

# **Role of Slogan in Political Mobilisation in Nigeria: A Study on 'O To Ge'**

Ibrahim Lawal Ahmed<sup>\*</sup>

## **Abstract**

One of the tasks of political parties in the modern democracy is political mobilization. In a competitive democracy political mobilization requires good strategy which demands exploitation of all the tools of mobilization. Political mobilization in Nigeria is simply reduce to election, hence, politicians increasingly tend to rely on bribe and intimidation of people to woe them into voting a particular party. Moreover, through institutionalization of poverty and manipulation of religion, traditional values and generosity, neopatrimonialism becomes a salient feature of Nigeria's politics. However, the deep divide between the elite and the people provides an opportunity to exploit in order to defeat neopatrimonialism and win an election in a fair and peaceful manner. In this regard, slogan is a powerful mobilization tool that politicians and political parties should pay attention to. Using secondary data analysis, the paper exposes the power of political slogan as shown by O To Ge in Kwara State. The paper shows how slogan can be developed by careful study of the socio-economic condition of the people and the attitude of the ruling party to break the neopatrimonial politics and achieve an electoral victory.

**Key Words:** Political Mobilisation, Neopatrimonialism, Slogan, Saraki, O To Ge

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<sup>\*</sup> Research Scholar, Bayero University Kano. email: ibrahim.lawal26@gmail.com

## INTRODUCTION

In Political mobilization is a primary function of political parties. It is a comprehensive activity that is geared towards making the citizens to participate in the political affairs of the state. But in a young democracy of Nigeria, it is primarily about mobilization of voters to polling unit. In a country where voters' apathy is a defining character of general election, as can be seen in the recently concluded 2019 election<sup>1</sup>, political mobilization becomes *r'aison d'etre* of political parties. But the challenge for any party is to canvass and sway voters to vote for them. Political parties in Nigeria usually engaged in fierce competition not because they want to implement their manifesto for the welfare of the masses but because of the candidates' and their allies desperate desire to have political office which will give them access to state resources. Therefore, democracy in Nigeria can be define in the words of Schumpeter as an institutional arrangement where individuals acquire the authority to decide by competitive struggle of power<sup>2</sup>. This is largely "because the state controls opportunities for profit through commerce, (therefore) politics becomes dominated by struggles for position in the state or for access to those who have influence over government decisions"<sup>3</sup>. Political parties are thus, platform that facilitates convergence of elites, their access to resources and securing their investment (status quo). Therefore, political mobilization is so significant to political parties in Nigeria that they device and adopt any means possible to influence voting pattern in their favour. It has almost become the tradition of political parties to use monetary and commodity gifts to entice voters into voting them.

The legitimate instruments of mobilization by political parties in Nigeria can be surmised as 4s: Social media, Songs, Symbols and Slogans. Social media is an internet-based network. It enables users to produce messages, interact and share content. The increasing number of Nigerians using social media; the network nature of the internet combined with the opportunity for collaboration has made internet an important tool for political mobilization. Hardly a political party and politician in Nigeria that does not have Facebook and Twitter account.

Songs are means of entertainment that is rooted in Nigeria's culture. Hence, entertainment is a formidable desire among Nigerians that cannot be underrated. Kukah in his analysis of politics and religion in the Second Republic (1979-1983) identified songs in politics as a strong mechanism for political mobilisation<sup>4</sup>. The proliferation of political songs in the political scene in Nigeria pointed to the degree to which political parties use this means.

Symbols can be in form of gestures, mode of dressing or a particular object. They reflect a course of action, aim or allegiance and solidarity. The wearing of red cap by Kwankwaso's supporters shows their allegiance to Kwankwaso. The use of broom by the current ruling party, All Progressive Congress (APC), conveys the party's aim of uniting the nation which is in line with the national objective of building unity in diversity.

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<sup>1</sup> Out of the 82,344,107 registered voters in Nigeria, only 29,903,797 votes were casted at 2019 Presidential Elections

<sup>2</sup> Schumpeter, John. *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, New York: Harper & Row, 1976.

<sup>3</sup> Turner, Terisa. 'Commercial Capitalism and the 1975 Coup' in Panther Brick, K. (ed), *Soldiers and Oil: The Political Transformation of Nigeria*, London: Frank Cass, 1978

<sup>4</sup> Kukah, Matthew Hassan. "Religion, politics and power in Northern Nigeria." (1993).

The focus of this paper is slogan. The paper proceeds to next section to look at Slogan and its usage in Nigeria. Section III delves into the slogan O To Ge and the reason for its success and section IV concludes with a note to Nigerian politicians.

## **SLOGAN AND ITS USAGE BY POLITICAL PARTIES IN NIGERIA**

Slogans are catch-phrases use by political parties to induce electorates to votes for them. In Nigerian context, many a times, candidates take precedence over the political party (manifesto). Therefore, slogan is more of a concise statement that describes or summarises a candidate's ideology and philosophy. It conveys the political mission of the candidate to the electorates<sup>5</sup>.

Slogans carry meaning beyond the conceptual denotation level. It carries connotation. Connotation in political context refers to feelings, attitude and moods<sup>6</sup>. This means slogan embodies the emotion of the people. It has to appeal to the conscience of the people. Therefore, it is preferable to use native language or language widely understood by the electorates. From the fore going, it can be deduced that good slogan has the following key features:

1. It must be concise.
2. It should convey the mission of the candidate or political party.
3. It should be timely by touching the concerns, hence, the mood of the voters and appeal to their conscience, emotion and patriotism.
4. It should be in a language predominantly spoken by the targeted electorates.

Slogans vary in terms of focus. It can be *personality or phenomena focus*. The personality focus slogans are two types. The first type, which is positive, the electorate's attention is drawn to the good qualities of the politician. The second type, which is negative, the electorate is told why he/she should not vote for a particular candidate. In both, the slogans centred on the candidates of the parties<sup>7</sup>.

Phenomena focus slogans are those that focus on the problems that exist in the society. The presentation is done in two ways: in the first, the problems are highlighted and then attributed to the opponent party or the opposition party is depicted as incapable of dealing with the problems while the other party is portrayed as the one having the solution. In the second, the problems are presented in a way that accusing finger is pointed at the opposition candidate/party as being responsible for the problems<sup>8</sup>.

Nigerian politicians and political parties are not master craft of slogans. Most Nigerian politicians sought to invocation of God as their slogan: "In God We Trust," "Victory is from God" etc. Historically, Nigeria had some captivating slogans that are still remembered with nostalgia. One of the finest slogans of the First Republic is that of Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU)'s 'Sawaba' meaning 'Redemption.' It was coined in the 1950s

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<sup>5</sup> Sharndama, Emmanuel C., and Ibrahim Mohammed. "Stylistic analysis of selected political campaign posters and slogans in Yola Metropolis of Adamawa State of Nigeria." *Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (AJHSS)* 1, no. 3 (2013): 60-68.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ezejideaku, Emma, and E. Ugwu. "The rhetoric & propaganda of political campaigns in Nigeria." *JOLAN* 10 (2007): 9-26.

during colonial era. It means redemption against colonial officials and their aristocratic allies who were traditional rulers. The slogan captured the party's manifesto, problem and the mood of the people. The term was later absorbed in the party re-incarnated, People's Redemption Party (PRP).

In the Second Republic, United Progressive Party (UPN) used slogan 'UP Nigeria' to canvassed support. Similarly, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) used "Say One Nigeria" to establish its presence across the federation. The Social Democratic Party (SDP) spear-headed by MKO Abiola, in the defunct Third Republic coined a slogan "Hope '93" to mobilize Nigerians to win the presidential election in 1993. It was a powerful slogan that suited the condition of the country which was suffering in the face of Structural Adjustment Programme by the military government.

In the Fourth Republic, there were not many good and powerful slogans. A former Lagos State governor, Babatunde Raji Fashola, developed a slogan "BRF is working" in 2011 to ride on the infrastructural works he was doing to the state. BRF is an acronym of his name. The ground breaking slogan of this period was that of All Progressive Congress (APC)'s "Change" in 2015. As Nigerians felt that they have sunk deeper and deeper into quagmire for sixteen years of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)'s rule, 'Change' was the perfect slogan that captured their mood.

The 2019 general election has little to write about on good slogans. Even the ruling party that initiated 'Change' in the 2015 general election did not bring a similar chagrin slogan like it. APC's 'Next Level' may be interpreted as another recession for many Nigerians. 'Let's Get Nigeria Working Again' by PDP is as good as saying another misrule because one is left to wonder whether Nigeria was working. Political candidates resorted to using their names which turns out to be even worse. Atiku Abubakar, Presidential candidate of PDP, turns to ATIKULATED, what message does that convey? Benue State governor, Samuel Ortom, decided his slogan will be ORTOMATIC. Does that mean his election is automatic and no voter need to go and vote for him? That of Enugu State's Governor, Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi, is classic in Nigeria's politics. The bill boards had bold inscription: "Enugu is in God's hands." Indeed, religion is instrumentalised in Nigeria's politics.

In the midst of this meaninglessness, there is one slogan that stood-out. It embodies most of the qualities of good slogan and it got the job done. It emerged from the State that has no history of bitter contestation until now. That is Kwara State. And that slogan is *O To Ge*.

### **O TO GE: WHY IT SUCCEEDED**

O To Ge is the slogan used by All Progressive Congress (APC) in Kwara State to win people's votes in all the elections; Presidential, Gubernatorial, National Assembly and House of Assembly elections. It was a trail blazer slogan that had a tremendous success. Thus, there is claim and counter-claim about who in specific coined the slogan. One version stated that it was coined by a septuagenarian, by name, Alhaji LAK Jimoh, a veteran politician. Similarly, an advertising agency called "The Hook Creative Agency" said that it originated the term. Regardless of who first coined and initiated the term, it is safe to infer that the Hook Creative Agency was hired by APC to publicise it. They use all means available, bill boards, social media, radio et cetera, to

turn *O To Ge* into household name and the powerful drive that saw Kwarans trooping out to vote for the party.

O To Ge simply means *Enough is Enough*. But enough of what? Enough of Saraki's family dominance of Kwara's politics. And why? A look into Kwara State and Saraki family's political dynasty will expose the reason for the success of this slogan and the deep meaning it conveys.

### **Kwara And The Saraki's Political Dynasty**

For almost four decades, the Kwara State politics was dominated by the Saraki family. They decide who get what and when. The founder of the dynasty is the father of Bukola Saraki, the Senate President of the 8<sup>th</sup> Assembly, Olusola Abubakar Saraki<sup>9</sup>. He was a medical doctor by profession. He came from a humble royal background. He started venturing into politics in the First Republic in 1964 when he contested for a seat in the parliament but lost. He burnt his finger and decided never again.

He returned to his medicine profession and used the wealth he had garnered benevolently to get people's popularity. As such on his return in the Second Republic, he was able to win a Senatorial seat and went on to be a majority leader. He used that position to be more popular than he was before. Thus, when he contested again in 1983, he was not only able to secure his seat but also helped several others including the candidate for the gubernatorial seat, Cornelius Adebayo. He grew so powerful after the second republic deciding who become the governor and all the strategic political offices in Kwara State. Thus, he became "a Kingmaker."

In the 2003 general election, after the return of democracy in 1999, Olusola Saraki decided his son, Bukola Saraki, who he had mentored, should be the governor. That year, he would be 70, therefore needed to establish a successor that will continue with the machinery. This was also necessitated as they had a fall-out with the then incumbent governor, Mohammed Lawal. He was successful in making his son the governor of Kwara State and his daughter, Gbemisola Saraki, a senator.

Olusola Saraki's source of power was manipulation of one of the powerful persuasion instruments which is generosity. His generosity was like that of Arctic explorers who leave caches of food scattered on the route to the North pole just in case they may need them one day. In the cause of his life, he was able to build what Aina and Bhekinkosi (2013:5) described as "social relations of assistance and institutionalized givings." The law of persuasion stated that when you give someone a gift or did a kind act to him, that person feels obligated to reciprocate. As such, Olusola Saraki always gets people to do his wish. He was said to be humble and simple at least, until he got power drunk to make his children the kings.

His character is contrary to that of his son and successor, Bukola Saraki, who is very arrogant from day one. And it was the son, as a successor that began to cripple the dynasty and put a halt to the old man's obvious megalomania when he (Saraki senior) sent to him (Saraki junior) a complete list of all that would be appointed commissioners. Bukola Saraki outrightly refused to

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<sup>9</sup> Animasawun, Gbemisola A. "Olusola Saraki, Charismatic Leadership, and Patron-Client Relations in Modern Ilorin." In *Governance and the Crisis of Rule in Contemporary Africa*, pp. 265-293. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2016.

abide. He began to build his own political niche and distancing himself from the influence of the old Saraki. The discord in the dynasty reached its climax and became exposed when Olusola Saraki tried to make Gbemisola Saraki (his daughter and two-time Senator) succeed her brother, Bukola Saraki in 2011 general elections. At that moment, people began to gesture that this was 'enough.' Kwara is a conservative Islamic dominated state and according to orthodox Islamic teaching, woman is forbidden to lead people.

Bukola Saraki knowing he could not control his sister, moreover, by virtue of coming from different mothers, there is a natural rivalry between them, decided to capitalize over this miscalculation of his father to his own advantage. He openly went against his father's wish and backed a stooge, Abdulfatah Ahmed. The defeat of Gbemisola was a personal defeat to Olusola and completed the coup de grace. A year later, he succumbed and died.

In 2015, Bukola Saraki defected to All Progressive Congress (APC) from Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) with his followers and retained his senatorial seat. He maneuvered his way against his party, APC, to become the 8<sup>th</sup> Senate President, with his deputy from the opposition party. This was unprecedented. He managed the Senate in a militaristic manner. Victimizing anyone who opposed his conducts and ways of doing things through suspension and other means of intimidation such as undue removal from a position as it was done to Ali Ndume, who was removed as majority leader unduly<sup>10</sup>.

His successes made him to be look upon by some analysts as a smart politician, which he believes he is. He also felt he was the smartest ace in the Nigerian politics, as his body language and actions denoted. As such, he grew even more ambitious and over-confident. His ambition made him to seek to be President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. His over confidence made him neglect his base and he became disconnected with the grass root. His aides diverted privileges from him for their private use knowing that he no longer had the capacity to checkmate them<sup>11</sup>. Hence, the internal party crisis which had its root to his anti-party stance and the legislature-executive conflict made him to leave the ruling party APC and defected to PDP, and for the first time run on the platform of a party that is not the ruling party at the federal level. Many of his loyalists did not go with him and some deserted him later. His arrogance and pride shadow his sight to see the need to get them back.

The Kwara people, since the assumption of Bukola Saraki as Governor in 2003 have had their worse. Poverty has increased at alarming rate that by the dawn of his tenure, in 2010, the Kwara State Bureau of Statistics estimated poverty of the state to be 80.54 percent<sup>12</sup>. The Abdulfatah Ahmed's administration was not viewed as different from that of Bukola Saraki. In fact, to many people, Bukola Saraki remained the Governor. This is close to truth looking at the pension benefits he enjoyed. Before leaving office, Bukola Saraki made sure a pension law was approved

<sup>10</sup> Gidado, Taofeek Oluwayomi. "Internal democracy and leadership crisis in the Nigerian legislature." In *Africa Now!*, pp. 167-187. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Animasawun, Gbemisola A. "Olusola Saraki, Charismatic Leadership, and Patron-Client Relations in Modern Ilorin." In *Governance and the Crisis of Rule in Contemporary Africa*, pp. 265-293. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Mustapha, Rafiu A., Rashidat Akande, and Sodiql Jimoh. "Impact of poverty reduction program of the Kwara State government of Nigeria on the beneficiaries." *International Journal of Economics, Commerce and Management* 3 (2017): 247-262.

that allows a governor after leaving office to receive a monthly pension benefit equivalent to the monthly salary earned while in office. Additional benefits include: a state-of-the-art residence within the state, an annual vacation of 30 days outside Nigeria with daily estacodes, free medical treatment for the governor and family members anywhere worldwide, three cars and a police pilot car, as well as two backup cars - to be replaced every three years en bloc; a furniture allowance payable every two years en bloc; two cooks, a steward, gardener and other domestic staff whose salaries are pensionable; two SSS (State Security Service) details and eight policemen (one of which must be a female, for house and personal security)<sup>13</sup>.

*This is in stark difference to over 9,000 pensioners in Kwara, who have each contributed 35 years of service to the state, have been battling for years to recover N1.68bn owed them by the Kwara State government. Cash-strapped and unable to pay salaries and pensions, the government slashed the already meagre pensions (some as low as N4, 000) of these retired civil servants by 50%. The pensioners took the case to court but lost, when the state appealed the initial judgment (Oxfam Report on Nigeria, 2017)<sup>14</sup>.*

The above was the situation as at 2016. As of September 2018, teachers and local government workers are owed salary of four and eight months respectively. Core Civil Servants and teachers are owed gratuity of three years and local government workers, ten years. Teachers were owed pensions of between three to four months and local government workers, between seven and eight months. Promotion and annual increment are owed since 2013<sup>15</sup>. This was the condition of Kwara people as the campaign for 2019 general elections kicked off.

### **O To Ge: Epitaph of Saraki's Dynasty**

O To Ge is a simple catch phrase in a native Yoruba language that aptly captured the feelings and frustrations of the people and also tell them what they need to do. And they boldly did it. As Lai Mohammed noted, it represents people's determination; to decide their own fate by taking back power to themselves. It focus encompassed the establishment as well as the problems of the state.

Many Nigerians were shocked by the result in Kwara. It displayed Bukola Saraki as one huge empty vessel. He blamed INEC for his failure. This shows how disconnected he is with the ground; his head is in the cloud; he has not grasped what hits him.

The Kwara people, on the other hand, celebrated with excitement of salvation that they can now decide who get what in the State. In Africa, revolution from the grass root is rare because Africans are obedient to their leaders and relied on their leaders for their own well being, in fact, history has shown that there was hardly a successful grass root revolution in Africa<sup>16</sup>. Therefore,

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<sup>13</sup> Mustapha, Rafiu A., Rashidat Akande, and Sodiql Jimoh. "Impact of poverty reduction program of the Kwara State government of Nigeria on the beneficiaries." *International Journal of Economics, Commerce and Management* 3 (2017): 247-262.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Brunet, Charles, Pravin Vaity, Younès Messaddeq, Sophie LaRochelle, and Leslie A. Rusch. "Design, fabrication and validation of an OAM fiber supporting 36 states." *Optics express* 22, no. 21 (2014): 26117-26127.

<sup>16</sup> Salamone, Frank A. "The African Origin of Civilisation and the Destiny of Africa." *Africa Today* 51, no. 2 (2004): 132-132.

this is very important to Kwara people who are typical Africans; conservative and subservient. O To Ge has made them to realize and actualize a potential which they thought they do not have. The slogan expressed the silent voice of the common men. It spoke to the heart of the people, hence, gave people the reason to come out en mass to vote. Thus, in the final analysis, as Kwara people beat their drums, dance and chanted in triumph O TO Ge! It means to them beyond fall of dynasty, good riddance to bad rubbish.

## CONCLUSION

Slogan is a powerful instrument of political mobilization that politicians and political parties in Nigeria should pay attention to in their propaganda. It is a good chip to getting votes. Successful slogans in Nigeria are usually one that captured the problems of the society aptly and pointed an accusation finger to the opposition.

The 2019 election revealed a sharp delink between politicians and the voters. No longer do the politicians have knowledge and understanding of the people at the bottom of the society. They believe they are gullible pigeons. Unknowingly, the masses are developing a political sophistication at their own level. Bribing voters cannot assure getting the votes. Use of thugs to intimidate voters is not a sustainable strategy as it can easily be curtailed by security operatives. Therefore, slogan is something the politicians and the political parties should adapt, master and wield it as a propaganda tool.

Use of slogan can certainly assured great victory as the case of O To Ge in Kwara State has already shown. O To Ge suited the condition and yearning of the people. Godfatherism or neopatrimonialism is a salient feature of Nigerian party politics which the Kwarans have had it for decades. O To Ge therefore means enough of that practice and the slogan spoke-out the inaudible voice of the masses. This gives them reason to vote.

As O To Ge has aroused a powerful urge for improvement in the welfare of people and made the people realize that power belongs to them, the winning party, APC in Kwara State has a tremendous task ahead of it. People will not listen to excuses for failure but rather results. Either one delivers or will be voted out. O To Ge has started a euphoria that will breeze for long. This leaves two questions, what do the Kwara people want? Can and will other States also replicate what happened in Kwara State?



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