

The Dangers of One-Party State

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The plurality of the entity known as the Federal Republic of Nigeria has never been in doubt, given the history of its founding and composition. A multi-ethnic, heterogeneous and multi-religious federation cannot be ruled through a monolithic political structure. The way and manner of the practice of politics since 1999 leaves no one in doubt that it is not about service to the people but rather self-interest for the political elite. A careful analysis of the manifestoes of the political parties reflects crass neglect of any ideology to drive the process, resulting in the rush to join any government in power, followed with the gale of defections that we have witnessed over the years. This has become more pronounced since 2023 under the present dispensation. In a country that boasts of 36 States, one political party has captured thirty-two and it is still counting, the real aim being to impose a unitary political structure. A forceful political dominance to create monopoly will not augur well for Nigeria, especially when it is not executed in the overall interest of the people. The contrived defections are all orchestrated towards perpetuating a political dynasty for the benefit of only a handful of loyalists, associates and supporters of those in power. In March 2026 alone, a major shift saw governors and lawmakers leave their parties for greener pastures in another political vehicle. Nigeria, as a democratic republic, should operate under a multi-party system in which political power is shared among a variety of political parties. This will ensure checks and balances, promote a pluralistic approach to governance, and prevent the concentration of power in the hands of a single entity.

However, there has been growing concern that the country could and is indeed drifting toward a one-party state, either de facto or de jure, where only one political party dominates, limiting political competition, civil liberties, and the democratic process. The dangers of such a shift for Nigeria's political and legal environment cannot be overemphasized. One of the most immediate and glaring dangers of a one-party state in Nigeria is the erosion of the core principles of democracy. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, in sections 40 and 42, guarantees the right to freedom of association and the

right to form and join political parties. These rights provide the foundation for the multiparty system, which ensures that no single party can dominate the political landscape unchecked. In a one-party state such as is being foisted by the ruling All Progressives Congress, these rights would be undermined as opposition parties would be either marginalized or completely outlawed. In the present dispensation, democratic process has lost its vibrancy, as citizens have no meaningful choice but to support the ruling party. Without political competition, free and fair elections lose their significance, and the country's electoral process would become a mere formality rather than a genuine contest of ideas and leadership.



One Party System

In the absence of fair competition, mediocrity will be entrenched. The existence of multiple parties no doubt prevents the concentration of power in a single group. However, a one-party system opens the door for the consolidation of power by a single political entity. This results in an authoritarian regime, where the ruling party controls all aspects of governance, including the executive, legislature, and judiciary. In a one-party state, there is often a lack of accountability. Since the

ruling party holds absolute power, there would be little to no pressure to ensure that the government acts in the best interest of the citizens. The checks and balances that normally exist between branches of government would weaken, and the separation of powers enshrined in the Nigerian constitution could become meaningless. People begin to pander to the so-called body language of the man in power, as there is mortal fear hovering over everyone under the authority. The concentration of power may also lead to widespread corruption as political leaders feel immune from scrutiny and oversight. When one party dominates, the lack of political competition incentivizes leaders to exploit their positions for personal gain rather than focus on public welfare. They become unquestionable, resort to arbitrariness and favoritism, as weapons to deploy to weaken the opposition. It is difficult in the current circumstances of Nigeria to determine the motive of luring or compelling everyone to join the APC, beyond the lust for power. In a functioning democracy, the

existence of a vibrant opposition is vital for holding the government accountable. However, a one-party state often results in the suppression or banning of opposition parties and the curtailment of civil liberties, including freedom of speech and freedom of the press. In such a system, political dissent is frequently seen as a threat, and opposition members are often harassed, arrested, or even killed.

Political opponents are silenced, and the media is restricted or co-opted to reflect the ruling party's interests. There are too many instances to recall in present-day Nigeria. These actions violate fundamental human rights, and individuals or groups who challenge the government's decisions may face persecution or imprisonment. The chilling effect on civil society stifles healthy debate and the exchange of ideas, which are essential for the growth and development of the country. Furthermore, the absence of political opposition prevents the electorate from engaging in informed discussions about national policies and holding elected officials accountable. Everything is to be seen from the perspective of the ruling party only, which is extremely dangerous and ominous. A one-party state can also hinder the country's social and economic progress. A diverse range of political perspectives is critical for addressing Nigeria's complex challenges, such as poverty, unemployment, and security. When only one party has control, policy decisions are often made in a vacuum, without taking into account the views or interests of marginalized groups or sectors of society. The failure to accommodate opposing viewpoints may result in policies that lack depth, inclusivity, or foresight, as with the power sector that has defied any solution from the present administration. Moreover, the absence of competition can lead to policy stagnation—where the government, feeling no pressure to innovate or adapt, fails to address evolving issues effectively. In the absence of meaningful opposition, the ruling party may prioritize its own political survival over the well-being of the country's citizens. In this regard, the anti-corruption mantra is seen as a means of coercing the opposition. Additionally, economic reforms that are critical to addressing the country's vast developmental challenges may be delayed or mismanaged, as there would be little external scrutiny or ideas to guide them. The fuel subsidy removal and the floatation of the Naira are clear examples. Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, and its political system, ideally, reflects this diversity.

The existence of a variety of political parties allows for the representation of different ethnic, religious, and regional interests. In a one-party state as we currently have however, the ruling party may only prioritize the interests of the ethnic or regional group to which it belongs, leading to the marginalization of other groups, as seen in the various appointments so far made by the President. This exclusion can exacerbate tensions

between Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups, fostering resentment, alienation, and potentially violence. The political system, under such a regime, might become increasingly polarized, with citizens from excluded groups feeling disconnected from the state and its institutions. This fragmentation of society can undermine the national unity that Nigeria desperately needs. This should be non-negotiable. A shift towards a one-party state could also harm Nigeria's standing on the international stage. Many international organizations, such as the United Nations and the African Union, emphasize the importance of democratic governance, human rights, and political freedoms. A country that moves toward autocracy and limits political pluralism risks facing sanctions, diplomatic isolation, and a reduction in foreign investments. It is bad enough that many of the ambassadors that were recently appointed by the President have been rejected. Furthermore, Nigeria's regional leadership within Africa, especially in issues of democracy and governance, would be undermined. The country has long played a key role in supporting democratic movements across the continent, but a slide into authoritarianism would diminish its credibility and moral authority in promoting democratic ideals elsewhere.

Finally, the legal consequences of establishing a one-party state in Nigeria would be severe. As mentioned earlier, Nigeria's Constitution enshrines the rights of individuals to form political parties and participate in the democratic process. A move toward a one-party state for the APC would likely require amending or violating the Constitution, which could undermine the rule of law. Such actions could be challenged in court by civil society organizations, political parties, and citizens, leading to a constitutional crisis. The courts might find themselves under immense pressure to conform to the will of the ruling party, thereby compromising judicial independence and the principle of justice for all. In conclusion, the dangers of a one-party state in Nigeria are far-reaching and would significantly undermine the country's democratic fabric, legal rights, social cohesion, and economic progress. Nigeria's constitutional framework and democratic structures are designed to protect the pluralism, competition, and checks and balances that are essential for healthy governance. Moving toward a one-party system would undermine these principles and endanger the political stability, freedom, and development of the nation. It is critical for the people of Nigeria, political leaders, and civil society to remain vigilant and committed to upholding the principles of democracy, freedom of association, and the protection of human rights. A strong, multiparty system is the bedrock of Nigeria's future prosperity and political stability.