autobiographical materials, and official policy records were extracted. Only sources meeting credibility and traceability standards were included.

Design and Data Analysis

This study adopted a qualitative exploratory comparative design, situated within a narrative analytical framework. The design enabled an in-depth examination of how the Four-Temperament Theory informed the leadership styles of Presidents

Muhammadu Buhari and Goodluck Jonathan. The study systematically compared documented leadership behaviours and policy actions across defined governance domains.

A comparative thematic analysis was conducted. First, leadership behaviours were coded deductively using the Four-Temperament typology (choleric, sanguine, melancholic, and phlegmatic traits). Second, themes were developed linking temperament characteristics to policy outcomes in security, anti-corruption, and national cohesion. Cross-case comparison was then performed to identify convergences and divergences between the two presidents.

Findings

Former President Muhammadu Buhari Temperament Profile

While it is impossible to definitively assign a temperament to a person without a thorough psychological assessment, we can infer some traits based on available information: Based on his political behaviour, public persona, and leadership style, Muhammadu Buhari exhibits traits that align with a choleric temperament with a touch of melancholic. Campbell (2020) portrays Muhammadu Buhari as a leader whose personality is marked by a tendency toward authoritarianism

and control. Buhari's actions—such as repressing critics, undermining the judiciary, and suppressing civil liberties—indicate a reversion to his earlier authoritarian style during his military rule. His no-nonsense attitude are characteristic of a choleric leader who seeks to take immediate and decisive action to resolve issues.

Campbell (2020) portrays Muhammadu Buhari as a leader inclined toward control and authoritarian tendencies, reflected in actions such as repressing critics, challenging judicial autonomy, and restricting civil liberties. These patterns suggest more than a political strategy; they reveal a personality disposition that favors order, discipline, and direct intervention. Interpreted through the lens of temperament theory, such tendencies correspond with a predominantly choleric orientation, characterized by assertiveness, urgency, and a strong preference for centralized authority. This disposition appears to have shaped Buhari's approach to decision making by privileging swift executive action over broad consultation. As a result, policy formulation during his administration often emphasized security, enforcement, and institutional control. In contrast to Jonathan's more accommodating and consensus oriented style, Buhari's temperament seems to have narrowed the space for deliberation, thereby influencing not only

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the content of policy but also the structure and pace of governance itself.

Military discipline shaped his authoritative leadership style, while religious devotion reinforced his loyalty to his ethnic and cultural identity (Ineh-Dumbi, 2021). Daura (2017) depicts Muhammadu Buhari as a person of strong moral principles, honesty, sincerity, and discipline, qualities that have influenced his personality from childhood through his political career (Daura, 2017). However, the portrayal also hints at a melancholic temperament, suggesting that Buhari's deep sense of duty and integrity are accompanied by a somber and reflective nature. Daura emphasizes Buhari's unwavering commitment to fighting corruption and injustice, portraying him as a patriot whose patriotism is rooted in a profound sense of moral responsibility. Buhari's embodiment of good moral character hints at a temperament that is serious, introspective, and deeply conscientious. These traits are often associated with a melancholic personality, one that approaches leadership with gravity and a strong sense of solemn duty (Adémólá-Olátéjù, 2014; Agbai, 2024).

Influence of Mohammed Buhari Temperament on his Decisions

President Muhammadu Buhari's administration was characterized by a decisive, top-down governance style, deeply influenced by his choleric temperament. Buhari's militarized approach to security was also evident in aggressive counterterrorism operations against Boko Haram, which prioritized territorial control over community reintegration and long-term stability. Buhari's choleric temperament was evident in his bold anti-corruption drive through implementation of the Treasury Single Account (TSA) and the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS) (This Day, 2017) centralizing finances and boosting transparency despite public outcry. Buhari's endorsement of the currency redesign and sudden border closures reflects choleric traits such as forcefulness, assertiveness, and a strong prioritization of order over broad democratic engagement. These decisions suggest a leadership approach that favoured swift structural reforms and centralized control, even when such measures generated public discomfort and raised concerns about civil liberties. His assertive support for EFCC full meaning and PACAC full meaning led to major prosecutions, but his style often caused inter-agency friction (Adeniyi, 2025) revealing a preference for control over collaboration.

Buhari's choleric traits surfaced in his authoritarian style, loyalty-driven appointments, and perceived regional favouritism, which intensified ethnic tensions and deepened national divisions (Nwoko, et al. 2022). This tendency towards centralized control and prioritizing his ethnic group led him to adopt various policy initiatives aimed at addressing complex national issues. The RUGA full meaning Settlement Policy, intended to resolve herder-farmer conflicts through designated settlements, was launched without sufficient stakeholder engagement, resulting in widespread opposition from other regions which widened the already polarised ethnic gap. (Adebayo, 2019)

Buhari's choleric temperament was evident in his assertive and authoritarian leadership style, marked by swift actions against political rivals and a clear intolerance for opposition. Buhari's crackdown on EndSARS full meaning protest, his disregard for court orders in cases like Dasuki, El-Zakzaky, and Sowore reflected a preference for unilateral control. The abrupt suspension of Chief Justice Onnoghen, bypassing constitutional norms, further demonstrated his strong-willed approach, undermining judicial independence and straining Nigeria's democratic institutions (Alabi, 2020; Eneasato & Okibe, 2020).

Similarly, Itumo and Kilete (2017) stressed that his tendency to centralize authority and bypass legislative checks led to frequent clashes with the National Assembly, particularly during budget negotiations with former Senate President Bukola Saraki. His administration often treated dissent as a security threat. The proscription of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) as a terrorist organization and the use of military force against protesters underscore a pattern of suppressing opposition through coercive means rather than dialogue, exacerbating public distrust.

Goodluck Jonathan Temperament Profile

President Goodluck Jonathan's leadership style and decision-making processes strongly reflect the traits of a phlegmatic temperament, characterized by calmness, diplomacy, and a preference for consensus over confrontation. As noted by Jacinto (2012), Jonathan consistently maintained a composed public demeanor, often choosing dialogue and negotiation rather than forceful or authoritarian approaches. This temperament aligns with democratic values and a collaborative approach to governance. Arugu and Kalama (2014) described his administrative style as one that

emphasized consensus-building and non-confrontation, traits commonly associated with phlegmatic leaders. Jonathan was known for avoiding aggressive political tactics and often sought compromise, even when it might have weakened his political authority. Daniel (2017) captures this when citing Jonathan's well-known statement that "no Nigerian citizen's blood is worth his ambition," a declaration reflecting his commitment to peaceful political processes and national unity.

However, this temperament also had its limitations. As Obadare (2017) observed, Jonathan's leadership was marked by a degree of political insecurity, leading him to seek validation from various power blocs, including the southern Pentecostal elite and northern political actors. This behaviour aligns with a predominantly phlegmatic disposition characterized by conflict avoidance and consensus-seeking tendencies. Such a temperament may explain Jonathan's cautious decision-making style, particularly in matters requiring decisive executive action, including responses to insurgency and internal party disputes. This supports the argument that temperament was not merely a personal trait but a structural influence on public policy outcomes during his administration.

Influence of President Goodluck Jonathan's Temperament on his Decisions

Goodluck Jonathan's presidency (2010–2015) reflected his phlegmatic, peace-seeking temperament. His calm, non-confrontational nature influenced key decisions, including his response to the 2012 fuel subsidy protests. Rather than forceful action, he opted for compromise, partially reinstating the subsidy (Yusha'u, 2012). Similarly, his support for the 2014 National Conference (Etemire, 2015) emphasized dialogue over imposition. Jonathan's leadership style consistently favoured negotiation and inclusivity, even amid national crises, illustrating his cautious and conciliatory approach.

Jonathan's phlegmatic temperament shaped his cautious response to the Boko Haram insurgency, leading to perceptions of weak leadership. His slow, measured approach and reluctance to confront aggression drew criticism full meaning (BBC News, 2015). These tensions and defections to escalating deep discomfort with conflict, favouring dialogue even when swift, forceful action was urgently needed, hesitation likely stemmed from a conflict-avoidant nature, allowing incomplete sentence

In 2013, Adetokunbo Mumuni (2013) reported on the complaint filed by SERAP and WEA full meaning regarding the controversial pardon of Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, a convicted former governor, sparked national and international outrage. Critics viewed the act as a major blow to Nigeria's anti-corruption efforts and a sign of weak political will. However, this controversial decision aligned with Jonathan's phlegmatic temperament prioritizes loyalty and personal relationships, influencing his decision to grant the pardon despite public outcry. Rather than distance himself from a disgraced mentor, Jonathan prioritized personal loyalty and regional ties. His decision, though unpopular, reflected his leadership style often criticized for prioritizing relationships and stability over firm action and institutional accountability.

Jonathan rarely engaged in public disputes with his critics showing emotional restraint and a diplomatic, accommodating nature. According to Omokri (2013), President Jonathan's administration demonstrated significant progress in various sectors and made decisions that sometimes disadvantaged him, such as appointing a northerner as full meaning INEC chairman and launching the Almajiri education initiative. These acts reflected his phlegmatic tendency to prioritise peace, fairness, and the greater good over personal or political gain.

A predominantly phlegmatic disposition, characterized by conflict avoidance, inclusivity, and long term social harmony, may explain Jonathan's willingness to prioritize national cohesion over short term political consolidation. This pattern suggests that temperament influenced not only the content of policy decisions but also the criteria by which policy options were evaluated, particularly the weighting of fairness and stability over political expediency.

Despite his shortcomings, Jonathan's phlegmatic temperament proved valuable during critical moments. The International Supreme Council for Peace Africa praised Jonathan's decision to concede defeat (Job, 2025) as humility and respect for democracy, averting post-election violence. While his calm temperament promoted unity and dialogue, it also led to passivity and missed reforms—often clashing with Nigeria's urgent need for bold, decisive leadership amid national crises.

Comparing Mohammed Buhari and Goodluck Jonathan Temperament and Decision Making

The table presents a comparative analysis of the temperamental profiles and decision-making styles of Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari, two significant figures in Nigerian politics.

Jonathan's primarily phlegmatic temperament, characterized by calmness, diplomacy, and a preference for consensus-building, shaped a leadership style that emphasized dialogue and a non-confrontational approach. This often translated into cautious and conciliatory decision-making, with a focus on negotiation and inclusivity. While this approach fostered unity and dialogue, it also led to perceptions of passivity and a reluctance to take swift, decisive action in the face of pressing challenges.

In contrast, Muhammadu Buhari's predominantly choleric temperament, marked by decisiveness, assertiveness, and a preference for control, informed an authoritative and top-down leadership style. His decision-making process was characterized by swift, often unilateral actions, reflecting a preference for order and control over broad democratic input. This approach was evident in his aggressive counterterrorism operations and anti-corruption drives, but also contributed to institutional friction and heightened ethnic tensions due to perceived regional favoritism. While Buhari's strengths lay in his integrity, discipline, and anti-corruption stance, his leadership was also marked by a tendency toward authoritarianism and a disregard for dissent.

Table 1: Buhari vs. Jonathan: A Comparison

Decision making style	Sub Category	Goodluck Jonathan	Muhammadu Buhari
Policy Preference	Approach to Conflict	Compromise seeking, avoids aggression, discomfort with confrontation	Forceful action preferred, control prioritized
	Corruption Handling	Alamiyeseigha pardon weakened anti-corruption perception	Sweeping arrests, anti-corruption drive, critics targeted
	Security and Boko Haram	Criticized for slow response to Boko Haram insurgency	Military focus, counterinsurgency gains
	Ethnic and Regional Bias	Advocated for national unity	Perceived Northern favoritism, lack of inclusivity, ethnic bias
Administrative Style	Leadership Style	Democratic/Laissez faire, dialogue focused, consensus builder, sometimes accommodating	Decisive, authoritative, no nonsense, perceived authoritarian
	Decision Making Speed	Cautious, values negotiation and inclusivity, sometimes prioritizes loyalty	Swift action preferred, led to institutional friction
	Response to Challenges	Dialogue emphasized, slow crisis response	Aggressive campaigns, executive power used
	Handling of Dissent	Tolerance for opposition	Dissent as threat, forceful response, legal crackdowns
	Handling of Public Protests	Allowed protests	Tough response, military involvement, condemned protests

Source: Author's compilation

Implications for policy making

1. A leader's temperament significantly influences the speed and urgency with which policies are designed and implemented. Phlegmatic leadership, as exemplified by Jonathan, tends to favor deliberation and caution, potentially resulting in policy delays. In contrast, choleric leadership, typified by Buhari, is associated with prompt, sometimes unilateral, decision-making.

2. Jonathan's people-oriented, consensus-driven approach led to inclusive policies like the National Conference and educational reforms. Consensus-driven leaders are more likely to adopt inclusive

policy frameworks that accommodate diverse viewpoints. While this fosters democratic engagement and legitimacy, it may also dilute the strength and clarity of reform agendas. Conversely, authoritarian-leaning temperaments may limit stakeholder input, expediting implementation but risking resistance and exclusion. Buhari's military-influenced, top-down style prioritized anti-corruption and security initiative

3. Leadership temperament affects the state's capacity to respond effectively to national crises such as the Boko Haram insurgency and fuel subsidy protests. Jonathan's restrained, conciliatory approach often led to perceived inertia during

emergencies such as the Boko Haram insurgency. Buhari's more assertive stance enabled swifter responses but occasionally disregarded civil liberties.

4. A diplomatic, negotiation-oriented leadership style is more likely to preserve institutional independence and promote rule-based governance. Jonathan promoted democratic values, tolerance for dissent, and peaceful power transition, strengthening Nigeria's democracy. However, such restraint may weaken enforcement capacity. Jonathan's collaborative style fostered more cooperative relations with the legislature. In contrast, more directive leadership may consolidate executive power, potentially undermining institutional checks and balances. Buhari's tenure, though focused on discipline, sometimes sidelined dissent, raising concerns about executive overreach. Buhari's authoritative approach led to periodic conflicts, especially during the 8th Assembly, affecting policy implementation.

5. Temperament influences public perception and trust in governance. A calm, emotionally restrained leadership style may engender a perception of fairness and stability. However, it may also be interpreted as weakness or indecision, particularly in areas demanding assertiveness. Assertive

leadership may project strength but can be polarizing. Buhari's aggressive anti-corruption stance, though more robust, has faced criticism for selective enforcement.

Limitations

This study offers valuable insights into the influence of presidential temperament on policymaking in Nigeria; however, it is subject to several limitations. The primary constraint lies in the methodology—temperamental profiles were inferred from publicly available information rather than formal psychological assessments. As temperament is best evaluated through standardized tools and direct interaction, the interpretations presented here may be affected by bias in sources or reporting. The qualitative, interpretive nature of this study introduces subjectivity, as policy selection and interpretation may vary among researchers. Thus, conclusions should be seen as exploratory rather than definitive. Future research could benefit from conducting formal psychological assessments, where feasible, of current and past Nigerian presidents using validated psychometric instruments.

Additionally, the analysis focused solely on two former presidents—Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari which limits the

generalizability of the findings. Expanding the scope of the comparative analysis to include a larger sample of Nigerian presidents from different historical periods would provide a richer dataset for identifying patterns and variations in the influence of temperament on governance. Political decision-making is a multifaceted process influenced by a wide array of factors beyond individual temperament, including political ideologies, institutional constraints, socio-economic pressures, and international dynamics. While this study focuses on the influence of temperament, it acknowledges that it is only one piece of a larger puzzle.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this analysis reveals a strong link between presidential temperament and governance in Nigeria. Jonathan's phlegmatic nature fostered dialogue and unity but led to perceived passivity. Buhari's choleric temperament drove decisive action and reform but risked alienating stakeholders and undermining institutions. Understanding these psychological influences is vital for comprehending Nigerian political history and informing future leadership choices. Both temperaments offer distinct strengths and weaknesses, underscoring the complexity of effective public policy-making.

Recommendation

Incorporation of Temperament Assessment in Leadership Selection

To enhance the quality of political leadership, it is recommended that temperament assessments be systematically incorporated into the recruitment and selection processes for public office. Utilizing empirically validated psychometric tools would enable stakeholders to evaluate candidates beyond surface-level charisma or populist appeal, aligning leadership competencies with the psychological demands of governance. For effective implementation, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), in collaboration with the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), should institutionalize a standardized temperament assessment.

Development of Temperament-Sensitive Leadership Training

Tailoring leadership training to accommodate specific personality traits will foster greater self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and areas-responsive decision-making. This approach is particularly vital in complex governance environments where rigid or reactive tendencies can undermine public trust and policy coherence. As such, institutions like the National Institute for

Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS) and the Public Service Institute of Nigeria (PSIN) should be tasked with designing modular, temperament-sensitive training curricula for current office holders and emerging political leaders, with ongoing professional development to reinforce adaptive leadership competencies over time.

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