

**PUBLIC TRUST AND DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA: THE MISSING LINK AND ITS IMPERATIVE FOR LEADERSHIP VALUES.**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Democracy is universally connected with the people, either from its procedural perspective or from its substantive consideration or from the point of view of its end results. Hence, if democracy must be sustained permanently in any nation, it must take care of peoples' yearnings, aspirations and welfare. This will make the people trust their leaders. In order to find out Nigeria's situation, this paper brought to focus a survey study done on Nigeria by afrobarometer (a collaborative group of social scientists from 18 African countries). The survey which studied the state of public trust in democracy and in the nation's leaders showed that many Nigerians have no trust in the nation's political leaders across all levels of government because of their poor performance. But the people still have trust in democracy as the best form of governance for the country. The paper then went ahead to show that the lack of trust brought about a missing link between the people and their leaders; a kind of disconnection between the people and democratic governance. In order to remedy the situation and possibly restore public trust, the paper called for a renewed democratic leadership that is value – based, virtuous and focused on public/national interest as against the leaders, usual selfish interest.*

**Keywords:** *Public Trust: The state of peoples confidence in the leaders and in democracy as a form of governance.*

*Missing Link: The absence of connection between the people and the leaders.*

*Democracy: The system of political governance, that is based on the values of freedom, justice, equality, accountability, fair election etc with the ultimate aim of satisfying peoples welfare and well – being. Value – rich leadership: Leadership that is completely guided by values that are aimed at satisfying public and national interest.*

*Virtuous leaders: Leaders that constantly and openly practice good values to the extent of making their characters enduring and shining examples for the followers across the nation.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Democracy being a people – based social and political issue needs peoples trust (public trust) to survive. A democracy that is able to deliver genuine democratic dividends to the people, can, everything being equal, be sure of using peoples trust and confidence to face daunting challenges of governance successfully. On the other hand, a democracy that does not enjoy public trust can only be sure of making the body – polity a fertile ground for discontent, tension and poor citizenry.

Scholars have been concerned about public trust in government in Europe and North Africa (Hetherington 1999; Ruscio 1996; Thomas 1998 in Kim, 2007). But why does trust in government matter? Level of trust in government can be viewed as the central indication of the public's underlying feeling about its policies; trust in government represents an evaluation of the government performance, indicating whether performance accords with normative expectations held by the public; trust in government enhances legitimacy and the effectiveness to democratic government; trust in government encourages compliance with laws and regulations. On the other hand, declining trust in government is linked to declining political participation (Kim, 2007). Nigeria's 1999 transition to civilian government ended a long, turbulent period of military rule and failed

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democratic experiments. At the time of the political handover, “many Nigerians expressed hopes for a ‘democracy dividend’ that will would expand political liberties, improve the performance of government, encourage accountability among leaders, and revive the ailing economy “ (Lewis, 2006 P.1) So far, what has been the reality on ground? Have the anticipated benefits of democracy emerged? Did the new dispensation fulfill the expectations of many Nigerians? What has been the state of public trust for democracy in Nigeria? Does the Nigerian public trust the government? Does the public trust democracy itself as a good process of governance? What evidences are available to show the trust or lack of it?. These and related questions will be addressed by this paper.

Further more, given the importance of value for human conduct and given the importance of leadership values for the development of a country, the paper will attempt to show that the level of peoples trust should dictate the type of leadership value required for the nation. In the course of addressing the issues above, the paper will clarify the concept of public trust, state the situation of public trust in Nigerian democracy and highlight the missing link/s between public and democratic governance in the country. Possible reasons for the missing link/s will be adduced and the consequences stated. The imperatives for Nigerian leaderships’ value will be discussed as possible way of getting over the problem of the missing link.

### **THE CONCEPT OF PUBLIC TRUST IN DEMOCRACY**

Trust is universally regarded as a good thing’ at both the interpersonal level and as a means of bringing stability to social institutions. The need for stability to social institutions like democratic institutions brought about the extension of trust to public matters, hence public trust. According to wikipedia (2011);

*The concept of public trust relates back to the origins of democratic government and its seminal idea that within the public lies the true power and future of a society, therefore, whatever trust the public places in its officials must be respected. (p.1)*

Public trust can refer to public opinion about the extent to which specific political incumbents, or even politicians as a class, are trusted to think and act in the interest of the public. It can also refer to more diffuse attitudes towards government institutions or political systems in general (Roger 2010). Public trust in the two dimensions can garner varying degrees of support for or opposition against government and its institutions such as the National Assembly, Judiciary and the Executive. Public trust can also generate support for or opposition against the process of governance. The two dimensions of public trust are regarded as important because each is part of what renders a government legitimate in the eyes of the citizens.

Public trust for or against government can be further explained on the basis of performance – based theories or public value – based theories. Performance – based theories generally focus on governments’ ability to effectively address a range of economic and policy related issues (Roger, 2010). They look at the quality of a governments economic policies, and try to connect these to measures of public confidence. Similar explanations look at the corruption and scandal levels of politicians. Yet others try to link levels of public trust to media portrayal of government and politicians.

On the other hand, public value – based theories emphasize the effects of values or expectations of the public. One of the value – based theories is associated with Ronald Inglehart, a prominent political scientist, who contends in Roger (2010) thus:

*Younger generations’ social and political values have shifted away from the materialist’ concerns of their parents and grandparents – economic prosperity security, and personal safety towards a set of post – materialists’ values – freedom of choice, quality of life and free expression – which erode respect for authority and thereby reduce public support for political actors and institutions. (P.2)*

Another variety of value – based trust theory is that of Alexis de Tocqueville, echoed by Robert Putman, where it is maintained that forces of modernization, trends of social and geographic mobility, television etc have weakened the bonds holding individuals and communities locally together in favour of globalised bonds and opinions. These in turn have eroded both interpersonal and political trust. All the above theories are plausible explanations of how public trust is generated for or against government.

In a situation where democracy is the core guiding value of government, the gap between people's aspiration and people's satisfaction which determine the public trust results into the concept of democratic deficit (Norris 2011). Hence higher democratic deficits may give rise to very serious public distrust, while low democratic deficits may possibly give rise to more public trust. The concept of democratic deficit thus show that there is a relationship between public trust and democracy. Given the above theoretical and conceptual explanations of public trust in relation to democracy, is it note possible to differentiate between public trust in democratic principles on one hand and on the other hand, between public trust in politicians, political parties and public sector institutions? Certainly, it is possible. According to Norris (2011), Russell Dalton in a cross national survey study concludes, more cautiously, that citizens in advanced industrial studies remain staunchly committed to democratic principles although they have gradually become more distrustful of politicians, detached from parties, and doubtful about public sector institutions" (P.2). In this situation, democratic principles may have been perceived by the public as ideals that have been correctly and perfectly enunciated by scholars and theoreticians of democracy, but the politicians who practise the principles are the ones doing it wrongly. What is the situation of public trust in Nigeria for democracy? Is it negative or positive and it sophisticatedly done as found by Russel in industrial societies?

#### **THE STATE OF PUBLIC TRUST IN NIGERIAN DEMOCRACY**

In Nigeria when one considers the contending and at times bitterly divided opinions between the ruling government or one hand and the opposition on the other hand over democratic dividends for the people, the issue of public trust becomes very germane for scholars to examine. In other words, it is relevant to ask where public trust under Nigeria's current fourth republic stand in relation to the democratic system? In order to answer this question the result of the afrobarometer survey study as reported by Lewis (2006) was used. The survey studied Nigeria's attitudes to government since the civilian regime in 1999. Under the title "Performance and legitimacy in Nigeria's New Democracy "It was coordinated by the institute for Democracy in South Africa, the center for Democratic for Democratic Development of Ghana and Michigan University (Lewis, 2006)

The survey was carried out among a random, representative sample of 2, 400 Nigerian citizens age 18 and above. All geographic regions and language groups were included. Interviews were conducted in Nigeria's major languages English and Pidgin. The survey was conducted in 2000, 2001, 2003 and 2005. It is important to state daily that in practical terms, there has not been any significant positive change in democratic dividends from 2006 to date which may be used to fundamentally fault the survey study as being obsolete: The study is as relevant today, 2011 as it was in 2005/2006. The result is succinctly stated below.

On support for democracy, Nigerians expressed very high levels of support for democracy in the immediate wake of transition from military rule, reflecting a sense of political euphoria after a long period of dictatorship. However since 2000, support for democracy declined steadily, though modestly. In other rounds, the support for democracy is still there.

From my own point of view, the support can be said to have tremendously rejuvenated with 73 millions unprecedented registered voters for 2011 elections people were resolute in supporting democratic election.

On satisfaction with democracy, the Nigerian public opinion reflects a sharp decline in satisfaction with democracy. Form 84% score of citizens satisfaction, six months after inauguration of the civilian administration, satisfaction plunged to 25 percent by the end of 2005. According to the report, among the group of African countries surveyed, Nigerians have changed their relative position, from the most satisfied citizens to among those least satisfied with their democratic government.

Comparing citizens satisfaction with political performance on one hand and citizens support for democracy on the other hand, it was found that professed support for democracy diminished by 16% points in five years, while satisfaction with political performance dropped by 59% points over the same period. Also while measures of "support" and satisfaction" were nearly equal following the transition, there is now a

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gap of about 40% points between the two dimensions in five years. The comparative result suggests that the basic commitment to democracy among the public seems to be resilient. This implies that although Nigerians have become increasingly discouraged by the performance of their government, their preference for a democratic political system has wavered only modestly.

As regards the performance of elected officials, a large majority of Nigerians disapprove the performance of their elected leaders, especially, the National Assembly members who continue to earn lowest assessments. Nigerians are becoming increasingly critical on the local government representatives and the president.

The policy performance of government on managing the economy, encouraging equity, providing good education and limiting crime were viewed by Nigerians as disappointing. However, government anti – corruption initiatives were applauded by the people. Nigerians showed diminishing confidence in the government’s ability to handle crucial issues affecting their lives such as narrowing the gaps between the rich and poor.

Focusing on institutions of governance such as the National Assembly, the ruling party and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), public trust in them, according to the report remained firm and did not consistently decline like the assessments of incumbent leaders and current policies. Majority of Nigerians expressed minimal trust in election, thus showing considerable skepticism towards an important democratic structure that is in charge of election.

The state of political rights and liberties provides a further measure of trust. Nigerians are largely disheartened by the state of political liberties in the civilian regime. In specific only about half of the citizens view political climate as free than under previous military regimes. This is a very adverse judgment, given the fact that political freedom and liberties are particularly fundamental to democracy.

In expressing their views on the extent of democracy in the country, about half of the citizens see Nigeria as a democracy with major problems” while two – thirds believe the supply of democracy is sorely lacking. In expressing their mind on the extent of democracy in the country there is a strong view by the report that Nigeria is a “democracy with major problems” illustrating the fact that the people have not reaped the dividends of democracy; and are neither enjoying improved governance nor enjoying proper economic management. It is interesting to know that the Afrobarometer Study shows that Nigerians do draw an implicit distinction between the government of the day and the democratic institutions hence government performance is scored low, while democratic institutions remain acceptable system than non – democratic alternative. Nonetheless, evidences point to the fact that public’s patience is being strained and democratic legitimacy is at risk.

### **THE MISSING LINK BETWEEN NIGERIAN PUBLIC AND DEMOCRACY**

Democracy everywhere depends on the public for survival. Ideally, therefore, there should be no disconnection between the people (public) and democratic governance. Given the above account of public opinions of Nigerian on democracy, a missing link can easily be identified between the two – the public on one hand and democratic government on the other hand. A refresh with the summary of the Afrobarometer survey study can provide at a glance the missing link. Lewis (2006) aptly stated, thus:

*To summarize our findings: Nigerians are broadly discouraged by the performance of their political system, and do not generally believe that they have reaped the “dividend” of democracy. Nonetheless, a large majority of Nigerians continue to prefer democratic government over all other options, and many Nigerians remain patient about anticipated benefits of the democratic system (P.2)*

Furthermore, the report stated that:

*Nigerians are most critical of the government of the day, and relatively less discouraged by the performance of the general regime of democracy. These popular attitudes suggest*

*that Nigeria's new democracy remains fragile,  
and suffers a growing deficit of public confidence.  
However, Nigerians are not ready to abandon the  
democratic system for non – democratic alternative  
such as military rule or a domineering presidency  
(Lewis, 2006, P.2 )*

From the summary, it can be started that the absence democratic dividend caused the missing link between the public/ Nigeria citizen on one hand and democracy/democratic governance on the other hand. In other words, there is no link between the people's welfare peoples socio – economic well being and the performance of democratic government/elected officials; a disconnection resulting into a distrust between the people and governance. Fortunately, however, there is still a link (a connection) between the people and the principles of democracy, the people still believe in democracy as better than other forms of authoritarian rule and they seem to be hopeful that democracy can eventually work in Nigeria.

At this juncture, it is important to state some evidences of the missing link (absence of appreciable democratic dividends since 1999) to compliment the report. Unemployment in Nigeria has continued to be high despite past government promises. This has culminated into the present situation which was declared by the minister of youth, Mr Bolaji Abdullahi thus: "86 million Nigerian youths are unemployed." (Daily Trust, August, 19, 2011 P.3). The minister further explained that the 68 million population is three times the population of Ghana, the next most populous country in West Africa. According to him, God forbid, if anything happens to this huge population of people, the entire West African is in trouble. Hence, the challenge we face is not only national, but also transnational.

Erratic/Zero power supply is one of the most obvious evidences of disconnection between the people and democratic governance. So far all promises by all governments in the power sector remain unfulfilled. Consequently, individuals agencies and firms now supply themselves power at a cost that is over 3 times the cost of public power supply (Adenikinju 2003 p.1). President Jonathan as the vice president had to apologies for governments failure in the power sector (Daily Trust, January 1, 2010).

Nigeria roads have become death traps for Nigerian masses who have no means to travel by air as most Nigerian leaders do. According to wikipedia (2011) only 20% of Nigerian roads are safe for traveling without death trap pot holes.

The health organization is so bad that the world Health Organization ranked Nigerian health system in 187<sup>th</sup> place out 191 countries evaluated; life expectancy declined in Nigeria from 47 in 1990 to 43 in 2006, while Malaysia life expectancy which attained nationhood at the same time with Nigeria has now reached 70 years (Ogbonaya, 2009).

Access to good water is pathetic. In Nigeria, more than half of the population don't have portable water to drink (Omoniyi, 2011). According to President Jonathan himself "in the absence of portable water, people simply drink what is available, and the implication on our peoples health has been most devastating (Umejei, 2011, P.1). The Nigerian education section is so bad that in 2010 the best university in the country, university of Ilorin is ranked 5,484 in the world (transparency.com). About 20,000 primary schools in Nigeria have no buildings of any type, classes are under trees. All the above samples are contrary to campaign promises made and of unprecedented billions of naira disbursed by various governments to those sectors of development. This is why Nigeria is described as a landscape that is:

*Littered with un – kept and broken promises. Various  
governments on inauguration make pacts  
with the people, but these dreams hardly  
materialize and hopes for a brighter future  
are always shattered. As a result, most  
Nigerians have developed a cynical attitude  
that borders on distrust of the establishment at all levels (Egbuunike, 2010) P.1*

Again, democracy, especially liberal democracy that Nigeria practices is supposed to be people – based and people driven. Unfortunately, the state of African people (as exemplified by Nigeria) is engrossed with material poverty that they are more busy struggling for subsistence and survival and less genuinely concerned about political rights, elections and voting (Nwabueze in Offor, 2006)

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“Unfortunately, the same people on whose behalf parties are formed and elections conducted, are merely mobilized (call it inducement) and manipulated during elections (Offor, 2006). The above scenario collectively makes it impossible for people to trust the government because the evidences of poor governance are too overwhelming to be trivialized by the people, especially the real common people (the masses).

However, in fairness to democratic governance in Nigeria, it is important to state a land mark achievement in the communication sector. Democratic governance in Nigeria has led to a tremendous improvement of communication among the citizens across the board: citizens of high and low economic status. According to the secretary General of ITU, Toure (2010).

*Nigeria has been one of the Africas biggest Success stories in its expansion of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)... From a subscriber base of less than half a million in 2000, Nigeria now has a total of over 73 million mobile and fixed connections, which is a teledensity of about 50 percent (p.1)*

Toure (2010) further stated thus: “In addition Nigeria added eleven million new internet users between 2000 and 2008. Representing close to 40 percent of the total addition in sub – Saharan Africa that period” (p.1). Given the fact that communication is an index of development, Nigeria can be said to be enjoying democratic dividend relatively speaking, in the communication sector. Unfortunately, the inadequate education infrastructure, the poor roads, poor power supply, poor health facilities, endemic poverty, critical shortage of portable water and high unemployment etc have so affected the peoples life negatively that positive developments in areas like the communication sector can best be qualified as isolated and could therefore not significantly change peoples trust in favour of government leaders and democratic governance. Absence of public trust for governments and the leaders can have far reaching consequences which may include hatred for the leaders and the entire government citizen, apathy against government and its programme, continuous negative evaluation of government by the citizens “and reduced support for government action to address a range of domestic policy concerns” (Chanley, Rudolph and Rahn 201. P.1). A situation like this is no doubt a fertile ground for growing disdain and dissent, for creating in - security and sabotage; for enhancing lawlessness and culture of impunity Nigeria at present can be said to be having evidences of the above consequences in various parts of the country. This makes it important to listen to the warning by a former Head of State, General Buhari, thus, Government must do things according to the law and if it does not do so the people would have no choice than to look after themselves, in any way legitimate as is or illegitimate happening already (Sunday Trust of July, 3, 2011). Where then does Nigeria go from here?

John Kennedy admonished that democracy should not be seen as final achievement, it should rather be seen as a call to untiring effort. The untiring effort in the view of this paper should include value rescue efforts, especially rescuing Nigerian leadership values.

### **IMPERATIVES OF THE MISSING LINK FOR NIGERIAN LEADERSHIP VALUE**

The people were very selective in their show of distrust in the sense that they only lost confidence in the leaders and a result distrusted them, but they still believed in democracy as the best means of governance. Why then did the people distrust the leaders? The leaders were distrusted because they led badly and they led badly because they were guided by negative values; values that were based on selfishness, greed and power drunkenness etc. According to Achebe (1983) “the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership” (p.1) leaders make things happen; they are wave makers. Hence a society without talented and committed leaders will retrogress or at best remain stagnant and this has been the situation in Nigeria.

According to Nike (2008)

A careful examination of the attitude and behaviour of the leaders of post – colonial Nigeria shows that many of the civilian, as well as military leaders, were mired in the pursuit of selfish personal goals at the expense of broader national interest or needs. In other words, they were instrumental’ leaders, or what David After called’ consumatory’ leaders (P.3)

The consummatory and selfish tendencies of Nigerian leaders transformed into a syndrome of cabals – oil cabal, electricity cabal, generator cabal, rice cabal, cement cabal, political cabal, fertilizer cabal, e.t.c. They are amorphous association of business and political leaders who have cornoned various sectors of the nation's socio – economic survival for their selfish interest, they are always working against the collective will of the Nigerian people on all fronts. As a mark of frustration, concerned Nigerians continued to ask rhetorically: where are our leaders leading us to? to whom can we look for direction and inspiration to actualize the much – talked about national dream of making Nigeria a great country with good people? Presently many Nigerians are not happy because they are poor; they are poor because their leaders made them poor, their leaders made them poor because the leaders style of governance is devoid of values that are based on public interest. Rather their leadership style is corruption - captured and based on selfish and self-centered values. If Nigerian leadership must be corruption – free, if the missing link between the people and the leaders must be removed, it is imperative that leadership values have to change fundamentally and meaningfully on the basis of public interest and overall national interest. In that wise, what type of leaders does Nigeria needs?

### **NIGERIA NEEDS VALUE – RICH, VIRTUOUS LEADERS**

If Nigeria must move forward meaningfully, the nation and particularly its leaders need to get their acts right and retrace their steps back to lead in compliance with public interest. This will restore public trust in them the way public trust is still friendly to democracy as a form of governance.

To be a trusted, current and future leaders must embrace value enrichment with the ultimate aim of becoming virtuous leaders. Conceptual clarification of value and virtue is necessary here. What is virtue and how does it differ and / or relate to value? “A value is a belief upon which a man acts by preference” (Gordon, in Dike, 2008. P.4) Johnson defined value as conception of cultural or merely personal standard by which things are compared and approved or disapproved relative to one another (Dike, 2008). Rokeah describes value as enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end – state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end – state of existence” (Dike, 2008. P.4). In a way, value is to a human being what software is to the computer. Value gives command to the body on what to do, how to do it and when to do it.

A good Nigerian leader should therefore have in his mind the software commands of honesty, accountability, rule of law, responsibility etc which should be based on public interest not selfish interest. In essence value is a morally neutral term that only indicates preference to choose one thing over the other value can therefore be particularistic to a particular choice – demanding situation.

Comparatively, ‘virtues’ are dispositions or traits, that are not wholly innate. (Dike, 2008). They are acquired, at least in part by teaching or constant practice and perhaps by God's Grace in some people's views. Virtues are traits of “ character” rather than traits of” personality” and, according to Frankena, (1963), virtues involve a tendency to act in certain ways in certain kinds of situations, not just to think or feel in certain ways. It involves: acting in certain ways; translating thinking and belief into actions. Thus, virtue can be conceived as an acquired human quality, which enables us to achieve and practice those goods, while the lack of it can effectively prevent us from achieving or practicing any of such goods. In other words, virtue means recognizing and practically doing the right thing (MacIntyre in Dike 2008).

Therefore, not all people of value may be virtuous, especially if they only conceive good values without consistently practicing them. They can only be virtuous if consistent practice of the good value makes them internalize it such that it becomes part of their character and they can be predicted by the people on that basis. On the other hand, all virtuous people are value – rich people because possession of good values is the beginning of virtue.

Virtuous leaders are individuals of high ethical standards who pursue the good for the benefit of society as well as for themselves, but not selfish self. Virtuous leaders are persons of consistent honesty, integrity and trust. For instance, in the business world, virtuous leaders are those leaders who are mindful that the needs and realistic expectations of others in the society in which they carry out their business, must be satisfied if their own needs and realistic expectations are to be met. Therefore, “virtue requires the acceptance of equity in human relationships and a commitment to act accordingly. It involves that core element, the belief system of a person” (Leibig, 1990, pp 1 – 5). Business leaders and political leaders involved in the Niger Delta of Nigeria at various times can be said to lack virtue, hence they operated without taking care of the infrastructural and welfare expectations of the oil - producing communities.

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In essence, virtuous leaders, not just value rich leaders are what Nigeria needs as a democratic country. Any one who aspires to lead others, irrespective of which level and which aspect of the nation's life, should be one who legitimately understands in thought and in practice the core essence of selfless service and public interest in leadership. They should not be individuals who don't understand anything about leadership value or individuals who only believe in talking about values but does not practice it, which is what many Nigerian leaders currently do. Virtues leaders practice honesty, rule of law, fairness, justice forth rightness, accountability, truth and discipline; they don't just talk about those values or preach them. Virtuous leaders lead by example and instill hope in the follower ship for the emergence of a better nation; follower ship that is largely good as testified by an important former government functionary, the former Director of State Security Service (SSS) until 2010, Ejiofor (2011) who said – Nigeria needs good leadership because Nigerians are good followers.

### **CONCLUSION**

No country can successfully run a democratic government without the peoples support and trust. And people's support and trust can only be generated and sustained if the peoples welfare and well – being are satisfactorily taken care of. This paper so far has shown that many Nigerians trust democracy as the best form of governance they can have. But the government leaders operating the democracy are seriously distrusted by the people because the leaders style of governance has all along been corruption – captured because it is based on self – interest instead of public and national interest. In order to address the unfortunate situation with the hope of restoring public trust, the paper stated the urgent need for Nigeria democratic leaders to change and become virtuous leaders. These are leaders that will not only be heard talking of democratic values of rule of law, accountability, honestly, responsibility, justice and fairness etc, but will be openly seen to be practicing such values in their daily governance of Nigeria.

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