

2027: Make or break

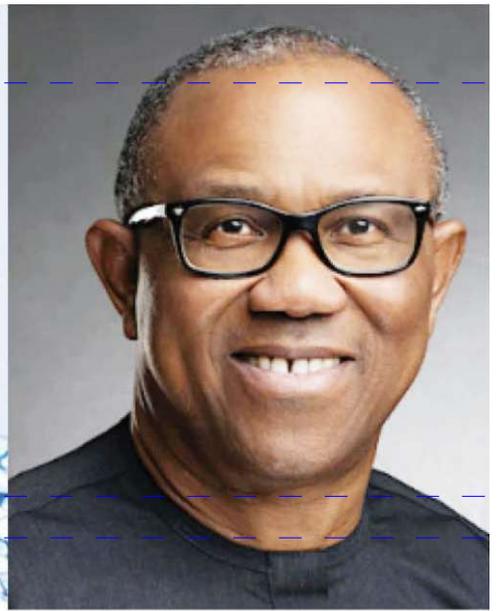
By Hakeem Baba-Ahmed



Tinubu



Atiku



Obi

“A canoe does not know who is the leader. When it turns over, everyone gets wet” African proverb.

It would seem like a whole year to the elections, but that would be the perception of people who look at ordinary calendars. Hardened politicians who know the value of time and the challenges of contesting elections will be thinking of the next few months as being decisive for success or failure. Complacency will be the biggest threat to parties who are serious about contesting for votes. INEC will be getting nervous over electoral processes, particularly improvements in voting and collation facilities. Parties will be taking stock of strengths and weaknesses. Nigerians will be fully mobilized; minds will be more or less made up, until they are not, in the last few days of the hustling. Money will be watched as it grows. Above all, politicians will be stretched as predictions become slippery or daunting, but fairly certain. In spite of appearances, the 2027 election is too far to call. The last three years have been eventful. The last will be decisive. Let's start with build-up and conduct of the elections themselves. Parties will hold primaries and conventions. Except for the APC, deciding candidates will be challenging for all other parties. Even APC will be spared only the disruptive influence of the presidential nomination. President Tinubu will be its candidate, strengthened and fortified by the army of powerful politicians his party had poached from other parties to

boost his chances of a return. The choice of his running mate will cost him valuable support and new supporters from new fault lines. The optics suggest he will not proceed with VP Shettima. This will please non-Muslim voters and the US lobby which appears to have found a strong foothold in Nigeria. Muslim clerics who campaigned for him and rank and file Muslims especially in the North who are not running away from bandits and insurgents will think he has turned his back on them. Between US's rising profile in our internal affairs and Muslim clergy and voters, a large chunk of his support base will be severely squeezed. It could be made up in part by Christian votes in the North and the disposition of South East voters, the latter itself subject to the choice of ADC's flag bearer. APC governors and legislator candidates will find that being in APC is not enough to guarantee return or success. Voters could reject many of them over their records or association with Tinubu's APC. They will have to campaign on many fronts, but first they have to survive bruising fights with a party that may or may not keep its words on automatic tickets for defectors and or the integrity of its loyalty to long serving, ambitious party members. The judiciary will have a field day deciding who will be candidates, eating up precious time to settle fixers, voters and party strongmen. Some

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will leave with their luggage for seemingly greener pastures, but they will find spaces to contest at great cost. APC's candidates will have a tough time explaining the administration's shortcomings in many parts of the country. Victories will cost a lot more than any other election. What is left of the PDP is substantial in terms of the weight of its politicians and infrastructure, but it will need extensive re-make to survive without further damage and put up a fight worth the name. By April this year, many of its heavyweights would have to decide whether there are enough reasons to stay and fight, or migrate to APC to join a long queue as political refugees. Many may also decide to boost the numbers of the ADC, but this will largely depend on how the ADC handles the fallouts of its selection processes. Still, PDP could provide a last ditch location for feckless Nigerian politicians from both ADC and APC. In the event that APC sustains its alienating tactics in many parts of the North, its prospects may dip sufficiently to attract some heavyweights to the PDP and ADC.

ADC sits between bright prospects and a disappointing end. It has little time to successfully address weighty issues that will make the difference between the two. Its biggest challenge is in deciding who gets its presidential ticket. Vice President Atiku will almost certainly win the ticket in open contest. There will be others who nurse the same ambition, and have not been engaged enough to consider options. A tremendous amount of work needs to be done by the most accomplished politician in the party, Atiku, to reduce damage and keep the party together as it confronts its most important challenge: to unseat Tinubu's administration. Its task is intimidating. It will have to successfully battle the demons that keep our democratic journey captive: personal ambition which dwarfs'

considerations of merit or interests of the party or the country; unspeakable quantities of money, mostly from public sources; regional, religious and ethnic elements that make no difference in qualities of governance, and the absence of organic linkages among politicians that can mitigate these limitations in periods of great stress. A handful of people in ADC now hold its destiny in their hands. How they relate, or, more specifically how they resolve personal ambitions in the context of real chances that they can defeat Tinubu will decide whether they lead a strong opposition, or they help lead Tinubu back to the Villa in March, 2027. There is yet another option that is not mentioned in popular discussions, but one that has

good prospects to make a difference in the elections. This is the option of some sort of alliance among other parties to give Nigerians a wider choice. This option suffers from two fundamental ailments in Nigerian politics: lack of huge amounts of money and credible politicians to trigger a popular change and anchor it to success. Yet this is precisely what the country needs at this stage: committed, honest politicians who seek to provide alternatives to leadership by politicians who have brought this country to its knees and still want support to do more. Smaller parties may trigger a major shift if they collaborate to provide a platform to get the power to give the poor respite from crushing poverty, insecurity and alienation from bad. If these parties plan to do more than go through another election as spectators, they should realize how little time they have left. The 2027 elections could quite possibly be the most important election in the life of this country so far. Tinubu insists that his economic reforms are profound in their impacts in the long run, but they leave too many of the desperately poor at the mercy of all the negative effects of change. The focus on challenging economic reforms in the context of widening insecurity robs his administration of popular support that even N20,000 per vote on election day may not redeem. Yet he and his party will not even contemplate a loss, such is the weight of their haul of office holders and frightening war chest. His opposition is fractured and fragmented, with politicians behaving in a manner which suggests that they believe there will be a free and fair election, APC will be rejected with the most minimum of efforts, and they will be the leaders the country has always wanted. There is a battle to be won and lost, but the warriors do not appear keen to fight.