

DEMOCRACY IN CAPTIVITY

How Money, Manipulation and Political Imposition Are Suffocating Nigeria's Democratic Future Ahead of 2027

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Nigeria's democratic process is steadily descending into a disturbing era of uncertainty, where political manipulation, electoral intimidation, manufactured consensus arrangements, judicial contradictions, and outrageous monetization of political participation now threaten the very soul of representative governance. What should ordinarily be a transparent democratic pathway for the emergence of credible leadership is gradually becoming an exclusive preserve of the wealthy political elite and entrenched power blocs. The unfolding developments ahead of the 2027 general elections, particularly within the ruling All Progressives Congress, have intensified national anxiety over the credibility of internal party democracy. Across several states, aspirants with strong grassroots appeal have either withdrawn under pressure or been tactically edged out through controversial "consensus" arrangements allegedly orchestrated by influential political interests. In many cases, those who resisted such arrangements openly described the process as a "coronation" rather than a democratic contest.

More troubling is the unbearable commercialization of political ambition in Nigeria. The astronomical costs of nomination forms, ranging from ₦20 million to ₦100 million and beyond, have effectively excluded ordinary Nigerians, young professionals, grassroots mobilizers, women, and financially average citizens from participating in governance. Democracy is no longer being shaped by popularity, competence, integrity, or public trust, but by the intimidating weight of financial capacity. The implication is dangerous: only the rich can aspire, while the poor merely watch from the sidelines as spectators in a democracy that constitutionally belongs to them. The tragedy is even more severe for women. Despite repeated rhetoric about inclusion and gender participation, the prevailing political environment has practically reduced leadership contests to an affair dominated by wealthy men and established political



godfathers. How can genuine democratic inclusion exist when financially disadvantaged but credible women are systematically pushed aside by prohibitive costs and hostile political structures? Such realities fundamentally contradict the principles of fairness, representation, and equal opportunity upon which democracy is built.

Equally alarming is the growing trend where former governors, after spending eight years in executive office, seamlessly migrate into the National Assembly, thereby consolidating political dominance and shrinking opportunities for fresh voices and emerging leaders. The legislature, ideally designed as a sanctuary for diverse representation and independent oversight, is increasingly becoming an extension of executive recycling and political entitlement. This pattern weakens democratic renewal and deepens public frustration with governance.

Electoral violence, delegate intimidation, inflated voting figures, manipulated accreditation systems, and allegations of false counting during primaries have further damaged public confidence in elections. The judiciary, expected to remain the moral guardian of constitutional democracy, is also facing growing accusations of contradictory and politically influenced judgments that often redefine electoral outcomes long after votes have been cast. If these disturbing trends continue unchecked, elections may gradually lose their legitimacy as instruments of popular choice. Democracy cannot survive where money silences merit, where consensus replaces competition, where courts become political battlegrounds, and where the ordinary citizen is financially prohibited from aspiring to lead. Nigeria must urgently rescue its democracy from elite captivity before public faith in the electoral process suffers irreversible collapse.

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