

The Stolen Crown and the Raw Impunity of 'Go to Court

By Josef Omorotionmwan

In Nigeria, every major election is rigged, big time! That also explains why every election year has become a year of war, a big war! It's simply a survival of the fittest in which the major political parties end up rigging themselves into big trouble and these things must keep happening so that the big political parties can have their fun. What a bunch of sadists who benefit only from confusion! Before the NPN could settle down to take the euphoria of their 1983 war victory, post-war hostilities had broken out in major parts of the country, particularly in the Wild-Wild West. These hostilities finally consumed the entire country, culminating in the intervention of the military by the end of that year.

Ten years later, we had the MKO Abiola debacle in which the freest and fairest election ever held in this country was annulled and many notable Nigerians, including the very protagonist of their struggle, MKO Abiola, perished. Every election cycle has succeeded in bringing us to the ruins of war.

For too long, we saw the 2023 hostilities coming. They are now here with us. There are no escape routes for anyone. We asked for an Electoral Act and we got one. Our ELECTORAL ACT, 2022 has been adjudged worldwide as the best for our situation. Rigging has all along been the bane of our elections. Among other things, the Act makes it mandatory for election results to be transmitted electronically direct from the polling booths and uploaded into the BIVAs in which case, the changing of results at the Collating Centres, usually associated with manual transmission would be avoided. This electronic transmission was to be done in real-time – immediately after votes are counted and publicly announced at each of the over 176,000 polling centres throughout the federation. We smelt a rat at that time when what was thought to be a permanent cure to the ills of our elections was stiffly opposed by the Ruling Party, the APC. So stiff was the fight here that some Members of the National Assembly even exchanged blows during the heated debates that took place on the floor.

Finally, however, the Bill was passed and President Muhammadu Buhari quickly gave his assent to it. The President paraded the ELECTORAL ACT, 2022 to the United Nations and the International Community as a sign that he was going to bequeath to Nigeria, a legacy of a free, fair and credible electoral system at the end of his tenure. Managers of our electoral system at the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, stood tall and assured Nigerians and the entire world that the era of free, fair and credible elections had finally arrived in Nigeria! We believed them.

From the paragraphs that follow, all the crimes and atrocities committed by the APC Pursuant to the enforcement of the Electoral Act, 2022, were simply pre-meditated. At no time did they believe that the laudable innovations in the new Electoral Act – were meant for enforcement. On what would easily pass for a test-run on the ELECTORAL ACT, 2022, and all the lofty promises and assurances flowing therefrom, Nigerians trooped out in their millions, like never before for the 2023 Presidential and National Assembly Elections on February 25, 2023. The youths in particular, a bulk of whom were voting for the very first time, had been assured that their votes would count.

Alas, their gallant gamble ended in the dust! What was expected to be the best election ever soon turned out to be the worst in the history of elections in Nigeria. In active connivance with the electoral umpires, the Ruling Party had walked the entire voting process on its head. They had jettisoned the much-talked-about transmission of results by electronic means and resorted to the manual transmission of results. Most results had allegedly been manipulated and altered. And they had resorted to the allocation of votes to themselves and other candidates in the opposition parties. At the National Collation Centre, Agents of the Opposition Political Parties pointed out the foregoing anomalies and informed the INEC Chairman who also doubles as Returning Officer for the Presidential Election, Professor Mahmood Yakubu, but he insisted that the collation must continue so that the necessary review provided for can be done after the Completion of Collation. At this point, the Agents of the major opposition walked out on the Chairman. Prof. continued his collation post-haste, and in the wee hours of Wednesday, February 29, under the candlelight, he announced Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the APC Candidate, winner of the Presidential Election. A few hours later, Tinubu was given the Certificate of Return. With raw impunity, the APC is asking the other Parties to "go to court". The APC today has in its hands, a victory that it is unable to celebrate. In spite of all the rigging, the Labour Party had constructively denied the APC of the celebration venues. That's what happened when the Labour Party swept the APC off its feet in all the possible celebration venues. Before we were fairly aware of what was happening, the entire Lagos State had been swept clean by the Labour Party. Nasarawa, the home state, of the National Chairman of the APC had similarly fallen to the Labour Party. Both Daura, the home of the President, and Aso Rock had been swept clean.

Who is afraid of going to court? Certainly not the LP and the PDP who have been beneficiaries of the Judiciary at various times. LP and PDP are already in Court to challenge the process through which Tinubu has been declared President-elect. Admittedly, the INEC may have since become a graveyard of reputations. The same cannot be said of the Judiciary in Nigeria. While Prof. Atahiru Jega remains the only one standing on honour on the INEC side, they are still standing clean in the Judiciary. In the face of the preponderance of the evidence, who says the Judiciary may not finally use this case to fix a few dents brought upon it by some unscrupulous elements that have passed its corridors? Yes, the King's Crown is stolen. But we are yet to see where the thief will wear that crown. Nigeria has happened to Buhari. In a single swoop, he may have squandered all the goodwill he acquired all these years. He presided over an Election Rigging Ring; and was soon consumed by it. At the very peak of it all, he attained the computer height of COPY AND PASTE. In his very backyard, a 2019 result resurfaced in the same polling booth in 2023. Two states in the same region are sitting elegantly on Mahmood Yakubu's return with exactly the same scores! The final icing on the cake came on the presidential election day when our Executive President displayed his vote for the entire world to see. True, even in lawbreaking – There is a President. We're all in this together. The same sun must beat the tortoise and its seller!

Hon. Omorotionmwan writes from Canada