



THE AFRICA POLICY JOURNAL

A HARVARD KENNEDY SCHOOL STUDENT PUBLICATION

Advancing the Policy Dialogue in Africa

Chude’s Interview (28/11/2017)

One of the highlights of Q4 2017 was the launch of the book “How to Win Elections in Africa,” and the subsequent book tour that took the authors, Chude Jideonwo and Adebola Williams, across America, the United Kingdom and Nigeria. The authors were actively involved in and ran the media strategies in the Presidential Election campaigns leading up to the election of President Muhammadu Buhari in the 2015 general elections in Nigeria and also in the election of President Nana Akufo-Addo of Ghana in 2016, and this book is a direct product of all the experiences they gathered while working on those campaigns.

After the book talk at the University of Massachusetts in November 2017, Chude graciously came to Harvard Law School where he was interviewed by Kenneth Okwor on behalf of the editorial team of the Harvard Africa Policy Journal.

Chude Jideonwo, a 2017 Yale Greenberg World Fellow, is the Managing Partner of Red, which comprises StateCraft Inc., Red Media Africa, Y!/Ynaija.com and Church Culture. He also teaches Media and Communication at the Pan Atlantic University, Lagos. Chude is an alumnus of the Lagos Business School and the Strathmore Business School in Kenya, and has also been recognized by Forbes, CNBC and BusinessDay for his excellence in entrepreneurship.

You are the author of “How to Win Elections in Africa,” can you tell us more about the inspiration behind the book?

Well, it was simple. I had this incredible experience while working on President Muhammadu Buhari’s campaign for the 2015 Presidential elections in Nigeria; which was an opposition campaign, and an insurgent campaign. It was one that we did not think we would win because that was the first time we were handling the fullness of the entire media strategy for a national campaign. I learnt so much in the 7 months that we worked on that campaign; a number of which I had previously sensed because I have been working in nation building for a while, especially through activism within President Jonathan’s administration, but gained better perspective on them in the course of our work within President Buhari’s campaign team. So, when I came out of that campaign, I was wowed and I felt the burning need to share the lessons I learnt with people – not the politicians of course, because they already know or are presumed to know how to win elections – but with people who



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are thinking of a new Nigeria (as cliché as that may sound) and with people who are thinking about redirecting Nigeria. I set out to demystify the campaign process so that people can approach elections in an informed and effective way. In all, I thought it would be a shame to have this wonderful experience and not document it.

Also, my experience with the campaign showed that there were a lot of parallels between the elections in Nigeria and the elections in other democracies across Africa, America and even Brexit. Given the current state of global politics, this was a grand opportunity for me to use the key contexts of the events in America, Brexit and other elections across Africa to share my experiences and the lessons I learnt.

What are some of the major trends you see in recent elections around the Continent?

Well, the first is that citizens are clearly more politically aware in a way they have never been before, citizens now know that they have the capacity to change the establishment. We saw evidence of this awareness in Gambia, in Ghana, in Nigeria and this awareness precipitated the circumstances in Liberia. Liberia had a very robust and boisterous elections, after which people even went to court. Going to court after an election is necessarily a good sign but given that this has not happened in Liberia's near history, it is a good sign of political awareness. Even beyond elections, social movements are rising across the continent; look at Cameroon and the strike that will never end, look at Kenya with Raila Odinga. People are learning that power resides with them and that can really change things, and people are now bolder in their engagements with the system. That is a deeply positive trend.

I attended your book talk earlier today at the University of Massachusetts: during the talk, you mentioned that you worked briefly with the Odinga team in Kenya. How was the experience?

Yes, we worked for him for a month in Kenya but I was not there - members of my team were there. After they landed in Nairobi and sent me the preliminary report on the electorate, the strategy, and the narratives around the Kenyan election; I found that it was strikingly similar to our experiences in Ghana and in Nigeria, and I told my team that I had to find a way to explore these parallels between Nigeria, Ghana and Kenya, and also seek out other parallels around the Continent.

What was remarkable about Kenya was that it was almost the same thing with Nigeria. Odinga was a part of the system, he had run for president several times and lost, each time blaming his loss on rigging and electoral fraud. The people in Kenya wanted change and you see, it was basically the same thing with Nigeria and Ghana - the deep similarities were almost uncanny. People were angry: anger was a defining emotion just as it was in Nigeria, more than 50% of the demography was under the age of 30. You see all of the same circumstances across Nigeria, Ghana and Kenya - an anti-establishment fervour so to speak.



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One unique feature of the book is the titling of its chapters - anger matters, establishments matter, money matters, empathy matters, amongst others - what informed this choice or style of titles?

I established a base line of all the things that mattered in an election across the world, excluding religion, then I assessed how sub-Saharan African democracies measured up to each of these items. Those baselines became the chapter titles. There were some things I said mattered but also noted that they did not matter as much as one would think or that they did not matter as much in Africa as they would in America. The essential idea was to have a baseline formulated around what matters, the extent to which it mattered, and the level of its applicability to elections within the African continent.

Of course, writing a book requires extensive research. In the course of your research, what other parallels did you find - besides the one you drew with the shocking emergence of Donald Trump as the American President?

Well the two basic foreign parallels used in the book were the election of the American President here in the United States and Brexit in the United Kingdom. This was largely because I wanted to use global events that virtually everyone was paying attention to, or at least resonated with most people. I also referred to a few other countries like France: at that time Macron and Le Pen were shaking things up in France in the same way that Donald Trump was shaking things up in the United States. Macron and Le Pen were insurgent candidates and did not belong to the establishment. Macron did something remarkable by establishing a political party from the scratch and using it to become the President of France in one strike. I think I also mentioned Germany. I used contemporary elections, things that we could see, and also drew parallels with elections happening in Africa at that time: Gambia, Rwanda, Somalia, Senegal, the municipal elections in South Africa, and the ridiculous situation in Congo - they were citing lack of funds as justification for the continued postponement of elections.

Looking at the Continent itself, it is common for African nations to seek examples outside the Continent. The trend has been: if the Brits or the Americans are doing it in a particular way, then we must also do it that way. Looking inwards, I have heard you speak about Botswana. I think Botswana presents a case of a stable political system. Do you think that Botswana can serve as an archetype of a stable political space for other African countries to mirror?

Oh absolutely. Interestingly, so far on this book tour only South Africans have consistently challenged my assertion that Botswana has a stable democracy. The indices and the global narrative show that Botswana is very stable country, Namibia and Tanzania are also very stable countries. Sadly, one of the tragedies of the African narrative is that we do not hear enough stories of working



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democracies on our Continent. In fact, in the course of writing this book, I was curious with my research; I sought out and unearthed African success stories in governance. My research did way more than scratching the surface. I sought out the numbers - I wanted to see the rankings of African countries on the good governance index, rankings in GDP per capita and other relevant baselines for assessing governments and governance.

My findings were remarkable. I found African countries that could pass for role model countries. When people speak of good governance and refer to countries like Canada, Norway, Denmark, or Switzerland, they often forget that we can find our own examples in countries like Botswana. We do not hear enough about these small but successful nations that have been going strong for years, and whose leaders have been doing well.

Some African leaders have voluntarily stepped out of office, but we do not hear about them. We hear, instead, of those forced to leave office like Mugabe of Zimbabwe and Jammeh of Gambia. At least one African leader has limited his own term of office - Macky Sall of Senegal is proposing constitutional reforms that would cut his own term office by two years and effectively reduce it to five years. He is also proposing constitutional reforms to reduce the powers of the President and increase the powers of the opposition. We need to talk more about the success stories in African politics, I do not think we talk much of those.

Talking about Zimbabwe. Let us assume you have clairvoyant powers; what do you think about their elections scheduled for 2018?

To be honest, I think the elections would hold. Nobody has an incentive to avoid the elections. Mnangagwa - “*the crocodile*”, as he is called – needs the legitimacy of an election. I seriously doubt that there would be free and fair elections, and this doubt is predicated on the following reasons: (i) the playing field may not be open enough for everyone; (ii) Zimbabwe does not have a free press; and (iii) Zanu PF is a principality - I mean, it is shocking that members of the Zimbabwean military are also members of Zanu PF. To a large extent, my forecast is that the elections are not going to be free and fair and if for any reason another popular person throws his hat in the ring, the incumbent might activate rigging. There is nothing in Mnangagwa’s past that shows that he tolerates competition, and there is no reason to expect him to change now. So, in the interim, it would be business as usual in Zimbabwe.

In relation to elections in Zimbabwe and to elections everywhere; what these leaders do not know, is that they should worry more about the things they cannot see, than the things they can. They do not know that they should worry less about the opposition candidate that they can see, and worry more about the seemingly “invisible” young persons or the younger generation who are looking at the upcoming elections and thinking to themselves “*hmmm, so it is actually possible to bring down*



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Mugabe? That means it would be very easy to bring down Mnangagwa or anybody else.” These are the kind of people I am hoping on - people who are paying attention to the situation, with the knowledge that they can change the status quo. I have a lot of faith in the young listening people of Zimbabwe.

Mugabe is getting a huge payout: the reports are that they are not just deposing him of power, but they are going to pay him for leaving office. There is a lump sum payment at the beginning and there would be tenured payments for the rest of his life. My question relates to the implications this has for democracy in Africa. What implications does this exit structure have for those countries that are still suffering from some form of authoritarianism and want to move over to democracy? If these countries decide to go the Zimbabwean way and start using state funds to make cash payments to deposed leaders, there would be questions of the legitimacy of that structure and on the legitimacy of that kind of payout.

Of course, those questions would always arise, but we must also consider the flip side. What if this exit structure becomes an incentive for these rulers to leave power? If they realize that the structure allows them to leave power without the risk of an arrest and with a salary for life, they may actually decide to leave power. Two alternatives: such ruler could remain in power, holding the country hostage and with access to the treasury, or he can agree to leave power and go in peace on the promise of a payout. If you look at it from that binary, then the latter option would be the better alternative. The latter option also reduces the risks of violent oppositions from the reactionary forces supporting the deposed ruler.

I understand the necessity for negotiating Mugabe’s exit. Obviously, if I was part of them, I would not do that. I would want his disgrace to be clear and complete because it is important not to send an ambiguous message about the repulsive nature of his government. He was a terrible leader: people lost their lives, unemployment rates soared, inflation rates soared. It is important for that message to be rung loud and clear. But, it is now impossible to clearly send that message especially because the people that deposed him were part of the people who caused the problem in the first place. Zanu PF is certainly not going to bring good democracy to Zimbabwe, but then for the Zimbabwean people, anything was better than Mugabe.

You worked on President Buhari’s election campaign in 2015, you also worked on President Nana Akufo-Addo’s election campaign in the 2016 Presidential Elections in Ghana. Should we expect to see you and your team actively playing campaign politics for the 2019 Presidential Elections in Nigeria?

Well, I cannot really speak about that. But then, Red will never stop being involved in nation-building. That is the core of our business. Therefore, it would be impossible for us to be totally absent from the political scene. But because we are now suspects and people are always watching us, we take



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elaborate steps to cover our tracks and shield our plans. We do not want people to see us coming. There is no doubt in my mind that Red would be part of the Nigerian story for a long time and Red always strives to be on the right side of history. Working on elections are critical, social movements and protests are also critical. You will always find us in such places as Nigeria continues its progression to success.

Thanks to Samson Itodo, the “Not to Young to Run” campaign has gained significant traction in federal and state legislative houses. Would you advise young people to seek elective offices in 2019?

Politics, like business, is a very serious matter and there are certain baselines that must be met. You do not deserve to be taken seriously in politics merely because you are young and showed up. To be taken seriously, you must meet the baseline requirements and not think that your young age necessarily means that we would take you seriously. Elections require resources, do you have the capacity to amass resources? Do you understand the polity and the politics? Do you have a feasible agenda? Can you convince people to believe in you and sell you to others? One of the demon spirits bedeviling young people who have designs on elective offices is that they think that they should be taken seriously merely because they showed up. Take Emmanuel Macron for instance, he built a new party from scratch and became President of France. People took him seriously because he had a clear agenda, he understood the essence of the journey to an elective office and knew what was required of the occupier of the elective office he sought. The Macron-attitude is lacking in many Nigerians, old and young.

There have been institutional blockages in Nigeria, I agree, but things like the “Not to Young to Run” campaign have gone a long way in pulling down some of those institutional blockades. But how many young people can convince political principalities like Tinubu to believe in their political agenda and support their bid for elective offices? The current custodians of political power are not going to cede power to a younger generation merely because they are young. Besides, many young people run and will run for elective offices for the wrong reasons. So far, we have not had young people who are half as serious as Macron and simply showing up in 2019 is not enough reason for us to listen to them or to even vote for them.

Of course, anybody (young or old) can run for office, it is their choice. But if you are not serious about it or if you do not understand the issues at play, we are not going to take you seriously. Any young person that wants to run for office can do so, but he or she must have the Macron-attitude.

Let’s talk about you: You are serial entrepreneur - at least you do not get recognized by Forbes for doing nothing. How are you able to manage your different business interests and what advice do you have for young entrepreneurs?



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The key in business is that an entrepreneur must learn to adapt to what is relevant and important as time goes on. People should focus more on creating value, on identifying needs, and in looking for ways to satisfy those needs. It is not wise to go into business with preconceived notions based on what exists because the biggest inventions in the world came from people who ignored what exists, identified problems and found lasting ways to add value and solve those problems.

This is what was important for me and what makes my own story unique. I did not set out to do several things - I actually cringe at the term serial entrepreneur - because I feel many young people take the wrong lessons from my life. They feel that my strategy is to spread out and diversify my risks, and just hustle it. But that's not my story. I set out to do one thing, but as I went along with that thing, I saw other problems that I wanted to solve and I solved them through business. My skill set revolves around a business enterprise. I like to create a product or a service and have people pay for it. I did not plan to go into television or into online publishing. I only set out to establish a media company that could change people's lives and along the way, the opportunities for television, online and the rest came along. At my core, I am simply a media entrepreneur and I do not think of myself as running several businesses. I strive to answer one basic question: how can I use the media to change lives? The real advice, therefore, is that entrepreneurs should solve problems and create value.

Take Linda Ikeji, for example. For a long time, many young people believed that the lesson to be learnt from Linda Ikeji's story is that they should quickly open their own blogs. That's wrong! The lesson is that entrepreneurs should seek out and do something that no one was doing. Solve problems that either had no solutions or had no better solutions before you came. Add value in a space where there was either no value or there was insufficient value before you came. Do something that is different and offer a product that was not there before. It is that simple. It does not matter whether you do this under one business or under several businesses. Linda Ikeji had only one business for eight years before she diversified - she blogged consistently for eight years before expanding her business.

I tweeted something that was a bit controversial: "*some people always say that there is no short cut to success, when what they actually mean to say is that there should be no shortcut to success.*" I mean Prince Harry had a short cut to success, but people build character better when they take the long route to success. However, not everyone needs to take the long route to success. It is the same for business. You can take the long route or the short route, you can have one business or several businesses, it does not matter. The major thing is that wherever you are, you must solve problems with solutions that did not exist before you came, and you must create value that did not also exist before you came on the scene.



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You are a journalist, a media entrepreneur, a lawyer, a lecturer at the Pan-Atlantic University and an activist. In terms of social entrepreneurship and active citizenship, do all these hats come together to make you the activist and socially aware Chude or is there a particular hat that you wear when you want to be a social entrepreneur?

In this century, the fact that we think that we must separate acts of charity and active citizenship from our daily work is strange and fundamentally not aligned with my experience. My businesses are a fundamental contribution to society. So, everything I am and everything I do contributes to my social entrepreneurship and active citizenship.

This has been a very interesting conversation. Your fellowship at Yale ends soon, what is next for you?

My next assignment is *Joy.Inc*. I want to completely change the conversation about success metrics, how we measure success, and how we deal with human behaviour on the continent starting from Nigeria, Ghana and Cameroon. We need to change the conversation: what does success mean? What kind of politics should we have? What kind of democracy should we have? What is the goal of governance? What is development? Jeremy Bentham's philosophy offers a very simple proposition in response: governments should provide the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. This influences American politics, it also influences French Politics. Happiness is an emotion and a citizen should be happy. We do not have any philosophical foundations for our democracy or our politics in Nigeria, and an adoption of Bentham's utilitarian philosophy would aid governance in Nigeria.

We need to change the narrative and have a more thoughtful conversation about what makes people happy. *Joy.Inc's* purpose is to inject that conversation into the national space.