

The Quality Of Political Communication And Nigeria's Democracy

A Perspective On The 2027 Presidential Election

By Otono Momodu

This serene Saturday morning stirred every hearth across the eighteen local governments of Edo State. Men and women, young and old, stepped out with quiet purpose toward their designated voting booths, to lay a thumb upon the name of their chosen steward for the local government election. It is, in truth, a sacred ritual — a coronation of the people's will, where the law grants but one sovereign right: to choose, by choice, and for choice. Today's exercise across Edo is more than a vote. It is, ideally, a renewal — a chance to rekindle the promise of grassroots governance, to demand dividends that touch the soil, and to hold to account those who will emerge from the ballot, bearing the people's mandate.

It was Pippa Norris who, in the year 2000, pronounced a truth that still echoes: the quality of political communication determines the quality of democracy. Democracy, she reminded us, does not live on ballots alone. It breathes in the ceaseless exchange of ideas, in the candor of debate, in the dialogue between those who seek power, those who report it, and those who grant it. When that communication is honest, inclusive, and anchored in issues, democracy grows responsive, transparent, and worthy of trust. When it is poisoned by falsehood, propaganda, acrimony, and silence, democracy withers — no matter how often we go to the polls.

As our nation turns its gaze toward the President-General election of 2027, Norris' words take on the weight of prophecy. Nigeria is a tapestry of tongues and faiths, a nation brimming with youth and now, with screens in every palm. Our elections are no longer mere contests of men and women. They are contests of stories, of narratives that seek to capture the imagination of a people. How political parties speak, how institutions inform, how the media frames, and how citizens respond between now and February 2027 will decide not only who ascends, but whether the nation will believe, and whether the government that follows will stand on solid ground.

Consider information. A democracy of dignity demands that citizens walk into the voting booth armed with truth — with clear, verifiable, policy-driven knowledge. Yet too often in Nigeria, our political speech has preferred the drum of identity to the lantern of ideas. Campaigns swell with slogans, with the arithmetic of zones, with appeals to faith and personality, while the hard questions of insecurity, hunger, power, learning, and livelihood are left in shadow. As 2027 draws near, if the APC, PDP, Labour Party and others choose to present manifestos that can be measured, and to stand in debates that probe the "how" behind every promise, then the voter will be sovereign indeed. But if our public space is flooded with manipulated images, counterfeit endorsements, and appeals to fear, then sentiment will rule, and the democratic spirit will be diminished.

Then there is inclusion. The voice of democracy must not be confined to the corridors of Abuja or the billboards of Lagos. It must reach the farmer in his field, the student in her hostel, the trader in the market, in the languages that cradle their thoughts — Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Pidgin — and through the mediums that hold their attention — radio waves, WhatsApp forwards, TikTok reels. With more than 60 percent of our



PROF. JOASH AMUPITAN (SAN)
CHAIRMAN
INDEPENDENT NATIONAL ELECTORAL COMMISSION (INEC)

electorate under 35, the 2027 election will test whether political actors can speak across generations and geographies. INEC too must lend its voice, with voter education that is timely, clear, and accessible, so that misinformation finds no soil and apathy finds no excuse.

Accountability forms the third pillar. Political communication should be a bridge, not a wall — a conversation where leaders explain, and citizens question. In Nigeria, that bridge has often been fragile. Debates are avoided. Criticism is dismissed. Yet as 2027 approaches, the press and the new digital voices bear a solemn duty: to move beyond noise, to fact-check, to interrogate records, to ask about debt and subsidy, about security and service. When journalism holds power to account, communication becomes democracy's conscience. When it becomes a megaphone for partisanship, it becomes its undoing.

And finally, deliberation — the very heart of the matter. Democracy flourishes where ideas are exchanged, not where insults are hurled. The 2023 elections revealed both our promise and our peril: social media awakened millions, yet it also became a theatre for ethnic barbs, religious suspicion, and manufactured truths. The road to 2027 must be different. If our conversations center on problems and solutions, then the election will be about governance. If they descend into "us versus them," then division will be the victor, and whoever wins will inherit a fractured mandate.

The burden rests most heavily on political parties. They are the chief architects of our political discourse. In Nigeria, the lines between them are often blurred by ideology, so communication drifts toward the cult of personality rather than the clarity of platform. For 2027 to mark progress, parties must turn from mobilizing by tribe and creed to persuading by performance and principle. That will require discipline, consistency, and the courage to debate in the open.

In the end, Norris was right. The health of our democracy will mirror the health of our conversation. The 2027 President-General election will not be decided only on the day we vote. It will be decided in the quiet arguments at motor parks, in the posts we share, in the town halls we attend, in the interviews we demand, and in the memes we laugh at or reject. If that conversation is truthful, respectful, and focused on the common good, Nigeria's democracy will be strengthened. If it is bitter, divisive, and deceitful, then even peace at the polls will not save us from governance without trust.

The ballot box is important. But the words we choose before we reach it are more so. As Nigeria prepares for 2027, the choice before us is stark: to speak in a way that builds, or to speak in a way that breaks. Let us therefore go, with our PVC in hand, to vote the dictates of our conscience — whether our chosen one triumphs or bows to the will of the majority. May the will of the greater majority be done through the ballot box and not through the sound of violence.