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## The Effect of Open Letters on the Perceptions of Electoral Accountability and National Sovereignty: A Study of Adichie's & Oke's Post-Election Letters to the American Governments

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### ABSTRACT

Reactions in Nigeria to Adichie's letter to the US President after the election were mixed, particularly leading to a reactive letter from Oke to the US President and Canadian Prime Minister. The complexity and diversity of Nigerian politics, as well as the challenges of striking a healthy balance between the demands for openness and accountability and the worries about national sovereignty and outside interference, is illuminated by an in-depth analysis of the perspectives and perceptions held by Nigerians with regard to the 2023 presidential elections outcome that prompted the letters. Hence, the study on reconciling the conflicting perceptions of electoral accountability versus national sovereignty in Adichie's and Oke's post-election letters to the American governments aims to present a variety of Nigerians' perspectives in regards to the outcome of the presidential election, to consider the alleged electoral malpractices in the Election and how these prompted the letters to the American governments and to reconcile the conflicting perspectives of openness/accountability (Adichie's Letter) and national sovereignty/interference (Oke's Letter). The study is built on the frame of the agenda-setting theory. The paradigmatic analysis method is employed and the study's discourse is further divided into four paradigms. The study concludes that all matters must be handled on the basis of deliberate patriotism and without any sentiment of ethnic biases as was perceived by Nigerians in order to resolve the tension between Adichie and Oke's letters, which present opposing views on the importance of openness and accountability and the value of independence and national sovereignty, respectively.

### INTRODUCTION

Renowned Nigerian writer and feminist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie whose quality of literary writings has been acknowledged all across the world, after the February 2023 presidential general elections in Nigeria, wrote to President Joseph Biden of the United States of America to voice her worries about the impacts of electoral fraud on the outcomes of the election. People all throughout the globe, especially in Nigeria, had various reactions to her message and one of such was an open reactive letter by Professor Yemi Oke (a renowned Nigerian who resides in Canada), this which was addressed to the US president and to Justin Trudeau, the Prime Minister of Canada.

In view of both open letters to the America-based governments after the election, this study will first provide a critical evaluation of Nigerians' perspectives and perceptions of the 2023 presidential elections and its outcome, these and other factors which had prompted the Adichie's letter. The purpose of this study is to examine the election's background and both letter's concerns to accomplish this goal. This study aims to look into the various responses to the two letters considered in the study, how the media has impacted the publics' perceptions encircling both letters and why different schools of thoughts perceived that both letters are tribally driven by their writers.

Senator Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the flag bearer of the All Progressive Congress (APC) from the Southwestern region of the country, emerged as the returning winner of the election, as was declared by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Tinubu contested for the presidency against his main challengers, Atiku Abubakar, the flag bearer of the People's Democratic Party from the Northeastern region of the country, and Mr. Peter Obi, the Labour Party (LP) flag bearer from the Southeastern region of the country. The election was alleged of voters suppression, seizure of ballot boxes, and other forms of electoral fraud, this, which had tarnished the reputation and credibility of the election, especially at the international level. According to Peter Obi, the presidential contestant from Labour Party in a statement published by the Daily Post Newspaper, he stated that the election was a clear deviation from the electoral rules and guidelines;

"It is a clear deviation from the electoral rules and guidelines as we were promised and did not meet the minimum criteria of a free, transparent, credible and fair election devoid of voter intimidation and suppression, and late commencement of voting in some specific states. This will probably go down as one of the most controversial elections ever conducted in Nigeria. The good and hardworking people of Nigeria have again been

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robbed by the institutions and leaders whom we trusted. If we seek to be called Your Excellency, then the process through which we are elected should also be excellent or sufficiently credible to generate the required confidence and moral authority to govern and lead. As you all know, the destruction of a society can be a gradual or sudden process through acts such as deliberate refusal to obey the rule of law and via the suppression of the will of the people” (Odunsi, 2023; Daily Post)

In the letter to the United States government, Adichie detailed her worries and suspicions on the possibility that the election results had been manipulated. As a result, she urged for international action to assure an early intervention in the purportedly unfair system. The open letter sent by Adichie was met with a diverse array of responses from people in Nigeria and away. While a school of thought interpreted this as an act of patriotism speaking out against election interference and calling for assistance from the international community to secure a process that is fair and open to all participants, another admits that she is actively pursuing foreign meddling in Nigerian internal matters, and that by doing so, she is endangering the independence of Nigeria. Yet another believe that she has a partiality for the party that is in opposition and that she has disregarded the efforts of the electoral commission to hold a fair election while she has been doing so.

It is most bewildering that a privileged Nigerian-born writer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie born in Enugu, Nigeria in 1977 but now lives in the United State of America, has decided to paint her country of origin “black” (Oke, 2023; Vanguard Online)

Adichie’s post-election letter to the government of the United States prompted a variety of emotions in Nigeria. As a result, an in-depth analysis of the perspectives, perceptions, and acceptances held by Nigerians with regard to the 2023 general elections outcome which prompted the letter would shed light on the multifaceted and diverse nature of Nigerian politics as well as the difficulties associated with striking a healthy balance between the demands for openness and accountability as well as worries about national sovereignty and outside interference.

### Objectives of the Study

The study shall be considered by the following objectives.

1. To present a variety of Nigerians’ perspectives and perceptions regarding the outcome of the 2023 Presidential General Election
2. To consider the alleged electoral malpractices in the 2023 Presidential General Election and how these prompted the Adichie vs. Oke letters to the American governments.
3. To reconcile the conflicting perspectives of openness/accountability (Adichie’s Letter) and national sovereignty/interference (Oke’s Letter)

### Significance of the Study

Conducting a study on the effect of open letters on

the perceptions of electoral accountability and national sovereignty, with specific focus on Adichie’s and Oke’s post-election letters to the American government has significant scholarly significance. In the contemporary era of digital technology, correspondence of this kind have emerged as a prevalent and influential mode of communication. To evaluate their influence on public sentiment, it is essential to comprehend the way they shape individuals’ perspectives on electoral responsibility. Furthermore, a fundamental aspect of every democratic system lies in the concept of voter responsibility. An examination of the impact exerted by open letters on the accountability of public leaders and politicians may provide insights into their efficacy in holding these individuals responsible for their actions and commitments. Furthermore, it is essential to acknowledge that national sovereignty has significant importance within modern governance (Catoto, 2022). The open letters authored by Adichie and Oke pertained to a national election and included the involvement of foreign actors, potentially exerting an impact on popular sentiment over the matter of national sovereignty. An analysis of these findings may provide a deeper understanding of the correlation between open letters and the notion of national sovereignty. Moreover, the study would shed light on the power dynamics inherent in open letters, offering valuable insights into the ways in which these letters function to delineate ideological boundaries within a given culture. Studying instances such as the dispute between Adichie and Oke, when individuals, interest groups, and even international corporations actively engaged with and respond to open letters, may provide valuable insights into the intricacies of contemporary democratic systems.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Individuals’ rights to vote, participate in government, and hold their leaders responsible depend critically on their level of political freedom (Lewis, 2011). This section of the study analyses the idea of political freedom to show why it is relevant to the study of how open letters affect people’s views on electoral responsibility and sovereignty at the national level. More insight into open letters as a tool for public participation might be gained via a thorough examination of the complex relationship between political freedom and the conception of democracy. When people are free to speak their minds, engage in political debate, and use their voice in elections without fear of retribution or penalty, Orijinmo (2023) admits that they are enjoying political liberty. The term covers a wide range of liberties, including freedoms of expression, assembly, and association, as well as the right to vote and hold public office (Egharevba & Chiazor, 2012). Electoral accountability refers to the many means by which citizens may ensure that their representatives are held accountable for their actions and choices after they have been elected to office. Accountability measures, as argued by Baccini, Brodeur, and Weymouth (2021), encourage politicians to put the needs of the people

first and increase openness. Voters must have the right to freely express their opinions and access trustworthy information to hold politicians to account. These basic liberties are protected by a transparent and free political system (Cancela & Geys, 2016, Ukpong *et al*, 2022).

When a country is said to be “sovereign,” it implies that it is free from any outside influence on its government and that its leaders may make policy decisions without consulting anybody else (Milward, 2017). Because it allows citizens to take part in political debate, shape policy, and look out for their country’s interests, Napieralski (2017) argues that political freedom is crucial to the upkeep of national sovereignty. Since open letters are a kind of public debate, they may affect public opinion and ultimately policymaking within a country, which can have consequences for the nation’s autonomy.

Individuals and organisations may make their voices heard and make their opinions known to government authorities by writing open letters (Williams, 2010). To convey one’s views on political matters, raise awareness, and encourage discussion, an open letter is a common form of political communication. When open letters provide light on electoral duty and national sovereignty, their impacts become vital in shaping public opinions, promoting democratic ideals, and influencing decision-making (Davis, 2021). Open letters provide the public a way to hold politicians accountable, which may boost public pressure and scrutiny. By addressing voters’ concerns and hopes directly, open letters have the potential to make politicians more aware of their responsibilities and increase the speed with which they are met (Oostveen, 2010). This encourages candid discussion between constituents and their elected officials. Given the political nature of open letters, they may influence public opinion and policy decisions with far-reaching consequences for a country’s sovereignty (Milward, 2017). Open letters have the potential to influence policy, alter agendas, and defend national sovereignty by galvanising public support or raising awareness on issues of national interest. Effective open letters respect national sovereignty without challenging the authority of elected officials and institutions (Leese, 2017).

Open letters are the most effective way to get people involved in politics. People are given a platform from which to express their views on political issues via open letters (Landemore, 2020). This free exchange of ideas fosters an environment of openness and acceptance by ensuring that all voices will be heard. To promote openness in a democratic government, letters to others are a useful tool. People are better able to express themselves, hold their government accountable, encourage debate and reform, empower the underserved, and increase trust and transparency in the system as a result. By providing a medium for politically charged conversation, open letters support democratic principles such as transparency, openness, and accountability. In this era of heightened focus on transparency and public engagement (Standing, 2012, Orijinmo, 2023), it is crucial to acknowledge and

encourage the role of open letters in democracy.

Nigeria’s democracy bears the scars of decades of election dispute and fraud in Nigeria. There have been six general elections since democracy was restored in 1999, and each one has been plagued by allegations of widespread fraud, violence, and other electoral malpractices (Aluaigba, 2016). In 1959, just three years before Nigeria declared its independence from Britain, the nation held its first general election. The Northern People’s Congress (NPC) received the most votes in the election, which was conducted under a parliamentary system of government. The National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) came in second, followed by the Action Group (AG) in third. Nevertheless, allegations of vote tampering and voter intimidation plagued the election (Obiagu and Ajaps, 2022).

In 1960, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa took office as Nigeria’s first Prime Minister after the country gained its independence. The NPC, the NCNC, and the AG all served under his leadership in a coalition government. However, the alliance did not endure long before it was dissolved in 1966 as political tensions and regional rivalries led to a military takeover. Coups and countercoups ensued, with the military eventually seizing power and holding it for more than a decade (Ogunnoiki, 2018). A civilian administration took over from General Olusegun Obasanjo’s military rule when a new constitution was passed in 1979. This happened soon after the new constitution was ratified. In this election, which took place under a presidential system of government, Alhaji Shehu Shagari, candidate of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), was proclaimed the winner. Some believe, however, that the election was stolen and that voters were threatened (Ogunnoiki, 2018). The integrity of the election has been compromised.

Shagari was reelected president of Nigeria in 1983, although his victory was again contested by the opposition parties. Massive protests and violent incidents ensued, leading to a military coup led by General Muhammadu Buhari. In 1999, Nigeria became the world’s most populous democracy, ushering in a new era in the country’s turbulent political history. This new era started in 1999, when democratic rule was restored. However, allegations of electoral malfeasance have plagued elections for quite some time (Aluaigba, 2016). Many people saw the first general election in the Republic of Nigeria in 1999 as a positive development toward a more democratic system of government. In this Republic, an election was held. There were apparently violent occurrences during the election, and some people believe ballots were stolen. Opposition groups claimed that the ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP) committed widespread election fraud (Arogbofa, 2022).

The general election of 2003 was far more acrimonious than the one before it because of claims made by the opposition parties that the ruling PDP had won the election via the use of violence, intimidation, and the manipulation of votes. Ogunnoiki (2018) found that the

election had several major faults and did not meet the standards set by international organizations. Among the many notable aspects of the 2007 midterm elections was the prevalence of allegations of vote-tampering and other forms of electoral fraud. Opposition groups claimed that the People's Democratic Party (PDP) administration misused state funds to sway the election, while PDP leaders were accused of using violence and rigging the vote by the opposition (Arogbofa, 2022).

The general election of 2011 was generally seen as a step forward from previous elections. Regardless of this, allegations of voting fraud persisted. Research conducted by Akhaine (2011) found that although the election itself was peaceful and accessible to the public, several voters were dissatisfied with the amount of secrecy surrounding the vote counting and announcements. It was determined that INEC had significant logistical issues, including the late delivery of election materials and inadequate voter education. Lack of openness and responsibility was another problem. Another tight general election took place in 2015, with both the incumbent party and the opposition parties leveling accusations of dishonesty against one another. On the other hand, most international observers said this election was a marked improvement over its predecessors (Mahakwe, 2022). The election was marked by high levels of openness and trustworthiness, as reported by Igbokwe-Ibeto *et al.* (2016). Nonetheless, as the study progressed, a few issues became apparent. Violence and intimidation, buying votes, and late distribution of election materials were all factors.

The ruling party and the opposition party both claimed electoral malpractices occurred during the 2019 general election, which was marred by controversy. Idowu and Mimiko (2020) claim that major problems with the election's operations and transparency, as well as problems with electoral security and low turnout, were to blame. Significant logistical problems, such as tardy delivery of voting materials and inadequate voter instructions, were uncovered by the investigators.

The absence of information was one of the most significant problems. Vote buying, violence, and intimidation tactics were all cited in the research. Allegations of electoral misconduct also impeded the 2023 general election, which just took place. The potential for vote buying, the use of violence and intimidation by political organisations, and the impartiality of the INEC are all causes for alarm, as outlined by Arogbofa (2022). Concerns about the security of collating data online and the likelihood of hacked or otherwise altered election results were also noted in the study. Dissatisfaction with the electoral process was communicated in the final report of the Joint International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) to the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria, which was published on the 12th of June 2023, by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI). Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) Chairman Mahmood Yakubu had promised to hold "the best-ever election" in

2023, but the study detailed several anomalies that tainted the process.

### Theoretical Framework

This study is analysed critically within the context of agenda-setting theory. Agenda-setting is the belief that the media has the power to shape the public's priorities by choosing which issues will get the most coverage (McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 2014). In this perspective, the media may influence public opinion by carefully choosing which stories to cover. This study is crucial for understanding the reception of Adichie and Oke's post-election letters to Vice President Joseph Biden in Nigeria. Adichie expressed concern about the manner the Nigerian government was handling the 2019 presidential election in a letter to the United States government (Vanguard, 2023) and asked for intervention. The Vanguard printed Adichie's letter. In response to Adichie's letter, Oke said that she did not agree with her views and that she did not share them. Both letters received extensive coverage in Nigerian media and elsewhere on social media, where they elicited a wide range of replies from other Nigerians. Some news outlets have praised both letters as courageous acts of speaking truth to power; others have vilified them as examples of the worst of what racial prejudice and globalization have to offer. The media had a major role in shaping the narrative that emerged from the letters. Furthermore, agenda-setting is applied here to explain why the media reported on the letters the way they did. How the media reported on the letters and how the issues were phrased affected how readers understood and responded to the messages contained inside. In all, the theory of agenda-setting is useful in the evaluation of the reactions of Nigerians to the post-election letters delivered by Adichie and Oke.

### Research Design

This study shall employ the paradigmatic method of analysis. According to Alghamdi (2015), a paradigmatic analysis is a method of doing research that comprises examining the underlying assumptions and concepts upon which people's understanding and interpretation of the world are based. To do this, one must first understand the many conceptual lenses through which individuals see and interpret the social, political, and cultural occurrences around them (Khaldi, 2017). This is done to learn how locals interpret and make sense of the cultural, political, and social events taking place around them. Paradigmatic analysis is a method that is useful in the context of this study. In this case, one paradigm shows a circumstance in which one school of thought supports Adichie's letter, while the other presents a situation in which the opposing school of thought support Oke's letter, which is diametrically opposed to Adichie's.

Cultural, political, and historical dimensions, among others, are explored in the study of these two paradigms. For instance, Adichie's letter focuses heavily on values and ideas related to democracy, free speech, and human

rights; these are all aspects that can possibly be included in a comprehensive definition of culture. To conduct a political analysis of Nigeria, one must consider not only the many political ideologies and parties but also the government's and people's respective positions of power. Oke's letter, which examines the historical context of Nigerian politics, may inspire historical perspectives that analyse the ability of Nigeria's political institutions to form the country's political landscape without any foreign interference.

### Research Discourse

#### Nigerians Perspectives on the 2023 General Elections

There is a broad variety of unpleasant views among Nigerians towards the 2023 general election, and these perspectives are chronicled by different journalists in various media platforms that may be available across the country. Some of these points of view are expressed here. It is no doubt that the credibility of authentic democracy has been questioned since the military rule ended in 1999. Presidential candidates have emerged with loads of promises chiseled in impressive manifestoes, but years have passed, and leaders have led and left; the hopes of Nigerians remain dashed. The long-awaited birth of a new Nigeria has consumed the minds of Nigerians as they anticipate the 2023 presidential election. Supposedly, the election was potentially meant to be the game changer, and this was largely due to the emergence of a generation who have decided to put an end to the bad leadership that has ravaged the potency of the great country. Millions of young Nigerians registered as first-time voters and their passion, we can say, stems from opportunities they have been robbed of and the tragedies that erupted during the End Sars (Police Brutality) violence. Even, these red-blooded scenarios are in fact insufficient when itemizing the urgent need for good governance in Nigeria. In short, Nigeria has long been overdue for a change. "If Nigeria continues on this downhill, it will be disastrous, so yes, it is a defining moment," a protester said (Orjinmo, 2023 - BBC News online).

While Peter Obi seemed to be a favourite before the election, there is no doubt that tribalism played a major role in the election. Another voter expressed joy for the outcome of the election; "Tinubu is a great man, he has been a great man in Nigeria and Lagos and has a track record of success". The Nigerian election has made it evident that no matter the level of education and exposure of the average Nigerian, emotions, sentiments, and biases are major decision drivers; and that many Nigerians largely identify along their ethnic and tribal lines than as Nigerians. The elections exposed the dearth of political illiteracy and Nigeria's history among the citizens. Some indigenous Lagosians praised the president-elect for his victory and emphasized that they would support any candidate and party that will ensure equitable representation in appointments of officials to run the affairs, "We will support any candidate and party that will ensure that the appointment ratio is shared

between the indigenes and others based on 75% to 25% as it was done in the Second Republic," the Communique said" (Nwaokolo, 2023 - Nigerian Tribune online)

The PDP candidate, Atiku Abubakar" in his post-election result speech expressed his disappointment.

The weekend election was neither free nor fair. Preliminary assessments indicate that it is the worst conducted election since the return to democratic rule. The manipulation and fraud that attended this election were unprecedented in the history of our nation. I can still not understand why the electoral umpire was in such a hurry to conclude the collation and announcement of the result, given the number of complaints of irregularities of bypassing of the BVAS, failure of uploading to the IREV, and unprecedented cancellations and disenfranchisement of millions of voters in breach of the Electoral Act and the commission's own guidelines. It was indeed a rape of democracy" (Premium Times, 2023)

David Adeleke, best known by his stage name Davido, is a Nigerian artist who has gained international fame. In response to the election's results, he said;

It's what it is! But I personally don't feel like that was really a credible election. You know what I'm saying? I feel like the most important thing is the safety of life of everybody. But in all, that wasn't it. So, I don't think I will be able to hide that. I can't hide that," (Oloniran, 2023 - Punch online)

The demand for a new Nigeria is being heard well beyond Nigeria's borders, as various world leaders have commented on Nigeria's potential to aid in Africa's development. Bola Tinubu, the freshly elected President of Nigeria, has received letters of congratulations from a number of world leaders, including the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, the United States Department of State, and others. The statement made by the US state department read thus;

"The United States congratulates the people of Nigeria, President-elect Tinubu, and all political leaders following the declaration by Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) on the results of the February 25 presidential election. This competitive election represents a new period for Nigerian politics and democracy. Each of the top three candidates was the leading vote-getter in 12 states, a remarkable first in Nigeria's modern political era, reflecting the diversity of views that characterized the campaign and the wishes of Nigeria's voters. We understand that many Nigerians and some of the parties have expressed frustration about the manner in which the process was conducted and the shortcomings of technical elements that were used for the first time in a presidential election cycle. Nigerians are clearly within their rights to have such concerns and should have high expectations for their electoral processes. We join other international observers in urging INEC to improve in the areas that need the most attention ahead of the March 11 gubernatorial elections." (Price, 2023 - United States government)

**Openness/Accountability Perspective (Adichie 2023)**

Chimamanda Adichie in her scathing open letter to President Joseph Biden expresses disappointment with the international response to the election's decision. From her perspective, many Nigerians are unhappy with how global leaders and international media have responded to the election's results, especially in light of the violence that has been alleged to have occurred. Adichie's letter to the President of the United States reflects the views of a sizable portion of the Nigerian population, whose outrage over the reported election irregularities calls for immediate intervention from all quarters, including the international community. The Adichie's Letter as published by the Vanguard online (April 6, 2023) states; Dear President Biden,

Something remarkable happened on the morning of February 25, the day of the Nigerian presidential election. Many Nigerians went out to vote holding in their hearts a new sense of trust. Cautious trust, but still trust. Since the end of military rule in 1999, Nigerians have had little confidence in elections. To vote in a presidential election was to brace yourself for the inevitable aftermath: fraud. Elections would be rigged because elections were always rigged; the question was how badly. Sometimes voting felt like an inconsequential gesture as predetermined "winners" were announced. A law passed last year, the 2022 Electoral Act, changed everything. It gave legal backing to the electronic accreditation of voters and the electronic transmission of results, in a process determined by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The chair of the commission, Professor Mahmood Yakubu, assured Nigerians that votes would be counted in the presence of voters and recorded in a result sheet, and that a photo of the signed sheet would immediately be uploaded to a secure server. When rumors circulated about the commission not keeping its word, Yakubu firmly rebutted them. In a speech at Chatham House in London (a favorite influence-burnishing haunt of Nigerian politicians), he reiterated that the public would be able to view "polling-unit results as soon as they are finalized on Election Day." Nigerians applauded him. If results were uploaded right after voting was concluded, then the ruling party, the All Progressives Congress (APC), which has been in power since 2015, would have no opportunity for manipulation. Technology would redeem Nigerian democracy. Results would no longer feature more votes than voters. Nigerians would no longer have their leaders chosen for them. Elections would, finally, capture the true voice of the people. And so trust and hope were born. By the evening of February 25, 2023, that trust had dissipated. Election workers had arrived hours late, or without basic election materials. There were reports of violence, of a shooting at a polling unit, and of political operatives stealing or destroying ballot boxes. Some law-enforcement officers seemed to have colluded in voter intimidation; in Lagos, a policeman stood idly by as an APC spokesperson threatened members of a particular ethnic group who he believed

would vote for the opposition. Most egregious of all, the electoral commission reneged on its assurance to Nigerians. The presidential results were not uploaded in real time. Voters, understandably suspicious, reacted; videos from polling stations show voters shouting that results be uploaded right away. Many took cellphone photos of the result sheets. Curiously, many polling units were able to upload the results of the House and Senate elections, but not the presidential election. A relative who voted in Lagos told me, "We refused to leave the polling unit until the INEC staff uploaded the presidential result. The poor guy kept trying and kept getting an 'error' message. There was no network problem. I had internet on my phone. My bank app was working. The Senate and House results were easily uploaded. So why the presidential results couldn't be uploaded on the same system?" Some electoral workers in polling units claimed that they could not upload results because they didn't have a password, an excuse that voters understood to be subterfuge. By the end of the day, it had become obvious that something was terribly amiss. No one was surprised when, by the morning of the 26th, social media became flooded with evidence of irregularities. Result sheets were now slowly being uploaded on the INEC portal, and could be viewed by the public. Voters compared their cellphone photos with the uploaded photos and saw alterations: numbers crossed out and rewritten; some originally written in black ink had been rewritten in blue, some blunderingly whited-out with Tipp-Ex. The election had been not only rigged, but done in such a shoddy, shabby manner that it insulted the intelligence of Nigerians. Nigerian democracy had long been a two-party structure—power alternating between the APC and the Peoples Democratic Party—until this year, when the Labour Party, led by Peter Obi, became a third force. Obi was different; he seemed honest and accessible, and his vision of anti-corruption and self-sufficiency gave rise to a movement of supporters who called themselves "Obidients." Unusually large, enthusiastic crowds turned up for his rallies. The APC considered him an upstart who could not win, because his small party lacked traditional structures. It is ironic that many images of altered result sheets showed votes overwhelmingly being transferred from the Labour Party to the APC. As vote counting began at INEC, representatives of different political parties—except for the APC—protested. The results being counted, they said, did not reflect what they had documented at the polling units. There were too many discrepancies. "There is no point progressing in error, Mr. Chairman. We are racing to nowhere," one party spokesperson said to Yakubu. "Let us get it right before we proceed with the collation." But the INEC chair, opaque-faced and lordly, refused. The counting continued swiftly until, at 4:10 a.m. on March 1, the ruling party's candidate, Bola Tinubu, was announced as president-elect. A subterranean silence reigned across the country. Few people celebrated. Many Nigerians were in shock. "Why," my young cousin asked me, "did INEC not do

what it said it would do? It seemed truly perplexing that, in the context of a closely contested election in a low-trust society, the electoral commission would ignore so many glaring red flags in its rush to announce a winner. (It had the power to pause vote counting, to investigate irregularities—as it would do in the governorship elections two weeks later.). Rage is brewing, especially among young people. The discontent, the despair, the tension in the air have not been this palpable in years. How surprising then to see the U.S. State Department congratulate Tinubu on March 1. “We understand that many Nigerians and some of the parties have expressed frustration about the manner in which the process was conducted and the shortcomings of technical elements that were used for the first time in a presidential election cycle,” the spokesperson said. And yet the process was described as a “competitive election” that “represents a new period for Nigerian politics and democracy.” American intelligence surely cannot be so inept. A little homework and they would know what is manifestly obvious to me and so many others: The process was imperiled not by technical shortcomings but by deliberate manipulation. An editorial in *The Washington Post* echoed the State Department in intent if not in affect. In an oddly infantilizing tone, as though intended to mollify the simpleminded, we are told that “officials have asserted that technical glitches, not sabotage, were the issue,” that “much good” came from the Nigerian elections, which are worth celebrating because, among other things, “no one has blocked highways, as happened in Brazil after Jair Bolsonaro lost his reelection bid.” We are also told that “it is encouraging, first, that the losing candidates are pursuing their claims through the courts,” though any casual observer of Nigerian politics would know that courts are the usual recourse after any election. The editorial has the imaginative poverty so characteristic of international coverage of African issues—no reading of the country’s mood, no nuance or texture. But its intellectual laziness, unusual in such a rigorous newspaper, is astonishing. Since when does a respected paper unequivocally ascribe to benign malfunction something that may very well be malignant—just because government officials say so? There is a kind of cordial condescension in both the State Department’s and *The Washington Post*’s responses to the election. That the bar for what is acceptable has been so lowered can only be read as contempt. I hope, President Biden, that you do not personally share this cordial condescension. You have spoken of the importance of a “global community for democracy,” and the need to stand up for “justice and the rule of law.” A global community for democracy cannot thrive in the face of apathy from its most powerful member. Why would the United States, which prioritizes the rule of law, endorse a president-elect who has emerged from an unlawful process? Compromised is a ubiquitous word in Nigeria’s political landscape—it is used to mean “bribed” but also “corrupted,” more generally. “They have been compromised,” Nigerians will say, to explain so

much that is wrong, from infrastructure failures to unpaid pensions. Many believe that the INEC chair has been “compromised,” but there is no evidence of the astronomical U.S.-dollar amounts he is rumored to have received from the president-elect. The extremely wealthy Tinubu is himself known to be an enthusiastic participant in the art of “compromising”; some Nigerians call him a “drug baron” because, in 1993, he forfeited to the United States government \$460,000 of his income that a Chicago court determined to be proceeds from heroin trafficking. Tinubu has strongly denied all charges of corruption. I hope it will not surprise you, President Biden, if I argue that the American response to the Nigerian election also bears the faint taint of that word, compromised, because it is so removed from the actual situation in Nigeria as to be disingenuous. Has the United States once again decided that what matters in Africa is not democracy but stability? (Perhaps you could tell British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who quickly congratulated Tinubu, that an illegitimate government in a country full of frustrated young people does not portend stability.) Or is it about that ever-effulgent nemesis China, as so much of U.S. foreign policy now invariably seems to be? The battle for influence in Africa will not be won by supporting the same undemocratic processes for which China is criticized. This Nigerian election was supposed to be different, and the U.S. response cannot—must not—be business as usual. The Nigerian youth, long politically quiescent, have awoken. About 70 percent of Nigerians are under 30 and many voted for the first time in this election. Nigerian politicians exhibit a stupefying ability to tell barefaced lies, so to participate in political life has long required a suspension of conscience. But young people have had enough. They want transparency and truth; they want basic necessities, minimal corruption, competent political leaders, and an environment that can foster their generation’s potential. This election is also about the continent. Nigeria is a symbolic crucible of Africa’s future, and a transparent election will rouse millions of other young Africans who are watching, and who long, too, for the substance and not the hollow form of democracy. If people have confidence in the democratic process, it engenders hope, and nothing is more essential to the human spirit than hope. Today, election results are still being uploaded on the INEC server. Bizarrely, many contradict the results announced by INEC. The opposition parties are challenging the election in court. But there is reason to worry about whether they will get a fair ruling. INEC has not fully complied with court orders to release election materials. The credibility of the Nigerian Supreme Court has been strained by its recent judgments in political cases, or so-called judicial coronations, such as one in which the court declared the winner of the election for governor of Imo State a candidate who had come in fourth place. Lawlessness has consequences. Every day Nigerians are coming out into the streets to protest the election. APC, uneasy about its soiled “victory,” is sounding shrill and

desperate, as though still in campaign mode. It has accused the opposition party of treason, an unintelligent smear easily disproved but disquieting nonetheless, because false accusations are often used to justify malicious state actions. I supported Peter Obi, the Labour Party candidate, and hoped he would win, as polls predicted, but I was prepared to accept any result, because we had been assured that technology would guard the sanctity of votes. The smoldering disillusionment felt by many Nigerians is not so much because their candidate did not win as because the election they had dared to trust was, in the end, so unacceptably and unforgivably flawed. Congratulating its outcome, President Biden, tarnishes America's self-proclaimed commitment to democracy. Please do not give the sheen of legitimacy to an illegitimate process. The United States should be what it says it is.

Sincerely,

Chimamanda Adichie

In her open letter to the U.S. government, Adichie urged the US presidency to do more to help spread democracy in Nigeria. She portrays that the United States owed it to Nigeria and other African countries to support democratic reforms. She used Nigeria and other African nations as examples. According to her, President Biden should use his diplomatic influence to urge the government of Nigeria to address the electoral fraud that was discovered there. Adichie writes in her open letter that free and fair elections are crucial for Nigeria's democracy and political stability. Election malpractices erode public trust in the election system and threaten the legitimacy of the democratic process. They also foster an environment of fear and intimidation, which discourages citizens from engaging in the political process and undermines democratic ideals.

Some others saw her public statements condemning election interference and pleading for help from the international community as heroic displays of patriotism. These people consider these measures essential for ensuring a fair procedure. Others, however, are of the view that she is endangering Nigeria's independence by aggressively pursuing international engagement in the country's internal affairs. Nigerians' responses to the open letters have sparked debate, with some worried about the potential for a power/attention struggle between those who support the letter, led by Professor Yemi Oke, and those who do not, who are concerned about national sovereignty and outside interference.

### **National Sovereignty/Interference Perspective (Oke, 2023)**

Professor Yemi Oke had responded to the letter that Adichie had sent to President Joe Biden by kicking against the letter. This tends to reflect the opinion of the Nigerian public, who, regardless of whether they are dissatisfied with the results of the election or not, are in complete disagreement with Adichie's message. In view of the analysis done by the Vanguard online (April, 10, 2023), Oke's letter to President Joseph Biden of the

United States and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada states thus;

Dear PM and President,

It is most bewildering that a privileged Nigerian-born writer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, born in Enugu, Nigeria in 1977 but now lives in the United State of America, has decided to paint her country of origin "black". Sadly, Chimamandi's letter is a reckless affront on our resolve not to be part of the "brain-drain" syndrome against our dear country. Nigeria like the writer. Some of us are determined to be "brain-gain" to Nigeria. It is in view of this that we felt taken aback that Chimamandi went below expectations to pen- down a seditious letter against the Government and people of Nigeria. Chimamandi's letter titled "Nigeria's Hollow Democracy" was not about the election or person of the President-Elect, Bola Ahmed Tinubu whose victory was freely and fairly unveiled despite dis-oriented opposition politicking and those of their supporters in Nigeria and their allies in the diaspora. Chimamandi's letter was against entire "Nigeria's Democracy that was fought and procured with patriotic bloods, labour, efforts, lives and undeterred resolve of democrats, chief among them being Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, who, by divine arrangement, is now the President-Elect of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The misplaced reference to certain "The smoldering disillusionment felt by many Nigerians" in her letter is, at best Chimamanda's sole experience of agonies of defeat suffered by her and her preferred candidate/ Party in the recently concluded Presidential elections in Nigeria. Sedition is an offence in the US where Chimamandi lives. It is also an offence in Nigeria, her country of origin that she now holds and views with disdain. Sedition not only covers a person's actions but also any words or writings in print that may incite, encourage or promote the overthrowing of a government. The US criminalizes seditious conspiracy by virtue of 18 U.S.C. § 2384. Sedition is a transnational crime defined as the "inciting by words or writing to show disaffection towards the state or constituted authority". The transnational nature of sedition committed by US resident against sovereign nations led to the enactment of the Alien and Sedition Acts (1798) which aimed to prevent "aliens," or non-citizens, living in the United States from resorting to seditious acts or conduct, like Chimamandi did in her letter. The law authorized the President to deport "aliens," and also permitted their arrest, imprisonment, and deportation for seditious acts or conduct. The Sedition Act also made it a crime for American citizens to "print, utter, or publish...any false, scandalous, and malicious writing" about a government. Under the Nigerian constitution, Chimamandi's franchise, constitutional right to vote and be voted for, is guaranteed but the writer opted to snub the legal right by refusal to collect a PVC- Permanent Voter's Card. She opted to be more "American" than the real Americans! She also did not participate in Nigeria's election as a candidate or as eligible voter. She opted to make several videos to publicly

endorse and campaign for her “messianic candidate of the Labour Party. Chimamandi became needlessly embittered because her tribal option and those of her political Party failed woefully. Chimamandi’s claims and assertions on the recently concluded Presidential elections in Nigeria is not only ludicrous, it is also illogical, baseless and depicts ignoble ranting of an uninformed mind about legal and judicial processes or procedures. It is unimaginable that someone who did not participate or vote in an election would make categorical statements about an election she did not witness. What Chimamandi did not tell her gullible readers is that her candidate won mostly in her/his ethnic enclaves and that the President-Elect, Bola Tinubu, President Buhari, notable Nigerian Governors, Senators and others also lost in their strongholds, which should ordinarily have been their locational advantage for “manipulating” the outcome, as Chimamandi unconscionably and recklessly alleged. The Writer-turned ethnic politician did also not indicate that the Presidential election was conducted on the same date as the National Assembly elections in which the ruling party won about 60% of all seats in the Senate and House of Representatives. The winning trends of the APC is obvious, real, actual and all-embracing. Chimamandi represents recent generations of Nigerian intelligentsias in the diaspora. Her lonely voice on the election of President-Elect Bola Ahmed Tinubu is, at best, a muted trumpet which is audible to no one except herself and her co-travelers. The only legal and legitimate option is for her candidate, Peter Obi, not Chimamandi herself because she lacks the locus standi, to approach the Presidential Election Petition Tribunal as provided by Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended). This has since been done, and further makes it illogical for Chiamamandi to resort to writing letters capable of inciting ethnic or violent reactions in Nigeria while she resides in the comfort of the US, her new found home or haven, which was fought for and procured with hard labour and commitment of Americans. If Chimamandi is unwilling to sacrifice to make Nigeria better, she should kindly desist from undermining the resolve of those of us who believe that Nigeria could be better if we all make necessary sacrifices like American did to build their country where Chimamadi now sojourns. Chimamandi’s letter is most unbecoming. Nigerians have spoken with their votes in the election, and they spoke loudly and clearly. The losers have since taken to the legal and legitimate options of challenging the outcome. Legally speaking, the issue is now subjudice. Chimammadi’s letter may be viewed as an attempt to undermine the course of justice or pre-empt the outcome of judicial processes. This is similar to the same way and manner her party and candidate orchestrated polls to pre-empt the outcome of an election they knew they could never win, as they planked their electioneering and campaign activities on tribal and other ethnocentric and religious sentiments. This is also reflected in the outcome of the elections as results empirically validated this

assertion. The position of law in Nigeria (and similar to all civilized democracies of the world, including Canada and the US), is that: any individual or political party that intends to challenge or question the result of an election must ensure the petition is established on a valid ground or reason recognized by law. An election petition can only succeed with valid grounds recognized by the 1999 Constitution or Electoral Act, 2022. The expectations of Nigerians are very high on the up-coming Bola Ahmed Tinubu Presidency, which had triumphed over all known forces of religious bigotry of “Muslim-Muslim ticket, ethnicity and other divisive tendencies. Elections have come and gone. The battle now shifts to the Presidential Election Tribunal. The act of serious, progressive and purposeful governance must immediately commence and continue pending legal battles. The President-Elect is no longer for the APC. He has declared that he is now for APC as much as for PDP, LP, and other major political parties in Nigeria. More importantly, he has also declared that his administration will govern for the benefit of those who voted for or against it. Now that the season of politics, politicking and electioneering is over, it is time for all of us to collaborate, including diaspora Nigerian citizens, writers andmbintelligentsias like the Chimamandis of the US, Canada, the UK and elsewhere, to team-up and get Nigeria working again under PRESIDENT BOLA AHMED TINUBU. The GIANT called NIGERIA must rise, and never fall again! The intention of this open letter is not to vilify, ridicule or incite and set the law of sedition in motion against Chimamandi. It is to right-size her over-bloated ego of perceived global self-esteem. She needs to realise that thousands, if not millions of Nigerians (including those of us who are now back home in Nigeria- but still frequently travel to those sides - to be a part of the solution and those still in the diaspora) have had similar and even better opportunities in Canada, US, UK and other countries of the world without deploying our privileged positions to undermine our country of origin, Nigeria. At a time all hands are on deck to build a Nigeria of Renewed Hope under the in-Coming President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the unpatriotic Chimamandis opted for the ignoble act of stimulating crisis against Nigeria, a country that prepared them for their perceived global fames. This is not the Canadian or American culture we had imbibed and which has now positively and progressively shaped our worldviews and socio-political and other forms of engagements. For the records, the pride of Canada and the US democracies is Multi-ethnicity and Multiculturalism, not ethnocentrism. This is a vital lesson for all concerned. Thank you.

Yours Faithfully,

Prof. Yemi Oke, PhD, FCTI, FCIARb

This research challenges that conventional wisdom by demonstrating unequivocally that both letters address the sociopolitical realities of Nigeria, far apart from any appeal to ethnicity. This research reveals clearly that beyond the cry for ethnic significance, both letters address the socio-political reality of Nigeria, which has

been misunderstood by many Nigerians who saw the response letter from Professor Yemi Oke to Chimamanda Adichie as a tribal fight and a demonstration of nepotistic opportunists. Independence, national sovereignty, and the possibility of intervention from inside are highlighted by the latter, while the former emphasises the crucial need for openness and accountability.

### **Concerns for Openness/Accountability and National Sovereignty**

The concern for electoral accountability and national sovereignty certainly played out in this setting (Adichie vs. Oke) where there is a conflict between the need for accountability and openness in a country and the necessity to defend national sovereignty. This is a difficult problem that has been contested for decades and is a topic that has been discussed for a long time. On the one hand, accountability and transparency are important concepts of good governance that guarantee people in power are held accountable for their actions (Taufiq, 2015). On the other hand, sustaining a country's national sovereignty is an essential component of preserving a nation's independent status and capacity for self-determination (Khosrowjerdi, 2022).

In her letter, Adichie specifically requested that the government seek aid from outside sources in its pursuit of accountability and transparency. Several nations have reached out to the international community and other governments for assistance in establishing institutions that can foster good governance, as stated by Jashari and Pepaj (2018). Separate and impartial judicial and electoral commissions, as well as anti-corruption agencies, are examples of such organisations. Providing technical help and experience that is often missing in underdeveloped countries, these programmes have the potential to be highly successful in increasing transparency and accountability.

As stated by Epstein and Kronstadt (2013), many times when a foreign government or organisation offers assistance, they tack on conditions to the finance that require the recipient country to adopt particular policies or reforms. Because of the potential for this to be seen as interference in a country's internal affairs, it might provoke hostility from domestic actors who believe their independence is being threatened. This may worsen the problem in some way. Furthermore, foreign aid may have unintended consequences, some of which may be harmful to the same institutions that it is meant to strengthen (Ifeoma, 2008). For instance, receiving foreign aid can lead to a reliance on external financing and policy decisions, which can stymie the development of long-lasting local institutions and dampen ownership and commitment from local players. Corruption in the delivery of foreign assistance is another factor that might erode people's trust in their government and other organisations. The public's confidence in their government and other institutions may suffer as a result.

### **CONCLUSION**

Resolving the tension between Adichie's and Oke's letters, which present opposing views on the importance of openness and accountability and the value of independence and national sovereignty, respectively, requires that all matters be handled on the basis of deliberate patriotism and without any sentiment of ethnic biases as was perceived by Nigerians. The letters sent by Oke and Adichie provide insight on these viewpoints. Patriotism is a necessary trait in every free society. It is the strong attachment one has to one's homeland, its people, and the values it maintains. Deliberate patriotism is shown when one takes active steps to protect national ideas and beliefs. Election day difficulties and other threats to democratic processes, such as voter fraud, call for an overt expression of patriotism. If voters are to have any trust in their government or the democratic process as a whole, elections must be conducted in a free and fair way. Professor of Religious Studies at Boston University, Nimi Wariboko, argues that patriotism is essential for solving political issues in the right way. Having pride in one's country and the democratic values it represents is crucial, as it will motivate people to strive towards ensuring that the process is carried out in a free and fair manner. This statement highlights the value of conscious patriotism that is not tainted by bias towards any group while discussing national elections. In addition, vigilant patriotism ensures that the democratic process is not polluted by elements like as violence, corruption, or foreign interference. Fraudulent elections, efforts to suppress the vote, and party political infighting all pose threats to the sustainability and efficacy of Nigeria's democratic system. Dealing with threats to democracy calls for calculated patriotism, which helps in ensuring that democratic ideals are not watered down in any manner. To counteract the forces that want to undermine the democratic process, a deep sense of loyalty to one's country and the democratic ideals it defends is crucial.

The likelihood of a peaceful response to a democratic crisis, such as claims of election fraud, increases when citizens actively practise patriotism. People who care deeply about their country and the democratic values it represents are more inclined to engage in civil, constructive debate in the pursuit of answers to pressing issues. A sense of loyalty to the country and its democratic principles ensures that people will engage in peaceful and constructive dialogue to resolve issues. While both letters considered in the study tends to stream from different ethnic backgrounds within the country, this study resolves that response to the issues on the grounds of deliberate patriotism should be done without any intention to downplay the unity of the nation's distinct entities. As such, this conclusion should be applied to all cases in the future if similar needs arises.

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