

# Ahead 2023: Nigerians Weary as APC and PDP continue to Flounder

By Sule Oyofe

The next few months will tell what 2023 will look like. For now, without being pessimistic, the prospects aren't bright—gloomy sort of—although not entirely hopeless. Accounts from the various political camps and the social media reports seems to point to a dreary if not a repeat of the tragic past—unless something drastic happens. Nigerians yearn for genuine change, one that would usher in a reign of peace and progress! But that issue seems to be at the back burners judging from the trend of the campaigners. Instead of providing concrete economic solutions to the nations catalogue of woes, they are busy digging deep and engaging in blackmail—which has all but dented the image of the nation and dried up the treasury.

The peace accord signed recently has not made any impact. To them, it is just a passing phase. The belief out there is that 2023 will be the same old story as everybody involved are already calculating how much will line their pockets—not what to do for the nation. What do you expect? There are no good roads, no water supply, no regular power supply, dearth of infrastructure, yet, this does not seem to assuage political followers. It is the same old players on the scene! But this time, disappointment awaits anyone ready to thread the old path. It is easy to project as of the moment that the PDP is already doomed; intra-party crisis has eaten so deep and created an unnecessary gulf between the key players; the self-styled party chairman, Iyorchia Ayu, refusing to step aside is the bone in the PDP neck; No amount of persuasion to do so has made him budge, but the Wike camp is unrelenting.

It is significant to mention that Ayu's behavior is not unexpected as he has been a recurrent fixture since 1999. His disposition to pecuniary interest is no secret and rather alarming regardless of whose ox is gored. Now, the furor generated has sliced a good chunk of the South from the main campaign party. It is ironic that some insiders in the PDP hierarchy still believe that the project is on course. "There is no magic here", said Alhaji Isa Muhammed, an Abuja based party faithful. "Wike has been a pillar to our party and now to be shabbily treated

is unacceptable", he told our reporters. Alhaji Isa Muhammed summarized the whole saga as nothing but defending selfish interest. He dared Ayu to step down if indeed he is patriotic enough.

Now the crisis has degenerated into boiling point with the PDP on a shaky note. "You can see the damage old politicians are causing Nigerians", rapped Engr. Chris Umole, also an Abuja based technocrat. "They care for nothing other than their pockets.", he said regretfully. For the APC, the story is not different. Instead of talk of salvaging the nation, the scramble for political positions and the health status of the "king maker" turned "king" has been the subject much less the Muslim Muslim ticket. "How they hope to proceed with that remains to be seen", disclosed Mr. Benjamin Olisa. "We have not heard of talk of salvaging the economy; it is all about personality", he said further.

Olisa would have wanted a more comprehensive package from the APC to assure Nigerians that something fresh will be on the table come 2023. "We need to know what they have in the bag—not this circle of violence, blame game, rabble rousing", declared Benjamin. The APC is stoutly built around Tinubu who has been overwhelmingly rejected by Nigerian youths who make up 65% of the population. Yet, the man is not relenting, hoping to force himself on the populace. "It is a shame that some of us have learnt nothing" said Olisa. "We hear without him the party will collapse. No one is telling us how to curb insecurity, terrorism, kidnapping, and all that nonsense this same APC government foist on us", said a weary artisan who sells souvenirs on the streets in Abuja.

Now with morale low, and confidence sagging, the reality on ground is how to disengage from the old politicians like Bukola Saraki, Dino Melaye, Iyorchia Ayu, Senator Abdullahi Adamu, Adams Oshiomole, Godwin Obaseki, Senators Alimikhena and Ali Ndume who apparently are capitalizing on the weakness of the system to recycle themselves. Bukola Saraki on his own

has been a recurrent fixture in Nigeria politics. His once powerful father, senator Olusola Saraki had set him up at quite an early age and since then has not looked back. Experience has exposed him no more as a serial opportunist out to serve his interest. As a former senate president, it is emphatic he has nothing new to offer—or give Nigerians. This is the same view held of other die hard renegades in the PDP and APC for their refusal to give space to new entrants—the reason why discipline has crashed and the interest to vote near zero.

The demands of the country require a patriotic, visionary who will look beyond ethnic politics and religious sentiments—something the two leading parties lack. "There must be a clear shift 2023 and beyond; that family affair era is gone and so are the rubbish tales often told by these spent products", declared Chief Samson Ordia another strong party stalwart. To him, needless for Nigeria to go into any election because the posturing of the old brigades shows no remorse. "Look at the crisis rocking the parties; power tussle here and there; are they deceiving us?" a visibly angry Ordia queried. He went on to call out more powerful stakeholders not only to reverse the trend but flush out the pretenders. "2023 is a golden opportunity for us to get it right, we must not miss it", he announced. Among the changes he expects, is a government formed without the likes of Bukola Saraki, Adams Oshiomole, Atiku Abubakar, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, senator Ahmed Lawan, Ndume Ali, Adamu Abdullahi, and all those who jointly conspire to recycle themselves forcibly on the nation. "It is not right for them to show up again, they have to give way, if truly we need redemption", he stated. For now, weary Nigerians are geared up praying seriously for a way out.

# Are the presidential candidates sleeping?

*By Dan Agbese*

It was not foolish to expect the political parties to bolt from the stable soon after INEC blew the whistle for the official start of the campaigns for the 2023 general elections – and engage the people in uplifting national conversations towards the post Buhari national politics of inclusiveness as opposed to parochial politics of exclusion. But it was naïve to expect our political leaders to have by now risen to the challenges of political leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and commit to doing things differently to help the nation recover its soul. As you can see, the big political parties do not appear to have grown in stature and matured in the process. They have sunk deeper in the nadir of the politics of capturing power, not in the politics of good and effective leadership in return for the people's support at the polls. They are embroiled in intra-party sabotage and inter party brick bats. It is the old and familiar way with the politics of brawn, not of brain. We have travelled so far but covered such a short distance.

Of the three big parties, PDP seems worsted by its internal sabotage. Five of its own state governors are at primitive war of chest beating against the party. It may be unwise for the party leaders to admit it, but it is not difficult to see that its internal sabotage has more or less crippled it and dragged down our democracy with it. The party will likely go into this critical battle of winning the presidency with its commanders and foot soldiers in disarray. I do not think history has a record of a fractious army marching into battle. But it is possible for the party to show that it can be done. This is a land in which everyone trusts in miracles. We need to rise. You cannot expect change when the same is the norm. But for Kola Abiola and Sowore, there are no new faces in the presidential race. The big parties threw

up the same men who have strutted our national political stage at federal and state levels since 1999. They came with the same views expressed in some worn out language because they rely on the same oiled system of capturing power, not winning it.

Not many of us realise how far we have regressed in our national politics. Politics is by nature an exciting game. It has been reduced to soulless business in our country with money being the arbiter in the contest for power. In the first and second republics, we had men who offered soaring rhetoric that lifted up our

free education at all levels. He showed us the strategy and statistical details of how it could be done. He thus did two things. He challenged his political opponents to contradict him; he also offered an interesting topic for national conversation. Was free education at all levels feasible at that point in our national development? I knew of no one who answered that question in the negative and put the chief to task. I suppose he talked above our collective understanding at the time. The chief was not a rousing public speaker; he made up for that as a profound political thinker who knew

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spirit. From their inspiring and uplifting speeches, tomorrow was almost tangible. Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the best prepared among our politicians of both the first and the second republics, did not just offer us

the potentials of this country much better than anyone else. So far, the chief has not reincarnated and there is none like him. However, he left something vital in our national politics, to wit the utilitarian value of a healthy debate in the quest for power

in the context of what is good enough for the country.

If politics is about human progress and development, then it should be anchored on intellectual challenges that give rise to some serious national conversations on matters that matter to us as a people, as a country and as a democracy. None of our politicians is walking along the path carved out by Awolowo because, let us face it, it is not only rather heavy but out of tune with the mediocrity that has taken the centre stage in our national politics. Of all our political losses, the loss of men capable of soaring rhetoric and inspired speeches must be the sorriest loss for the country. Our current crops of politicians are uniformly dull. Their speeches do not inspire, let alone raise hope, in the present and the future of our country and its people. In more than seven dull years, President Buhari made not a single inspiring speech to whip up and galvanise the people towards a given national cause.

When he chooses to talk always with a written speech, he does so with barely concealed contempt for the people he purports to rule. He did not encourage national conversation to help the country arrive at consensus on matters that not only matter to us but also agitate us. For instance, he treated the clamour of restructuring and state police with such contempt that their proponents must have lost confidence in the justness of what they were pushing for.

So far, not one of the presidential candidates has shown any indications that he can lift us from this national stupor and make up for the years that the locusts of dullness had eaten. We need a soaring rhetoric that fires our hopes in a country about to be freed from rank provincialism and put back on the pedestal of inclusiveness. We hear nothing because from them because they choose to say nothing. Their aides are busy insulting one another and throwing brickbats, a sorry development that throws us back to the primitive politics of taking power, not winning it in a fair and open competition. If the parties had matured, we would not be pulled back as if we were beginning again.

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In the times before these, the political parties issued their manifestoes because the duty of winning elections was incumbent on them. The political parties have abandoned this and left their presidential candidates to issue their manifestoes. This means that the individuals are marketing themselves, not their political parties. This is a rather cruel twist in the circular development in our national politics.

When the parties issued and marketed themselves through their manifestos in the first and the second republics, we elected individuals arguably, of our choice into elective offices as wards of their parties. But now that we elect political parties rather than individual candidates, the candidates issue their own manifestoes. They market themselves, not their political parties. It flies in the face of best practices in democracy.

It points to two unsavoury developments. One, our political parties have little or no control over those elected on their platforms. They are, therefore, not the servants of the

parties in elective public offices and do not feel bound to do what will advance the interests of their parties. The party manifestoes were the selling points in the past. Each party ensured that those elected on their platforms adhered to the execution of their programmes contained in their manifestoes to help them win re-election.

Two, when the right of the political parties to issue their manifestoes was taken away from them, they lost the capacity to drive national and sub-national developments – the primary responsibilities of parties in a democracy. The result, as I have argued here times without number, is the present chaos we witness in the executive branches of government where presidents and state governors commit to and waste money on hair-brained ideas that only deepen our frustrations and disappointments with our governments.

*This country gains nothing from being the poster child of mediocrity and political dullness. Nigerians are excitable people. They need a potential leader whose words, if not deeds, excite them. Our country has everything to gain from presidential candidates whose inspiring speeches melt the wax of dullness. They need impassioned rhetoric that fires their imagination and gives them hope for the emergence of a national leader not allergic to national conversations but who will encourage them to help us resolve our problems through dialogue by people who have ears and can hear one another. It should no longer be more of the same but less of the same and more of the new. It requires no magic.*