

THE ROAD TO 2023 AND ABUSE OF STATE ADMINISTRATIVE RESOURCES

(Report Prepared by Centre for Social Justice)



(Mainstreaming Social Justice in Public Life)

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By

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
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| APC | All Progressives Congress |
| APCON | Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria |
| CEO | Chief Executive Officer |
| CRISSA | Cross River State Signage and Advertisement Agency |
| FCET | Federal College of Education |
| FUPR | Federal University of Petroleum Resources |
| GOSUPDA | Gombe State Urban Planning and Development Authority |
| INEC | Independent National Electoral Commission |
| KUDA | Kebbi State Urban Development Authority |
| LP | Labour Party |
| NIDCOM | Nigerians in Diaspora Commission |
| NNPP | New Nigeria Peoples Party |
| NUDB | Nasarawa State Urban Development Board |
| PAF | Presidential Air Fleet |
| PCC | Presidential Campaign Council |
| PDP | Peoples Democratic Party |
| SAR | State Administrative Resources |
| YPP | Young Democratic Party |

1. INTRODUCTION

State Administrative Resources (SAR) are public resources at the disposal of the three tiers of government for the day-to-day performance of state duties and functions. These resources could be financial, administrative/institutional, media, regulatory, coercive, legislative, etc.

For financial resources, public funds secured through kickbacks and over-invoicing of contracts can be used to finance the campaign of the incumbents. Public funds directly stolen from the budget can also be used to fund campaigns. Institutional resources including human and material resources could be cornered by the incumbents for their use. Government-owned media can dedicate more time to incumbents while disparaging the opposition in abuse of media resources. Law enforcement agencies can intimidate the opposition and their supporters, unduly or maliciously prosecute them while regulation of the opposition may become stricter and more demanding than usually required of incumbent parties and candidates. The legislature's power of law-making and oversight can be abused to frustrate the opposition.

By S.95 of the Electoral Act 2022, it is provided that:

- (1): *A candidate and his or her party shall campaign for the elections in accordance with such rules and regulations as may be determined by the Commission.*
- (2) *State apparatus including the media shall not be employed to the advantage or disadvantage of any political party or candidate at any election.*

The 2013 Political Parties Code of Conduct had provided that:

All parties shall discourage their members in government from using their power of incumbency to the disadvantage of other parties or their candidates during campaigns.

The earlier 2011 Political Parties Code of Conduct in paragraph 9 stated that all political parties shall separate party business from government business. As such, political parties shall not utilize public resources for any party activities and shall not permit any of its sponsored candidates holding public office to use public resources for the purpose of political campaigning in elections.

The underlying jurisprudence on safeguarding SAR and prohibiting their deployment in elections is to create a level playing field for all candidates and parties. Deploying SAR in favour of incumbents will undermine democracy by creating an uneven playing field in favour of incumbents and their party. Furthermore, this will undermine the constitutional non-discrimination provisions found in the Fundamental Rights chapter of the Constitution. In addition, putting public assets at the incumbent party's disposal in its drive for re-election negatively influences the quality of governance, since the diversion of

resources incurs financial costs for the institutions involved and may reduce the quantity or quality of services provided to the public.

However, the rule against the deployment of SAR seems to be one of those sections of the Electoral Act more obeyed in the breach. This report documents the key abuses of SAR since the 2023 campaigns started.

2. ABUSE OF HUMAN RESOURCES FOR PARTISAN PURPOSES

2.1 Minister Fetsus Keyamo: In August 2022, the Nigerian Minister of State for Labour and Employment, Festus Keyamo was appointed as the official spokesperson of the APC Presidential Campaign Organisation. He has been most visible in that capacity throughout the electioneering period to the detriment of his official duties. Festus Keyamo is paid at the tax-payer's expense as a minister. He is expected under the law to dedicate 100% of his time to the issues and challenges facing the Ministry. A Minister is not a part-time job that can be combined with other assignments. The fact of being paid with public funds disqualifies him from dedicating his time for partisan purposes and if he must do so, he should be seen to be speaking for all registered political parties. Thus, instead of the All Progressives Congress spending its resources to hire a spokesperson, the treasury was compelled to pay for the party whilst other parties paid from their private resources.

2.2 Abike Dabiri-Erewa: Also, Abike Dabiri-Erewa the Chairman/CEO Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM), was appointed as the Chairman of the Diaspora Mobilisation Committee of the APC's Tinubu/Shettima Women's Campaign Team for the 2023 general election.¹ She is also director (South) for Protocol and Events of the Tinubu/Shettima 2023 Presidential Campaign Council. She has since been vigorously deploying her time, paid for at the public expense to the partisan purpose of her party's re-election to the disadvantage of other parties.

3. USE OF GOVERNMENT VEHICLES AND AIRCRAFT

The use of official vehicles and aircrafts by the incumbent All Progressive Congress (APC) during campaigns has been very visible. On the October 24, 2022, the Punch Newspaper reported that Senator Remi Tinubu, the wife of the presidential candidate of the APC, Bola Ahmed Tinubu and Nana Shettima, wife of Tinubu's running mate, Kashim

¹ The Cable Newspaper, October 1, 2022: Aisha Buhari named grand patron of APC women campaign team... Joke Silva, Abike Dabiri appointed into committees: <https://www.thecable.ng/joke-silva-abike-dabiri-appointed-into-apc-women-campaign-team-aisha-buhari-named-grand-patron>, accessed January 24, 2023

Shettima, on Monday, arrived in Makurdi, Benue State, aboard a Nigerian Airforce aircraft to commiserate with flood victims in the state.²

3.1 Official Aircraft at APC's Presidential Campaign Inauguration in Jos: On November 16, 2022 President Mohammadu Buhari and his team flew at least four state aircraft to the presidential campaign inauguration of Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu and his running mate, Alhaji Kashim Shettima in Jos, Plateau State. Some of the aircraft in the Presidential Air Fleet were PAF Boeing 737 with registration number 5N-FGT, PAF Nigerian Air Force helicopter with registration number HIP004. Also on the ground at the airport was PAF helicopter with registration number 5N-FGI, NAF aircraft F900 with registration number NGR961. Findings show that the airport lacks adequate parking space for the high number of aircraft arriving in the state capital. As such, some of the aircraft were forced to fly to Abuja to park, which is about 30 minutes flight from Plateau. It made it easier for the pilots of the VIP jets to return to pick up their passengers.³

Political campaign finance rules dictate that state resources such as the above mentioned aircraft should not be deployed to advance the interest of the ruling party. The use of state-owned aircraft by the president and his team for the campaign in Jos tips the balance in their favour even when they are already advantaged in the contest by their incumbency.

Across the States of the Federation, monitored reports indicate that virtually all the governors and senior government officials have been attending rallies and campaigns with their official vehicles. They see nothing wrong with their action as they deem it their right to move around with the vehicles no matter the occasion.

4. ABUSE OF REGULATORY RESOURCES

4.1 Jos, PDP and Airport Incident: On December 13, 2022, Channels Television reported that at least 100 members of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) were stranded at the Yakubu Gowon Stadium in Jos, the Plateau State capital moments after concluding the party's presidential campaign rally in the state on Tuesday.⁴ Among those stranded was the National Organising Secretary of the PDP, Umar Bature. Also stranded were

² Tinubu, Shettima's Wives Travel To Benue On Board NAF Aircraft: <https://twitter.com/MobilePunch/status/1584597305977892865?s=20&t=fiUqWnebvXXBqBH61BGAHQ> accessed December 19, 2022

³ Punch Newspaper, November 16, 2022: Tinubu campaign: VIPs hit Plateau with 30 private, chartered jets: <https://punchng.com/tinubu-campaign-vips-hit-plateau-with-30-private-chartered-jets/> accessed January 24, 2023

⁴ Atiku's Security Team, Journalists, Others Stranded As Jos Airport Shuts Down: <https://www.channelstv.com/2022/12/13/atikus-security-team-journalists-others-stranded-as-jos-airport-shuts-down/> accessed December 19, 2022

security personnel working directly with the PDP presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar, as well as journalists.

Atiku and the PDP Presidential Campaign Council (PCC) were said to have been transported to the airport shortly after the rally. About 30 minutes later, the PDP candidate and some top members of the party reportedly boarded and departed from the state. However, shortly thereafter, the airport tower signal went off. It was gathered that an aircraft that was about to land could not land and was forced to turn back.

An airport worker explained that the staff received instructions to shut down the facility at exactly 5:30 pm, claiming that there was no request for an extension of time by the PDP. Some PDP members alleged that this could have been politically motivated with a member of the PDP, Justice Abraham accusing the APC of ordering the shutdown of the airport. But three hours later, the tower signal came back. Two aircraft arrived at the airport to move the stranded passengers to Abuja.

4.2 The Ebonyi Labour Party Incident: Also, on September 17, 2022, the Police in Ebonyi State dispersed hundreds of supporters of Labour Party presidential candidate Peter Obi who gathered for a rally. The Police accused the party supporters of not paying the required fees and attacking Police officers. In a statement sent to journalists, the Ebonyi Police Spokesperson, Chris Anyanwu, said the Police acted based “on the rules of engagement.” Mr Anyanwu said that the Police acted based on the request of the Ebonyi State Government over the non-payment of approved fees.⁵

4.3 Implementation of Governor Nyesom Wike’s Executive Order: Although, there are no reports of the destruction of campaign billboards in Rivers State, Governor Nyesom Wike had in September announced that he had signed Executive Order 21 which make it mandatory for political parties to apply to the Ministry of Education two weeks ahead before their rallies in any public school in the state. He also announced that political parties wanting to use any public school in the state for their rallies must pay the sum of N5 million to the state government for security purposes.

But opposition parties claimed the Executive Order made access to campaign venues difficult for politicians within and outside the state, according to a report by Vanguard newspaper.⁶

⁵ Why we dispersed rally by Peter Obi’s supporters in Ebonyi – Police: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/554625-why-we-dispersed-rally-by-peter-obis-supporters-in-ebonyi-police.html> accessed December 19, 2022.

⁶ Executive Order 22: Wike outlaws opening of campaign offices without approval: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/11/exec-order-22-wike-outlaws-opening-of-campaign-offices-without-approval/> accessed December 30, 2022.

By the Executive Orders, Wike banned the use of premises, buildings and sundry structures in residential areas as campaign offices by political parties in the state, without government approval, with effect from November 11, 2022. In another Executive Order 22, the Governor prohibited the posting of bills, posters or related materials in unauthorised places, which he said is intended to back the enforcement of Rivers State Outdoor Signage and Advertisement Law. The governor condemned incessant defacement of costly property, particularly in Port Harcourt, through indiscriminate posting of handbills, banners, posters and all sorts of unauthorized materials. Executive Order 22 also prescribes that “any political party, association or body of persons, however, called or described that wishes to use any premises, building or structure situated in a residential area in any urban area of Rivers State as campaign office must obtain permission from the Rivers State Commissioner for Urban and Physical Planning.”

4.4 Adamawa State Government’s Regulatory Antics: On January 7, 2023 The Nation Newspaper reported that the Adamawa State Government turned down a request by President Muhammadu Buhari for the use of the state owned Ribadu Square in Yola, the state capital for the APC presidential campaign on Monday January 9, 2023⁷.

Governor Ahmadu Fintiri who is of the PDP said the square was undergoing renovation. Buhari’s Chief of Staff, Professor Ibrahim Gambari, had earlier notified the state government of the planned visit of the President on that day to participate in the APC rally at Ribadu Square.

But in a reply to the Presidency letter, the Secretary to the State Government, Alhaji Bashiru Ahmad, said the facility which is owned by the state would be unavailable on Monday. He cited renovation of the centre as reason for its unavailability. Ahmad in the reply to the Presidency letter said:

“I write to acknowledge your letter ref. SH/COS/28/16/A/793 dated 3 January, 2023 addressed to His Excellency, the Governor, in respect of the above subject matter.

“It is with utmost joy that we always welcome the news of a visit by the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to Adamawa State and always prepare to accord him a rousing welcome with the highest level of respect notwithstanding political party differences.

“Please note that, on this proposed visit that is scheduled for 9 January, 2023 and considering the purpose of the visit which is rally, the only befitting place (Ribadu Square) that is secured enough to host Mr. President, on occasions like this, and the surrounding infrastructural facilities are under extensive renovation. We,

⁷ Intrigues as Adamawa denies Buhari, APC use of campaign venue: <https://thenationonlineng.net/intrigues-as-adamawa-denies-buhari-apc-use-of-campaign-venue/> accessed January 7, 2023

therefore, write to inform you that, much as we would want to provide a place befitting to receive Mr. President, we are constrained because we cannot guarantee the readiness of Ribadu Square before the due date of the flag-off. However, we are working round the clock and racing against time, along with the contractors, to get the place fairly ready to receive the President on the 18 January, 2023 when the presidential campaign train of the APC berths in our state. Sir, while hoping that you will take seriously the foregoing in your planning, accept, as always my highest respect for your esteemed office.”

However, sanity prevailed and the rally was held at the Square.

4.5 Ogun and the Dance of Regulation: On January 17, 2023, it was reported that the request by the Peoples Democratic Party to make use of the MKO Abiola International Stadium for the rally of its presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar, was turned down by the Ogun State Ministry of Youth and Sports.⁸

The PDP had made the request in a letter to the State Commissioner for Youth and Sports on January 3, 2023, ahead of the rally slated for January 19. In the letter signed by the State Secretary, Sunday Solarin, the PDP recalled how an earlier request for the use of the stadium was not obliged by the State Government.

The letter read in part:

“It is pertinent to mention that the use of this state asset was sought in April 2022 vide a letter dated 5th April 2022 requesting for the use of the facility for the conduct of our party primary.

Surprisingly, our humble request was kept in abeyance to date which translated to tactical denial. While we will like to put this unwarranted denial behind us, we wish to vehemently emphasise that the use of state assets should be to the benefit of the general citizenry irrespective of any leaning.

“We, therefore, once again formally write to seek the usage of this facility for the purpose, and on the date indicated above.”

In response to the party's latest request, the Ministry of Youths and Sports, in a letter dated January 10, 2023, said the stadium could not be available for use. According to the Director, Administration and Supplies For Permanent Secretary, I.A Kuforiji, the stadium was undergoing a major renovation. The letter comes amid a report by Punch that the

⁸ Punch Newspapers: Ogun denies Atiku access to stadium for rally: <https://punchng.com/ogun-denies-atiku-access-to-stadium-for-rally/> accessed January 18, 2023

same stadium hosted a football match in the Iseye Cup Competition on Sunday, January 15, 2023.

Earlier in September, the PDP's State Publicity Secretary, Bankole Akinloye, who spoke with Leadership Newspaper in Abeokuta, the state capital, alleged that agents of the State Government destroyed two of party's campaign billboards mounted at Sango Ota-Ijoko road in the Ado Odo-Ota Local Government Area, as well as another one situated in Wasinmi village, along the Abeokuta-Sango Ota-Oshodi Road, while posters in strategic areas around the Abeokuta metropolis were also torn off. He said the PDP's giant billboard mounted at Sango-Ijoko Road was destroyed a day to the governor's visit to the local government, with the incident almost turning into a communal war when the youths of the area stormed the streets in protest against the destruction of the billboard of their candidate.

4.6 Lagos State and the Politics of Traffic Regulation: On Sunday, December 18, 2022, Daily Trust Newspaper published an extensive report of how Lagos State Government uses traffic to disrupt opposition campaigns.⁹ The report notes that ahead of the February 2023 elections, there are allegations of abuse of state apparatus by the Lagos State Government to intimidate the opposition.

Since the electioneering started in Lagos, many residents have had to endure one form of traffic diversion or the other which has impaired movement across the state. However, the diversions are said to be made to the advantage of the ruling APC during their rallies while the opposition parties are left to manage traffic during their events.

The State Government has been diverting traffic for APC rallies in the State since the electioneering started. Roads were closed during the mega rally of the APC presidential candidate, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, on Saturday, November 26, as well as during the campaign flag off of Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu for a second term on Saturday, December 3, 2022. Also, a travel advisory was issued for the campaign walk tagged "Ring Out the Vote" by the Lagos APC presidential and gubernatorial campaign team held on Wednesday, November 30. Traffic was also diverted when the Chairman of the Lagos State Parks and Garages Management Committee, Musiliu Akinsanya, popularly known as MC Oluomo, led a "five million" rally for Tinubu on October 9. Some sections of the busy Ikorodu-Ososun Road, Funsho Williams Avenue, among others, were closed for traffic.

For the APC presidential rally held on November 26, there were two statements issued by the Ministry of Transportation announcing traffic diversions. For the APC women's presidential campaign rally at the Mobolaji Johnson Arena (Old Onikan Stadium), Onikan,

⁹ How Lagos Uses Traffic To Disrupt Opposition Campaigns: <https://dailytrust.com/how-lagos-uses-traffic-to-disrupt-opposition-campaigns/> accessed December 19, 2022

Lagos Island, the State Government rolled out a traffic advisory to aid the motoring public in navigating their journeys around the axis during the event.

However, while traffic advisory was issued for each APC campaign rally, the same privilege was not extended to the opposition. Senator Dino Melaye who was in the team of the PDP presidential candidate, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, who was in Lagos to campaign during the week, alleged that roads were blocked to prevent people from coming to the rally.

Daily Trust reported that Atiku and members of his team had a hectic time accessing the TBS as their convoy maneuvered in the gridlock around the Lagos Island/TBS axis. It was also observed that neither the Transport Ministry nor LASTMA provided any advisory when the supporters of the presidential candidate of the Labour Party (LP), Peter Obi, on October 1, held a rally tagged “4 Million-Man Walk for Peter Obi” simultaneously in various areas of Lagos State, including, Ikeja, Lekki, Surulere and FESTAC. LASTMA officials are hardly seen at rallies and programmes organised by the opposition.

4.7 Kwara State and Opposition Campaigns, Billboards: The opposition New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) in Kwara State said its billboards were destroyed on two occasions at its secretariat along Stadium Road, off Ibrahim Taiwo Road, Ilorin.¹⁰ The chairman of NNPP in the state, Alhaji AbdulSalam AbdulRazaq , also complained that the party had on many occasions been denied the opportunity to hold meetings in public schools whereas the ruling APC enjoys the facility unfettered.

On November 20, 2022, the PDP in Kwara State accused the ruling APC of an attack on its gubernatorial candidate and his supporters at Shao, Moro Local Government Area of the State. The party said that its gubernatorial candidate Alh. Shuaib Abdulai Yaman, and his campaign train were ambushed and attacked by armed thugs suspected to be APC sponsored, early morning in Shao while the team were on their way back to Ilorin the state capital.¹¹

4.8 Akwa Ibom State Indirect Attack on Opposition: The Young Democratic Party (YPP) in Akwa Ibom State said that its candidates and supporters were facing intimidation, defacing of billboards and killing¹². YPP Youth Leader of Etim Ekpo Local

¹⁰ Leadershio Newspaper October 23, 2022: “2023 Campaigns: INEC Threatens Sanctions As States Clamp Down On Opposition Parties” available at <https://www.google.com/search?q=2023+Campaigns%3A+INEC+Threatens+Sanctions+As+States+Clamp+Down+On+Opposition+Parties&oq=2023+Campaigns%3A+INEC+Threatens+Sanctions+As+States+Clamp+Down+On+Opposition+Parties&aqs=chrome..69i57j69i60.1022j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8> , accessed January 24, 2023

¹¹ Daily Sun Newspaper: Kwara PDP condemns attack on Guber candidate, supporters, available at <https://www.sunnewsonline.com/kwara-pdp-condemns-attack-on-guber-candidate-supporters/>, accessed January 24, 2023.

¹² Ibid

Government Area (Ward 8), Comrade Amada Reuben, who condemned the destruction and defacing of their party's governorship candidate billboards, Senator Bassey Akpan, described it as "undemocratic and against the rules of play" and urged security agencies to address the matter to avoid the peaceful state from being thrown into turmoil. In the same vein, the Director of Communications of the campaign organization, Chief Usoro Isaac Usoro, frowned at the incidence, saying it had raised "concern and tension in the state, but it will never reduce Senator Akpan's popularity amongst his teeming supporters across the state."

4.9 Cross River State Signage Saga: In Cross River State, the Director-General, Caterpillar Movement, Mr. Joe Obi Bissong, said PDP campaign billboards across the three senatorial districts of the state were being pulled down. He said the Cross River State Signage and Advertisement Agency, CRISSA was responsible to the attacks while acting on instructions from the State Government. The DG of CRISSA, Mr Effiom Effiat, denied PDP's allegation and said that the Agency only brought down political billboards which its owners failed to meet up with the guidelines.

4.10 Nasarawa and The Lafia Square Denial: In Lafia, the state capital, the major public event centre for political rallies and other State Government function is Lafia Square. Opposition political parties do not have access to the Square. During the recent visit of the presidential candidate of the NNPP, Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso, to Lafia to commission the party office, he addressed party supporters at the roadside and later went to Taal Conference Hotel, Lafia, for a meeting.

Also, following sustained criticism from civil society organisation and opposition political parties, the Governor of Nasarawa State on January 19, 2023 suspended the Managing Director of Nasarawa State Urban Development Board (NUDB), Engr. Mohammed Wada Yahaya, over destruction of campaign billboards across the State. In a letter signed by the Secretary to the Government of Nasarawa State, Muhammad Ubandoma Aliyu, with reference number: S/SSG/PARA/7/VOL.TV/58, titled, 'Suspension Without Pay', the State government directed that Engr. Yahaya should hand over the affairs of NUBD to the most senior officer of the agency with immediate effect.

4.11 Kebbi State and The War on Opposition Billboards: Reports from Birnin Kebbi metropolis and other parts of Kebbi State indicated that posters and billboards belonging to candidates of opposition parties were all removed by the officials of the State Urban Development Authority (KUDA). The General Manager of the Authority in the State, Alhaji Aliyu Umar Ika said the Agency removed the campaign billboards because of the inability by the opposition candidates to obey the rules. He said most of the candidates from opposition parties have neither informed the agency officially nor paid the specified charges to the authority and that no poster or billboards is allowed to be placed on

government properties such as roundabouts or structures without informing or paying charges of such placement to KUDA.

PDP gubernatorial candidate, Major General Aminu Bande Rtd, while reacting to the action of KUDA, through his spokesperson Alhaji Sani Dododo blamed the APC, which is the ruling party in the State. He said the ruling party was afraid of losing the elections.

4.12 Delta State and Denial of Venue: Clampdown on opposition parties by the ruling PDP is common in relation to rallies in Delta State, as well as denial of venues. Other political parties use Federal Government facilities for their rallies as the State and Local Governments have not been allowing the use of their stadium, arcade, school fields and halls.

The APC, the major opposition party in Delta State, always use Federal College of Education (FCET) open field for their rallies in Asaba while it uses Federal University of Petroleum Resources, (FUPR), Warri for its rallies in Warri axis. Engr Omeni Sobotie, APC state chairman, however, said there is no cause for alarm over that, as the party prefers even to use federal facilities, saying PDP administration will soon come to an end and that such facilities would not be censored. But PDP Publicity Secretary, Mr Osuoza, claimed the facilities need to be applied for, so that money realised from them can be used for their maintenance.

Also, the Delta State APC reported a destruction of billboards of its governorship candidate, Ovie Omo-Agege by hoodlums suspected to be agents of the PDP. Ima Niboro, the Director, Communications and Media Strategy, Delta APC Campaign Organisation said loyalists allegedly sponsored by the PDP and its candidate, Rt. Hon. Sheriff Oborevwori were responsible for the act. It was found that APC campaign billboards in Uvwie Local Government Area and Osubi, Okpe Local Government Area of the State were destroyed.

4.13 Gombe State Pulls Down Opposition Candidate Campaign Office: The Gombe State Government like many others, charges politicians, especially those in the opposition, taxes for placing their political billboards in places in the State but permits pasting of posters at no cost. However, the ruling party places its billboards everywhere, including the Government Reserved Area, for free while opposition parties are not allowed to place political billboards, banners or own campaign offices at the Government Reserved Area. It was gathered that the minimum rate for placing a political billboard in the State is N150,000 and the price goes up depending on the sizes, while presidential billboard attracts between N200, 000 and N300, 000.

Aside charging members of the opposition for placement of political billboards, the Government of Gombe State on Tuesday, August 30, 2022 clamped down on the major governorship candidate in the state, Mohammed Barde who is a flag bearer of the PDP

in the 2023 election, by demolishing his campaign office. The Gombe State Urban Planning and Development Authority (GOSUPDA) which carried out the demolition exercise explained that the demolition of the office was due to its proximity to the Presidential Lodge at the Government Reserved Area.¹³

The action elicited condemnations from PDP members and supporters in the state who described the action as victimization of the opposition. Some journalists too who covered the demolition of the PDP campaign office were arrested by the Police.

4.14 Abia State and Billboard Attacks: The Labour Party reported the destruction of the campaign billboards of its Abia State governorship candidate, Dr Alex Otti; and other candidates of the party in Abia State. The State LP Campaign Coordinator , Hon. Acho Obioma, demanded immediate release of LP chieftain arrested for resisting agents of Government perpetrating the destruction of the opposition billboards in his domain. He said that after repeatedly destroying party's gigantic billboard located around Umuikaa Junction at the Aba-Port Harcourt Expressway, the Government and her agents arrested one of their party chieftains from Isialangwa South, Elder Dr. Nwaigburu after he and other party faithfuls prevented state agents from destroying the party's campaign billboard.¹⁴

The General Manager of Abia State Signage and Advertising Agency, Anthony Otuonye denied the allegation, saying what was destroyed was Otti's campaign flex banner because of the message. Meanwhile, it was gathered that the Agency's charges for billboards are as follows: presidency, N15,000,000; governorship, N10,000,000; Senate, N6,000,000; House of Representatives, N3,000,000, and State Assembly N1,500,000.

4.15 Kano State Campaign Venue Rhetorics: In Kano State, the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP) said the State Government deliberately ensures that opposition political parties do not have access to large venues for political campaigns. Malam Sagir Sani, who is a member of NNPP, said the party held its first rally at Modobi Road close to Sharada Police Station. According to him, the rally was held outside the main city because of the lack of access to government infrastructure. He said even posters that belong to their candidates are prohibited and most often destroyed by hoodlums from the ruling party.¹⁵

¹³ Daily Trust Newspaper, Wednesday August 31, 2022: Gombe Gov't Demolishes PDP Gov'ship Candidate's Campaign Office available at <https://dailytrust.com/gombe-govt-demolishes-pdp-govship-candidate-campaign-office/>, accessed January 24, 2023.

¹⁴ Vanguard Newspaper, December 03, 2022 "Labour party decries incessant destruction of opposition campaign billboards in Abia" available at <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/12/labour-party-decries-incessant-destruction-of-opposition-campaign-billboards-in-abia/> accessed January 24, 2023.

¹⁵ Ibid., 10.

Also, Hon. Shu'aibu Musa Gezawa, a stalwart of Labour Party in the State decried the unaccommodating attitude of the ruling party and for not giving the opposition a breathing space. He said democracy ought to be a game not a war where anything that belongs to the opposition is subject to attack.

4.16 Anambra and the Politics of Campaign Billboards: On January 16, 2023, the Anambra State Signage and Advertisement Agency dismantled the campaign billboard of the presidential candidate of the Labour Party, Mr Peter Obi. Obi's big billboard located at the Nnamdi Azikiwe University Temporary Site Flyover was pulled down alongside that of the party's candidate for the Anambra Central Senatorial District, Chief Victor Umeh.

Punch Newspapers reported that the Managing Director of ANSAA, Mr Tony Ujubuonu, said contrary to insinuations, the pulling down of the billboards had no political undertone, but that the affected candidates did not comply with the laid down procedures.¹⁶ In August 2022, the Anambra State Government had fixed the sum of N10 million as fee to be paid by any presidential candidates wishing to publish/paste posters anywhere in the State. A public notice signed by the MD/CEO of ANSAA, said senatorial candidates would pay N7million; House of Representatives, N5 million; and State House of Assembly N1million to be eligible to paste their campaign posters. The statutory costs for out of home media and mobile advertising were pegged at N100,000 for 48 sheets billboards, N500,000 for spectacular billboards, N500,000 Gantry displays; N100,000 for irregular shaped billboards; N50,000 for branded vehicles; and N5,000 for Keke Rear branding, respectively.

4.17 Bauchi and Attacks on Opposition Billboards: On May 4, 2022, the APC Youth Forum accused PDP in Bauchi State of sponsoring thugs to destroy billboards of APC aspirants. The National Chairman of the Forum, Ukkasha Rahama, said the destruction of billboards and campaign posters was done at strategic areas in the state capital.

4.18 Intimidation of Opposition in Bayelsa: The Bayelsa State Chapter of the APC accused the ruling PDP of stifling opposition when security agents arrested a member of the APC, Mr Ebikopoemi Bobby Ugo, over allegations of defamation. Investigations revealed that Ugo and three others were invited by the Anti-Kidnapping Team of the Bayelsa State Police Command over allegations of defamation of character.

At the peak of the flood disaster in Bayelsa State, Ugo was said to have made some FaceBook posts which criticised the state governor over his handling of the flooding in the state and suggested that he had received funds from the Federal Government. Following a complaint to the Bayelsa State Police Command, the Anti- Kidnapping Unit invited Ugo and three others namely, Mark- Charles Gborieneni, Funkebi Atabala and

¹⁶ Anambra destroys Obi's billboards, LP protests: <https://punchng.com/anambra-destroys-obis-billboards-lp-protests/> accessed January 24, 2023.

Preye Bagou to appear before it on October 21 over allegations of defamation of character and conduct likely to cause breach of peace.

However, before October 21st when the quartet was billed to appear before Police, they were arrested. While three of them were later released, Ugo was detained, arraigned and the Police got a Court order to further remand him for additional 18 days at the Okaka Medium Prisons.

4.19 Edo State Ban on Opposition Billboards: On October 26, 2022, Sahara Reporters reported that Billboards owners in Edo State were banned by the State Government from accepting advert campaign projects from the opposition, the APC.¹⁷ It was learnt that the governor threatened to confiscate the billboard of anyone who disregards the directive.

This was made known by a member of the Billboards' Association in Edo, Mr. Ibrahim Momoh. Confirming the development, the State Director, Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON), Abdul Hakeem Tiamiyu, noted that he got the same complaints from a billboard owner. The Assistant Secretary, Billboard Owners Association, Edo State chapter, Mr. Precious Otameh who also confirmed the development said:

"A message came from Edo State Government House telling us not to accept Adverts from APC and other opposition parties in the state. "We have been waiting for them for guidelines till this moment. They keep telling us not to erect any advert billboard from any opposition party until further notice."

However, the Edo State Commissioner for Communication and Orientation, Mr. Chris Nekhihere, said the State Government had paid for the billboards in advance, knowing that elections were forthcoming.

5. USE OF COERCIVE RESOURCES

This can be seen in the intimidation and direct frontal attack on opposition parties and their candidates. For example, on January 25, the Nigerian Tribune reported that the Presidential candidate of the Labour Party (LP), Mr Peter Obi on January 24, 2023 survived an attack against his convoy in Katsina after the successful rally. The party in a statement issued by the Obi-Datti Presidential Campaign Council said the the presidential candidate came under massive attack as thugs pelted his convoy with stones.¹⁸

¹⁷ Governor Obaseki Bans APC Party From Campaigning On Billboards In Edo, available at <<https://saharareporters.com/2022/10/26/governor-obaseki-bans-apc-party-campaigning-billboards-edo>>, accessed January 24 2023.

¹⁸ "Obi Escapes, Condemns Post Rally Attacks In Katsina" available at <https://tribuneonlineng.com/obi-escapes-condemns-post-rally-attacks-in-katsina/> accessed January 25, 2023

The statement signed by the Head of Media, Obi-Datti Presidential Campaign Council, Diran Onifade reads:

The Obi/Datti Presidential Campaign Council hereby condemns the attack on our Presidential Candidate Peter Obi in Katsina, Katsina State yesterday. Our candidate had met with women in a townhall and then held a hugely successful Rally at the Muhammad Dikko Stadium. However, on his way to the airport, hoodlums attacked the car our candidate was riding in, with heavy stones from his driver's side, causing substantial damage to the vehicle. To the glory of God, Mr Obi and other occupants of the car were unhurt. Subsequently another set of thugs also threw stones outside the stadium which damaged several vehicles including that of our official stage crew. The two incidents taken together make us suspect that the attacks may have been premeditated, at the behest of desperate politicians who had been deluding themselves, with the false claim, that they had the northwest locked up but are now shocked by the show of force of the Obedient movement in the region. While thanking the good people of Katsina who came out en masse to support our campaign yesterday, we call on security agencies to investigate this matter to forestall future occurrences.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This is not an exhaustive list of the abuse of SAR since the campaigns started but it has been compiled to show the trend of the abuses and to draw the attention of the authorities to violations of the law and ensuing impunity. The extant Electoral Act has been violated and the authorities including law enforcement agents and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) needs to take steps to stop further violations.