

The Cancer Destroying Nigerian Democracy,

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During the November 11, 2023 elections in Kogi, Bayelsa and Imo States, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) Election Analysis Centre highlighted the 'need to separate the unpredictable technical failures that are due to the operational, logistical and infrastructure challenges of electoral administration in the country on the one hand from the politically instigated failures attributable in the main to deliberate manipulation by candidates, political parties and their proxies in state and society on the other hand. The challenge, therefore, is how to unscramble the nexus connecting technical to politically motivated failures with a view to enhancing the integrity of elections in the country.' In short, 'politically instigated' or 'motivated failures' due to 'deliberate manipulation by candidates, political parties and their proxies' is the main challenge negatively affecting 'integrity of elections' in Nigeria. This is certainly not a new revelation. If anything, it only drew attention to the fact that the main problem of elections in Nigeria remains mainly 'deliberate manipulation by candidates, political parties and their proxies'. 'Deliberate manipulation' of election results 'by candidates, political parties and their proxies' has been a problem in Nigerian politics since the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999. Some may argue that it is as old as politics itself and is not limited to Nigeria. As much as that could be true, what is uniquely Nigerian is the fact that the institution that should have developed the capacity to deal with the challenge becomes the first casualty of the problem. That institution is the political party.

Ideally, every political contest or contest for an election is expected to start internally within parties. Aspiring candidates emerged and parties are expected to conduct internal elections, which produces candidates, otherwise known as party primary. Rules or guidelines to guarantee free and fair contest or equal opportunity to each aspiring contestant are expected to be set by each party for the conduct of the primary. The reality, however, is that although all parties in Nigeria have rules or guidelines for primary elections, copies of which are deposited with INEC, the first act of 'deliberate manipulation' starts internally within parties during primary election. In fact, the process of manipulation begins when party leaders are being elected. These are the people expected to produce as well as enforce the party rules or guidelines expected to guarantee free and fair contests internally within parties.

Consequently, political practice and culture, across all Nigerian parties, is about recruiting membership based on individual aspirations for political offices. The scenario,



therefore, is that once an aspirant has strong financial capability, the party is handed over to the person. Such a person would then proceed to appoint loyalists to serve as party leaders. Issues of membership and participation in political activities, including holding party positions and appointments into governments controlled by the party, are restricted to close associates and supporters, while professional management of the party and disciplinary conduct of members are conveniently ignored. As a result, there is the preponderance of unethical, unfair, and other substandard practices by all political parties and their candidates without any exception in Nigeria. Party offices are manipulated to be controlled by aspiring candidates. All the problems associated with Nigeria's national elections become manifest at this point. Imposition, vote buying, rigging, etc. emerges from this point. Party leaders are produced through these unethical methods and in return they are expected to produce their sponsors who are the aspirants for elective positions through such methods as party candidates for elections. Once they become party candidates for elections, the next task is to use the same methods of manipulating election results to emerge winners. Manipulation of political contests

through imposition, vote buying, rigging, etc., which begin at the level of producing party leaders grew and sadly become political culture that unethically determine winners of electoral contests. Manipulation of political contests is the cells or tumors that grow uncontrollably and spread. Once a party produces its leadership through processes of manipulation, such a party would end up producing candidates through manipulation and the candidates would in turn be seeking to win elections by manipulating results. This was what destroyed the PDP as a party. When the APC emerged in 2013 with the promise of change, many Nigerians, especially founding members of APC expected that being envisioned to be a progressive party meant departure from the culture of manipulation. To be candid, ahead of the 2015 general elections, internal party contests in APC were relatively competitive. There were certainly incidences of vote buying during the APC primary elections in 2014; the scale was however negligible relative to what was the case in PDP. Virtually, all APC candidates who contested the 2015 elections were elected by delegates at party primary. None emerged through imposition, which explains why there were hardly any court cases challenging the emergence of any APC candidate for the 2015 general elections.



Unfortunately, by 2023, the situation in APC completely changed negatively. Like was the case in PDP in 2007, whereby almost all the candidates of the party for the 2007 general elections were products of imposition, including its Presidential candidate, late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, imposition of candidates in APC also became rampant. In fact, the attempt by members of the 9th National Assembly, which was dominated by APC legislators, to insert the clause of compulsory direct primary was a deliberate response to the problem of potential imposition of candidates in the APC. However, unlike the case of the PDP in 2007, there was a strong resistance in APC in 2023 against attempt to impose a Presidential candidate.

President Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu emerged as the APC Presidential candidate for the 2023 Presidential election after a strong internal contest, including opposition to attempt by people loyal to former President

Muhammadu Buhari to impose a so-called consensus Presidential candidate. Strong internal contest within the APC ahead of the 2023 general elections rekindled some belief among Nigerians that there is still some hope that APC can be transformed to emerge as a truly progressive party, based on which problems of manipulation of political contests through imposition, vote buying, rigging, etc. can be resolved. Many APC leaders were confident that under the leadership of President Asiwaju Tinubu, the potential transformation of the party into a truly progressive party would be achieved.

About six months since the emergence of President Asiwaju Tinubu, such confidence can hardly be sustained. If anything, what is very clear is that President Asiwaju Tinubu's commitment to the development of the APC as a political party may only be guaranteed to the extent that the party will give him what he wants. It is almost a return to the old PDP model of party organisation under former President Olusegun Obasanjo with the requirement of 100% loyalty. Without any attempt to reopen old wounds, the requirement for 100% loyalty was responsible for the graveyard silence internally within the APC when Dr. Abdullahi Umar Ganduje was proposed by President Asiwaju Tinubu as National Chairman. After Dr.

Ganduje's successful emergence, there is also graveyard silence even when Dr. Ganduje continued with the practice of freezing structures of the party. No meetings of organs are taking place almost four months after the emergence of Dr. Ganduje as the APC National Chairman. Given such ugly reality, it should only be expected that the culture of manipulating political contests

through imposition, vote buying, rigging, etc. would become entrenched in APC. Like the case in PDP in 2007, it may grow to the point whereby almost all APC candidates for 2027 elections may be produced through imposition. Unless we want to lie to ourselves, as things are, culture of manipulating political contests through imposition, vote buying, rigging, etc. in APC has reached the point where PDP was in 2007. Recall that on May 29, 2007, late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua while delivering his inaugural address to the nation, acknowledged that the election that brought him to power had shortcomings and undertook to 'set up a panel to examine the entire electoral process with a view to ensuring that we raise the quality and standard of our general elections, and thereby deepen our democracy.' On August 27, 2007, late President Yar'Adua inaugurated a 22-member Electoral Reform Panel, chaired by Hon. Justice Muhammadu Lawal Uwais GCON. The Panel

submitted its report in December 2008 and regarding the state of political parties, the Panel identified that:

'One of the most crucial and yet least developed democratic institutions in the country is the political party system. There are currently 50 registered political parties in the country, most of which are an assemblage of people who share the same level of determination to use the party platform to get to power. As such, it is usually difficult to identify any party programmes or ideologies. The structure of the political parties is such that internal democracy is virtually absent. The political parties are very weak and unable to effectively carry out political mobilisation, political education and discipline.' Given this reality, the Justice Uwais Panel recommended the establishment of Political Parties Registration and Regulatory Commission to, among others, 'monitor political campaigns and provide rules and regulations which shall govern the political parties.' The logic that ~~informs this recommendation is the need to unbundle INEC to make it efficient based on which two additional commissions were recommended to be created out of INEC. These are Electoral Offences Commission and Constituency Delimitation Commission. Specifically, the Election Offices Commission was envisioned by the Justice Uwais Panel to, among others, perform the function of 'enforcement of the provision of the Electoral Act 2006, the constitutions of registered political parties and any other Acts or enactments.'~~ All the recommendations to unbundle INEC were not considered. Instead, since 2008, successive governments limit their focus to electoral reforms, mainly dealing with strengthening the technical capabilities of INEC to handle operational, logistical as well as developing all the necessary infrastructural requirements for elections. Over the years, at least since 2008, INEC has been strengthened. Unfortunately, political parties in the country have remained what they were as identified by Justice Uwais Panel – 'assemblage of people who share the same level of determination to use the party platform to get to power... difficult to identify any party programmes or ideologies... internal democracy is virtually absent... very weak and unable to effectively carry out political mobilisation, political education and discipline.'

With currently about 91 political parties (as at 2023), the primary focus of all the registered parties is to win elections based on the culture of manipulation of political contests through imposition, vote buying, rigging, etc. It starts at the small level of producing party leaders and grow to become unethical political culture producing winners of every electoral contests. APC with all the

vision of emerging as a progressive political party is being destroyed. Suddenly, APC leaders, sadly, including President Asiwaju Tinubu have assumed the overdrive mode of operating with hardly any strong respect for internal democracy within the APC. Otherwise, what could explain the current happenings in APC whereby none of the party organs is functioning as provided in the APC constitution?

The reality is that, unless political parties are compelled to respect their rules based on which organs of the parties are allowed to function, problems of manipulation of political contests through imposition, vote buying and rigging would continue. Political parties and many other political institutions would continue to be destroyed. Any proposal for electoral reform in the country must therefore include stronger regulatory framework for the operations of political parties in the country. If INEC is not to be unbundled to produce Political Parties Regulatory Commission as proposed by the Justice Uwais panel, then it should be strengthened to regulate the conducts of political parties in the country, include getting parties to respect their own rules.

So long as political parties in Nigeria are allowed to



operate in a lawless manner, the problems of manipulating political contests would continue and the 'challenge ...of unscrambling the nexus connecting technical to politically motivated failures with a view to enhancing the integrity of elections in the country' will continue to elude us as nation. At another level, being loyal APC members, we must also appeal to all APC leaders, especially President Asiwaju Tinubu to resist the temptation of overindulging themselves with the false belief that they could continue to succeed to impose their choices on Nigerians. APC leaders must be humble enough to as much as possible bring themselves down to the levels of ordinary Nigerians and have a more listening ear. Inability to listen and have the needed humility to meet the expectation of Nigerians will strengthen the belief of leaders in unethical practices of manipulating political contests. As our Christian brothers and sisters would say, may this not be our portion in APC. Amen!