



The Black Box of Nigeria's Politics

A State of the Nation Address by
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Introduction

Fellow citizens of Nigeria at home and in the diaspora, let me begin by wishing you all a Happy 61st Independence Anniversary once again. More than six decades ago, as our nation's founding fathers walked the long road to independence, they were under no illusions about the challenges of forging a nation from one of the most diverse groups of people on earth. Even as they took great strides in negotiating the terms of our nationhood, they recognized that independence was only the beginning of the difficult, but not impossible, task of nation-building. They understood that, as momentous as the attainment of independence was for Nigeria, the fight for freedom was not yet won until every Nigerian citizen could stake a claim to the Nigerian nation.

At the 1958 Lancaster House Conference, for instance, Chief Obafemi Awolowo said to the assembly of Nigerian and British representatives:

“Independence for Nigeria in 1960 is imperative, but independence for Nigeria as a corporate entity is not enough. The peoples of Nigeria must at the same time be guaranteed their freedom. We must ensure that, in an independent Nigeria, individual citizens throughout the land enjoy liberty, human dignity, and equality under the law. There must be one Nigeria, with one constitution, and one law for all.”¹

On October 1, 1960, Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa, while delivering his Independence Day address, described himself, not by the magnificence of the high office he occupied as the prime minister of the most populous black nation in the world, but as a citizen. By so doing, he identified with the Nigerian people he had been elected to serve. In his speech, the prime minister stated:

“Words cannot adequately express my joy and pride at being the Nigerian citizen privileged to accept from Her Royal Highness these Constitutional Instruments which are the symbols of Nigeria’s Independence. It is a unique privilege which I shall remember forever, and it gives me strength and courage as I dedicate my life to the service of our country.”²

On November 16, 1960, in his inaugural address as Nigeria’s first indigenous Governor-General, Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe warned the newly independent nation of the dangers of elevating power above

institutions and the rule of law. In his legendary address titled “Respect for the Dignity of Man,” the great Zik said:

“Without respect for the rule of law permeating our political fabric, Nigeria would degenerate into a dictatorship with its twin relatives of tyranny and despotism. I hold that the arbitrary exercise of power without the restraining influence of the rule of law must be condemned as a fundamental departure from constitutional government. Any justification of such untrammelled exercise of political power is, to me, an outrage on human conscience and a gross violation of human rights.”³

In recognition of this right to individual freedoms under the rule of law, irrespective of the diversity of persuasions, the Premier of Northern Nigeria, the Sardauna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello, said to the peoples of Northern Nigeria in a unifying message:

“Subject to the overriding need to preserve law and order, it is our determination that everyone should have absolute liberty to practice his belief according to the dictates of his conscience.”⁴

Admittedly, these founding patriots were far from perfect. Their human fallibilities were evident in some of their actions and inactions. Nevertheless, their legacies of selfless service to their people have not been matched by subsequent generations of Nigerian leaders. Having

played their roles in the making of the Nigerian nation, with some tragically losing their lives in the process, our founding patriots bequeathed Nigeria to Nigerians in the hope that each generation would build, in a manner of speaking, “a more perfect union.”⁵

Nigeria on Trial: A Great Cloud of Witnesses

Fellow citizens of Nigeria, lend me your imaginations. Imagine for a moment that the Court of Heaven is seated to hear a historic case on Nigeria and the Presiding Judge is none other than the Almighty Himself. Imagine that this court is presented with reports on the current state of the nation and our founding fathers are called upon one after the other as expert witnesses to audit the nation we have built on the foundation of their labours. What would their testimonies be regarding Nigeria of today?

What would Sir Ahmadu Bello, who was a passionate educationist and an advocate of girl-child education,⁶ say of a Northern Nigeria where over 1,000 students, boys and girls inclusive, have been kidnapped from their schools in six northern states since December 2020?⁷ What would the Sardauna say to the report that young people in Northern Nigeria are turning to armed banditry as a vocation, with around 30,000 armed bandits spread over 100 camps across the North and raining down terror on fellow citizens?⁸ What would the late premier say to the fact that nearly 350,000 people⁹ in the North-East, including 300,000 children,¹⁰ have been killed in 12 years by the Boko Haram terrorist group, while “there are currently 1.9 million

people displaced from their homes...[of which] sixty percent...are children”?¹¹ What would his response be to the evidence that, despite the efforts of our gallant soldiers and the news of insurgents surrendering to the Nigerian troops,¹² the terrorists are winning hearts and minds¹³ and are recruiting massively¹⁴ among despondent villagers who have lost confidence in the Nigerian state? Would the witness be in contempt of court if he lost his dignified composure seeing that his dream for Northern Nigeria has become a nightmare? Or would he wonder if there is no government in power to checkmate the evils presently plaguing the country?

As you reflect on this solemn image, picture also the Owelle of Onitsha, Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, in the witness box of this historic court poring over recent records on Nigeria. What would he say to the report that, every Monday, the South-East, including his beloved Onitsha,¹⁵ shuts down as people comply with the sit-at-home order of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)? What would this founding father say to the report that, on Independence Day 2021, in compliance with threats from IPOB, the people of the South-East could not freely salute the Nigerian flag?¹⁶ What would he say to reports of brutal attacks on hard and soft targets by the Eastern Security Network (ESN)¹⁷ even as the Nigerian state continues to clamp down ruthlessly on the group?¹⁸ What would the response of the great nationalist be to indications that, almost six decades after the Nigerian Civil War, memories of the war continue to echo, not just in people’s life experiences, but also in distressing utterances by

political leaders,¹⁹ while genuine national reconciliation remains a mirage? Would this national icon be in error if he felt for a moment that his lifetime labour to build a Nigerian nation may have been in vain?

As you keep that in mind, think of Chief Obafemi Awolowo in the witness box as an expert witness, assessing the happenings in the states of the South-West, the legacy zone of the former Western Region. What would he say to reports that the people of the South-West, just like those in the Middle Belt, the South-South and the South-East, have become vulnerable to criminals and marauding gunmen who kidnap, kill, maim, rape and pillage communities? What would the late sage say to the report that, not only has the Nigerian state been unable to protect the vulnerable, but also that the subnational governance structures have largely been helpless as non-state actors attempt to destabilize the region? What would he say to the report that some Nigerians of Yoruba descent, who are frustrated at the state of the nation, have teamed up with other aggrieved Nigerians to mobilize for a referendum on secession from the Nigerian state, even taking their grievances in protests before the community of nations at the United Nations General Assembly?²⁰ Would the sagacity of the sage diminish in significance if he broke down in lamentation over the region and nation that he laboured tirelessly over in his lifetime?

The Verdict on our Stewardship

Fellow Nigerians, a critical point of national reflection in this season of our 61st Independence Anniversary is the quality of our stewardship of the nation that we inherited from our founding patriots. What does it say about our stewardship when, more than sixty years after the discovery of oil in Nigeria, at a time that the world is moving on from oil and embracing renewable energy, we are still bickering over what paltry percentage should be allocated from oil revenue to oil-bearing host communities?²¹ What is our progress scorecard when, in the era of the fourth industrial revolution, our policy debates are still around reopening cattle grazing routes²² and sustaining an archaic practice that has claimed numerous lives and left many homeless across the nation? What lessons have we learnt when, over sixty years after our founding fathers almost sacrificed the prospects of nationhood on the altar of sectional politics, we are still caught up in squabbles over which part of Nigeria the next president will come from?

Indeed, we forget that in our national history, there has been no correlation between the number of years a region has produced a president or head of state and the level of development of that region or geopolitical zone. If there were any correlation between the part of the country that produces the president and the level of development of that region, the North would be the most developed region in Nigeria today, having produced heads of state and presidents for over 40 out of 61 years since independence.²³ Instead, despite the historical dominance of the North in the governance of this nation, data from

the World Bank indicates that, as of 2016, the North accounted for 87% of the poverty in Nigeria.²⁴ Furthermore, based on a report by the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR), the facts indicate that the North has dominated key appointments in the six years of the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari.²⁵ Despite this preponderance of appointments from the North, data from the Nigeria Living Standards Survey shows that the North has continued to dominate the poverty headcount in Nigeria even during the Buhari administration.²⁶

If there were any correlation between where a president comes from and the level of development of his region, the administration of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan would have resolved the restructuring, resource management and environmental degradation-related crises of the Niger Delta, as well as the developmental aspirations of the South-East. If there were any correlation between where a president comes from and the development of his region, the administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo would not have resulted in the marginalization of the South-West or the freezing of the allocations of Lagos State.

While inclusiveness is integral to achieving national integration, we have merely majored in minors in our approach to political inclusion. The problem with Nigeria is not that some ethnic groups have not produced a president; the problem with Nigeria is that we have failed to heed the admonitions of our founding fathers, the likes of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, who challenged us in his Lancaster House

address to move beyond the independence of the country to freedom for the peoples and citizens of Nigeria. The result of this failure on our part as a nation is a governance structure that has kept the diverse peoples of Nigeria excessively dependent on the central government. Can you imagine for a moment what the verdict of our founding fathers would be before the court of heaven today? I have no doubt that they, with pinpoint accuracy, would declare before God that the succeeding generations of leaders have unwittingly removed and replaced the ancient landmark they unanimously set, thus acting in gross violation of the very basis of our union, and, worse still, in flagrant disregard for the word of God. The Bible states expressly in **Proverbs 22:28** (NKJV)¹:

Do not remove the ancient landmark which your fathers have set.

As if Moses the lawgiver and deliverer had Nigeria's amalgamation in 1914 in mind, he also declared in **Deuteronomy 19:14**:

“You shall not remove your neighbor's landmark, which the men of old have set, in your inheritance which you will inherit in the land that the Lord your God is giving you to possess.”

This law was subsequently inscribed on stones along with the attendant consequences of the violation thereof in **Deuteronomy 27:17**:

¹All scriptural references are from the New King James Version (NKJV) of The Holy Bible, unless otherwise stated.

“Cursed is the one who moves his neighbor’s landmark.”

If only the people insisting that the 1999 Constitution (as amended) should remain the Grundnorm for Nigeria were aware of the consequences of the curse they are attracting to themselves and their descendants after them, they would all repent and be at the forefront of the campaign for constitutional re-engineering and reset. Alas, they are none the wiser. This is a great pity, and if they remain hellbent on a destructive path, here is the word of God to the arrogant princes of Judah who did likewise in the past: “The princes of Judah are like those who remove a landmark; I will pour out My wrath on them like water” (**Hosea 5:10**). The 1999 Constitution (as amended) was imposed upon the nation by the military and has completely removed the ancient landmark set by our founding fathers in the 1960 Independence Constitution and the subsequent 1963 Republican Constitution respectively. THIS IS WHERE THE RAIN STARTED BEATING US AFRESH AS A NATION!

For every contractual agreement, the parties are required to sign a document validating the terms and conditions in the reckoning of the Law. In the case of Nigeria, our founding fathers, in effect, signed a contract in 1960 detailing the terms and conditions of our union or unity following a series of negotiations. This contract was then updated in 1963 following due consultations. While the 1999 Constitution (as amended) opens with the preamble “We the people,”²⁷ We, the People of Nigeria, were neither duly consulted, nor did we accept the conditions under which we are now being

governed! How, then, can anyone hypocritically insist that “our unity is non-negotiable?” Did we not negotiate it in 1960 and 1963?

Truth be told, the majority of the champions, promoters and supporters of the “our unity is non-negotiable” slogan pay lip service to a version of unity that serves their selfish interests. What they are insisting on, in reality, is that “our disunity is non-negotiable,” and that we must be forced to live together irrespective of the inherent dysfunctionality of the terms and conditions. The continued insistence on altering the set rules in the midst of our spirited game of national development, and the subsequent imposition of a draconian and lopsided concoction of a constitution in 1999, is the most inhibiting, corrosive spanner thrown into the wheel of our national unity and faith, peace and progress, from that time until now. I am fully persuaded, as are many fellow compatriots within and outside the shores of Nigeria, that the 1999 Constitution, whether as amended, or to be further amended by the National Assembly, is nothing more than a glorified death certificate.

At this juncture, let us borrow a leaf from recent world history. Once upon a time, the Berlin walls separated Eastern Germany from Western Germany until President Ronald Reagan in his indomitable manner spoke lucidly on live television to the president of the then Soviet Union. He said, “Mr Gorbachev, tear down this wall!”²⁸ Mr Gorbachev eventually did, and Germany is better off for it today.

In the same spirit, I say to President Muhammadu Buhari: Mr President, stop passing the buck to the National Assembly. Tear down this inhibiting concoction of a constitution; tear it down so we can build a truly great nation! This is one enduring legacy your administration can still secure before your time in power draws to a close. If you do, present and unborn generations of Nigerians will remember you for it and write your name in gold when the history of this period is written. If you don't, history will record that you failed to rise to the occasion and squandered a great opportunity.

Fellow citizens, what we need is a geo-political structure that will provide an enabling environment for every zone in our nation to maximize its geo-economic opportunities and potentials under a strong and united Nigeria. This can be achieved by a pragmatic approach to restructuring Nigeria, rather than by mere zoning of the presidency.

Please note that those clamouring and waiting for genuine change to happen through the upcoming 2023 presidential election, without first insisting that our imposed sham of a constitution must be torn and discarded, are merely putting the cart before the horse. This is nothing but a prescription for retrogression. No tangible progress can ever be made by such an exercise in futility. It would be tantamount to building a superstructure on a faulty or shaky foundation.

As patriots, we have presented to the current government pragmatic pathways to such a geo-economic, geo-social and geo-political

restructuring of Nigeria. However, given the lack of political will on the part of the government, the time has come for Nigerian citizens to make informed and compelling demands on the political system. The purpose of this address is to equip the citizens with the tools to do this.

The Power of the Nigerian Citizen

Fellow Nigerians, throughout our history, from the fight for local representation in the colonial administration, to the fight for the independence of Nigeria, every time there was progress on the path to nation-building, it was because the people realized that “the power of the people is greater than the people in power.”²⁹ As nation builders, this realization of the power of the citizen was what informed our confrontational stance against military dictatorship. It was what informed every intervention in governance that we have either pioneered or supported since the return to civil rule. It was what birthed the Save Nigeria Group (SNG) amidst the turbulence of a power hijack over eleven years ago. It is what is about to awaken a new wave of intelligent engagement in the polity as we reclaim Nigeria for Nigerians and as we go to the nations to rally Nigerians for Nigeria.

However, an active citizenry must be empowered with knowledge and understanding because you cannot engage a system whose intricacies you do not understand. I do not doubt that Nigerians are well-versed in political matters; this much is evident from conversations in beer

parlours, barbershops and salons; in markets, offices, churches, and mosques; on the streets, among the so-called “Free Readers’ Association” by newspaper stands, in countless WhatsApp groups and, of course, on social media. However, not many Nigerians understand the intricacies of the political system and how it affects their lives and livelihoods.

It is why, in this address, I seek to unveil to the Nigerian citizen the intricate world of politics, so that every Nigerian will have a basic understanding of the system that we are confronted with. Fellow Nigerians, please journey with me as we thoroughly examine “The Black Box of Nigeria’s Politics.”

The Black Box of Nigeria’s Politics

This segment of my address was inspired by a presentation I made to the National Association of Political Science Students (NAPSS, UNILAG Chapter) on August 6, 2021. I am extending it to the generality of the Nigerian citizenry because I am convinced that our progress as citizens is dependent on the extent to which we can decode the complexities of our political system.

The notion of the black box of politics emerges from the idea that the inner workings of the political system are opaque to the citizens. As citizens, we experience the impact of governance, whether good or bad. We know when government officials are working for the common good and we can even opt to reward them by re-electing them. We can also assess the impact of bad governance.

As a business owner, for instance, you feel the pain when your business fails due to inadequate access to infrastructure such as electricity; you also feel the drain on your savings when the dollar to naira ratio hits the roof. As a petty trader, you understand what it means to be unable to make enough sales in a day to put food on the table for your household. As a student, you know what it means to spend six to eight years studying for a four-year course in an unsuitable learning environment characterized by incessant strikes and school closures amidst poor funding for education. As a young unemployed graduate, you understand what it means to be without a decent job or to be unable to access credit to finance a viable business idea. As a social media enthusiast for whom Twitter is a reliable platform for engagement, you know what it means to be unable to engage on Twitter due to the protracted ban on the platform by the federal government. You also understand what it means to be brutalized by poorly paid law enforcement agents. Sometimes, we even react by protesting against the actions of the government when situations become unbearable, as did some of our young people during the #EndSARS protests around a year ago. These unfortunate experiences are all-too-familiar to most Nigerians.

What we may not understand, however, is the behind-the-scenes political intrigues that create and sustain these situations. These intrigues and trade-offs that take place behind the scenes within the political system are what we term “The Black Box of Nigeria’s Politics.” I refer to it as a black box because, unless you “shine your

eye,” the more you look, the less you see. My job in this address is to remove the veil. To do this, permit me to introduce to you what I have termed the five (5) concentric circles of Nigeria’s politics.

The Concentric Circles of Nigeria’s Politics

1. The Periphery of Power

At the periphery of politics in Nigeria today is the electorate. The last voters’ register released by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) ahead of the 2019 elections gives us a breakdown of the Nigerian electorate across occupations. The list includes 22.3 million students, 13.6 million farmers and fishers, 11.8 million housewives, 10.8 million business people, 7.6 million traders, 5 million civil servants, 4.5 million artisans, and 6 million others.³⁰

The public servants and officeholders who wield political power are in the minority (just over 2 million people)³¹ when compared with the rest of us as a collective bloc. What this means is that if we, the citizens of this nation, agree on a united position to salvage our nation from those who oppress us, then we can change this country and reclaim Nigeria for Nigerians. However, to understand why we have been unable to do this over the years, let us now take a look at the next concentric circle.

2. The Gate of Power

Despite the size of the Nigerian electorate, summing up to more than 84 million people, elections in Nigeria are decided, not just by

numbers, but by power blocs and gatekeepers whose individual and combined influence have often surpassed the voice of the electorate. These power blocs constitute the elite who stepped into the shoes of the colonialists after independence. Like the colonialists, these power blocs have mastered the art of divide and rule and have kept citizens disunited along ethnic, political and religious lines.

These twelve (12) power blocs include: (1) the political parties without which an individual cannot contest elections in Nigeria; (2) the council of state which I will refer to in more detail subsequently; (3) the Nigeria Governors' Forum whose opinions are influential on major political issues, including where the next president could come from; (4) the retired generals who have retained enormous influence on the military hierarchy; (5) the military, law enforcement and intelligence agencies who wield the power of the gun either to protect or to intimidate the electorate; and (6) the traditional rulers who wield substantial influence among the respective socio-cultural groups and whose endorsement politicians must seek in the course of running for office.

Furthermore, the power blocs include: (7) the political dynasties and the political godfathers who influence elections and public policy within their respective domains, and who also determine the direction of politics at different levels of organisation, including the polling units, the wards, the state congresses and the national congresses; (8) the private sector, comprised of captains of industry who maintain a "political-industrial complex"³² that patronises politicians and funds

election campaigns, sometimes across political parties, in a bid to safeguard their investments; (9) the media moguls who own the major print and electronic media houses and shape public opinion with their ideological slants on the news of the day; (10) the religious leaders, including pastors, imams and marabouts, who command a massive following, and to whom politicians go for prayers, sometimes kneeling before them publicly for endorsement and fortification; (11) the Nigerian Labour Congress/Trade Union Congress (NLC/TUC) whose leadership and membership wield a considerable hold on the lever of the Nigerian economy; and (12) foreign powers who, over the decades, have continued to wield influence on domestic politics.

To counteract the longstanding order, a new power bloc has recently attempted to emerge among the social media savvy and technology-empowered Nigerian youth. However, the old order has responded by clamping down on this fast-growing power bloc.

3. The Corridor of Power

In the context of the “black box of politics,” I use the phrase “Corridor of Power” metaphorically, considering the image of a building in which one encounters the corridor after passing through the gates or doors. In this context, therefore, the Corridor of Power is occupied by those who have access to decision-making offices after elections are concluded.

To appreciate how power works in the Corridor of Power, we must remain mindful that in each election cycle, there are winners and

losers beyond the actual candidates. Those among the power blocs who back candidates to win elections are equally winners and are guaranteed access to the Corridor. They play active roles in the choice of cabinet members and in championing political and policy agendas. Unlike in developed democracies where lobbyists have a clear-cut agenda in line with well-defined political ideologies which could cascade into broader national interests, many of the actors in Nigeria's Corridor of Power are contractors seeking patronage or currying favour for themselves or their cronies. Some policy outputs and government decisions that affect us as citizens are a result of the influence of these persons on the political agenda within the black box of the political system.

4. The Room of Power

Beyond the Corridor is the Room of Power, a centre of deliberations and decisions. Being in the Room is being in a position to make or influence policy directly. To understand the power of the Room, picture the boardroom in a corporate organisation, a room in which the board of directors of the organisation meets regularly. For ease of understanding in the context of the political arena, in place of the board of directors, you may call the occupants of the Room "The Cabinet." These are persons who are appointed as heads of ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs). In many cases, they are the nominees or beneficiaries of the winners among the power blocs and gatekeepers. In return, they keep the Room open to their benefactors

so that the interests of the latter are protected in the decision-making process.

Beyond the general chamber of the Room is an inner chamber known as the Kitchen Cabinet, comprised of a few individuals who are the final stops to the Seat of Power. They are those you refer to as “The Cabal.” Some of them may be unofficial advisers, but their perspectives can override those of the official cabinet. I will leave you to guess who these are in Nigeria’s current political dispensation.

5. The Seat of Power

The final concentric circle is the Seat of Power, occupied by a decision-maker who could be the president at the federal level, the governor at the state level, or the chairman of a Local Government Area at the local level. The degree to which the legislature and judiciary can perform oversight and adjudicative functions respectively determines the extent to which the Seat of Power is subject to checks and balances. It is said that the Nigerian president is the most powerful president among the world’s democracies because of the immense powers vested in the president by the Nigerian constitution.³³ These powers effectively give the president control over the judiciary because of such constitutional provisions as the listing of the National Judicial Council (NJC) and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as executive bodies whose heads the president has the power to appoint.³⁴ These are some of the anomalies in our present structure.

Surrounding the Seat of Power is a component of the Nigerian political system that is worthy of note, namely the Council of State, which I earlier alluded to as a power bloc. This includes the President, the Vice-President, all former Presidents and Heads of State, all former Chief Justices of Nigeria, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Governors of the thirty-six states, and the Attorney-General of the Federation. The Council of State advises the president and, as such, wields influence on the direction of state policy.

The happenings at the Gate of Power, the Corridor of Power, the Room of Power and the Seat of Power are what constitute the black box of Nigeria's politics. It is within this system that the fate of our citizens has been decided over the decades. The challenge before us as nation builders is to reposition the Periphery of Power to the centre of governance such that the "Office of the Citizen"³⁵ becomes as distinguished, if not more distinguished, than the Office of the President.

This mandate to restore dignity to the Nigerian people is what has informed our strategic intervention in governance through the years across platforms, from the pulpit to the podium. In doing this, we have leveraged our God-given access to not just the Corridor of Power, but the Room of Power and, indeed, the Seat of Power, making governance recommendations in the interest of the Nigerian people.

However, I have since realised that access to the Room, as good as it is, is not as effective in achieving this mandate as being in the Room because there are those within the Room whose stock in trade is to misinform and mislead the occupants of the Seat of Power. Hence, framework after framework, proposal after proposal, much of our attempts to facilitate good governance in the interest of the Nigerian people have been met with opposition. It appears that once we have made our case in the interest of Nigeria and left the Room, certain characters around the Seat of Power step in to counter our position in their selfish interests or the parochial interests of their benefactors among the power blocs. This is why we must all be committed to redeeming the Seat of Power and fostering the emergence of the best, brightest, fittest and most competent across the governance ecosystem, so that the black box of politics will become the lighthouse of good governance. However, to make this happen, citizen participation is imperative.

The Imperative of Citizen Participation

I am reminded of the words of Jean Jacques Rousseau in *The Social Contract*:

As soon as any man says of the affairs of the State *What does it matter to me?* the State may be given up for lost.³⁶

I am also reminded of the agelong words attributed to Plato:

The penalty good men pay for indifference to public affairs is to be ruled by evil men.³⁷

As powerful as the power blocs are, and as impenetrable as the Gates of Power appear to be, the real reason for the marginalization of the Nigerian citizen in the affairs of our nation is the inadequate participation in the governance process by the citizens themselves.

A crucial aspect of poor citizen participation is the low voter turnout that has defined Nigeria's democratic experience despite the significant budgetary allocations to elections. According to INEC:

“Over the last two electoral cycles, including off-season elections, voter turnout across the country hovers around 30 to 35 per cent. While a few elections had higher percentages, some recent by-elections recorded as low as 8.3 per cent voter turnout in an urban constituency of over 1.2 million registered voters located in the nation's most densely populated city. This unfavourably compares to the average voter turnout of 65-70 per cent in other countries, even in the West Africa region.”³⁸

Fellow Nigerians, to build a great nation that works for every Nigerian, this trend must be reversed. Therefore, the concluding part of this address is dedicated to activating ten (10) key citizen power hubs that can positively transform the political landscape ahead of the next elections.

Activating the Power Hubs of Citizen Participation

1. The Household

The change we advocate must begin from the family, or, in socio-economic terms, the Household. I, therefore, call on Nigerian households to ensure full participation of members who have attained the voting age in the ongoing continuous voter registration exercise. While this responsibility falls on husbands and wives alike, women, in particular, have an important role to play. After all, “the hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world.”³⁹ Therefore, homemakers are nation builders.

In the INEC electorate profile I earlier presented, housewives constituted the third-largest bloc of potential voters among the Nigerian electorate. I am reminded of the remarkable roles played by women in the movements that birthed corporate independence for Nigeria. The notable leaders of some of these movements, including Mrs Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and Mrs Margaret Ekpo, tactically deployed fellow women, including housewives,⁴⁰ in driving political change, sometimes forcing husbands to allow their wives to join their movements.⁴¹ These women would deal a heavy blow to the institutions of colonialism long before the battle for independence gained momentum. I am also reminded of Jael, the heroic housewife in the Bible who became famous for overpowering Sisera, the enemy of her nation, thereby ending decades of oppression, right from the comfort of her home.⁴² Finally, just three weeks ago, there were reports of housewives protesting a seven-year power outage in two communities in Kano.⁴³

As we advocate a massive voter turnout during the next elections, I enjoin the great women of this nation to refuse to sell their votes to crafty politicians for a loaf of bread or a bag of rice. You deserve much more than crumbs from the table; you deserve seats at the table in the Room of Power. The destinies of our nation and our children depend on the power of your vote. Vote wisely!

2. The Market

Closely linked to the Household is the Market, which represents the convergence of farmers, fishers, market women, petty traders, artisans and microenterprises. These stakeholders at the base of our economy, often referred to as the informal sector, are estimated to constitute up to 65 per cent of the Nigerian economy.⁴⁴ I call on these grassroots influencers to recognize that they deserve a Nigeria that works for them. They must reject the offers of “stomach infrastructure”⁴⁵ and demand the provision of critical infrastructure such as roads, electricity and market facilities that will enhance their businesses and boost their productivity.

3. The Village Square

The Village Square represents the convergence of community dwellers. In rural areas, this is the literal village square where elders and age grades deliberate. In urban areas, the village square represents the community development associations, town union meetings, and the landlords’ and residents’ associations of the various streets and estates. Not only must these structures become centres of community

organizing for citizen participation, they must also refuse to collude with politicians to rig elections.

4. The Street

Closely associated with the Market is the Street. The strategy of the power blocs and those in the Corridors of Power has been to capture and control the streets because, in Nigeria's current political architecture, the game of politics is won by the man or woman who controls the streets. Needless to say, this has done much damage to the nature and quality of our politics. It is what has fuelled the violence-prone nature of our politics. If we look closely enough, we will find that the insurgency and violent secessionist agitations that confront us as a nation are an overflow of the violence on the streets.

Let me, therefore, use this occasion to appeal to the lords of the streets, the Al Capones, the gangsters, the area fathers, area mothers, area boys, and area girls who are being used by selfish politicians; let me appeal to them in the language they all understand *well-well*: *My people, di time don come make we stop ija igboro, make we talk sense to ourselves. Time don come make we shine our eye, because all dis politician wey dey use us to fight and kill ourselves, dem no rate us at all. Dat na why dem no fit send their own pikin to fight the yeye fight wey dem dey send us to fight. Time don come for us to use our street sense. Dis country na we own. Nigeria na for Nigerians.*

5. The Campus

Greatest Nigerian Students! Ever Conscious Nigerian Students! Articulate Nigerian Students! The next power hub of citizen participation that must be activated is the Campus. Students constitute the biggest potential voting bloc with 22 million registered voters on the last register. From the audacious resistance against the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Agreement by the National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS) in 1962, to the famous Ali-Must-Go protests in 1978, to the earth-shaking Anti-SAP riots of 1989, Nigerian students have been at the forefront of major political shifts since independence.

It is time for Nigerian students to once again arise and push the envelope of citizen participation in the political space. On the platform of the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), our students must actively engage the relevant political institutions towards such reforms that can enhance the political process. The immediate goal of such engagements should be to remove the obstacles to student participation in politics. For instance, I understand that, since the beginning of the Fourth Republic, students have largely been disenfranchised during elections because they register to vote on their campuses. However, because schools are mostly closed during elections and students are required to vacate the campuses, many students are unable to vote and are thus disenfranchised. To address this anomaly, NANS must work actively with its subsidiaries such as the National Association of Political Science Students (NAPSS) to advocate the digitalization of the electoral process.

In this highly connected 21st century, we have absolutely no excuse to condone the retrogressive resolution passed by the National Assembly with the collusion of the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC);⁴⁶ we have absolutely no excuse to reject the electronic transmission of election results; we have absolutely no excuse to obstruct the progressive introduction of electronic voting. Who, if I may ask, is afraid of free, fair and credible elections? Who is afraid of efficiently conducted elections? Who is afraid of the voice of the millennials and the youth of this nation?

6. The Workplace

The next hub of citizens' power that must be activated is the Workplace. It is often said that the middle class is the most politically docile among the Nigerian electorate. It is time to change this narrative. The middle class, through Concerned Professionals led by the likes of Prof Pat Utomi and Dr Oby Ezekwesili, played a critical role in the fight against military dictatorship. It is time for the professionals to unsheathe their swords and deploy their influence and intelligence to take back our nation. Employers must begin to encourage their staff to participate in the political process because public policy affects workplace productivity.

A critical outpost of the workplace is the labour unions. The labour unions must reinvent themselves through such intelligent, data-driven and solutions-based engagement that can awaken a new political consciousness among Nigerian workers. In this regard, the best and

the brightest must come together across our nation to create for Nigerians a Nigeria that is efficiently structured, effectively governed, accountably served, and selflessly led in the interest of the Nigerian worker.

7. The Digital Space

The young people of this nation have proved resilient against the recent constraints on social media expressions. They have navigated the ban on Twitter and have devised innovative and legitimate strategies for constructive digital engagement. As the need for citizen participation intensifies, the level of engagement in the social media space must not diminish. With #NigeriaforNigerians, you must remind the political class that they do not own this country. This nation belongs to you, the citizens of this nation, and now is the time to take it back.

8. The Nigerian Diaspora

Even as Nigerians resident in Nigeria work to rebuild “Nigeria for Nigerians,” the “Nigerians for Nigeria” mandate rests upon the Nigerian diaspora. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) put the number of Nigerians in the diaspora at approximately 1.7 million in 2020.⁴⁷ However, a 2019 statement by the Senior Special Assistant to the President on Foreign Affairs and Diaspora, Mrs Abike Dabiri-Erewa, put the figure at over 20 million.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, what cannot be disputed is the tremendous level of competence demonstrated by countless Nigerians in their host

countries. What is also clear is that they are the “second-largest source of foreign exchange inflow into the country, second only to crude oil earnings.”⁴⁹ In 2018, this inflow was estimated at “over 25 billion dollars.”⁵⁰ INEC and the National Assembly should therefore be compelled to open up the voting space for the Nigerian diaspora.

9. The Elite Club

The Nigerian elite must realize that they are citizens first and foremost before they are identified by any position they are privileged to occupy. Therefore, I make bold to declare that it is time for the emergence of a new Nigerian elite consensus, an elite consensus that prioritizes the Nigerian citizen in the content and direction of state policy; an elite consensus to pragmatically restructure Nigeria in such a manner that guarantees the freedom of the individual Nigerian citizen and the optimization of the geo-economic potential and productivity of Nigeria’s diverse peoples; an elite consensus to rebuild Nigeria for Nigerians. Failure to do this would, sooner or later, lead to an inevitable collision between a complacent elite and the unstoppable moving train of an empowered citizenry.

10. The Places of Worship

That Nigeria is a deeply religious nation has never been in doubt. What has been in doubt, however, is the extent to which we translate the religious enthusiasm and fanaticism in our churches and mosques to value-driven patriotism. Therefore, religious leaders must become active citizen-educators, empowering their followers to support the

right causes, lead the right causes, identify the right candidates, become the right candidates, and build the right kind of nation.

Conclusion

Fellow Nigerians, with strong convictions rooted in the dreams of our founding patriots, with true commitment to national reconciliation and integration, and with enduring confidence in our God-given destiny, let us now arise and build the Nigeria we envision; a New Nigeria, a Nigeria that works for every Nigerian, a Nigeria for Nigerians.

I remain confident that Nigeria will be saved, Nigeria will be changed, and Nigeria will be great in my lifetime, by God's grace! Amen.

Thank you for listening; God bless you, and God bless our beloved nation, Nigeria.

Pastor 'Tunde Bakare

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