

ZONING POLICY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This work examines zoning policy on National development in Nigeria. The theoretical framework stems from the concept of political system propounded by Talcoh Persons. The historical descriptive method was used with content analysis and quantitative data. The work found out that lack of zoning in the political system of Nigeria has caused some zones to be abandoned in the scheme of things. The northern zone has dominated the political space while recourse is not given to other zones of the South East and South South. The work therefore recommends that political institutions in the country should involve zoning in sharing political positions from the Presidency to even employment opportunities made available to other sectors of the nation. Political parties should zone offices to all the zones of the country to enhance peace, security and stability of the polity.

INTRODUCTION

The zoning policy or power rotation has really caused a lot of political instability in Nigeria arising from disagreement among politicians in spite of the fact that it brings about development of democracy. In the words of the economists a recent piece in the economists (2009) highlights the system of zoning that Nigeria employs to alternate power between the North and South divide in the country. In the words of the economists "Candidates are picked alternatively from North and South behind closed doors and presented to voters in rigged polls".

Since independence 62 years ago, Nigeria has not achieved its full potential as the giant of Africa. For many decades, Presidential and Governorship politics in Nigeria has been saddled with ethnicity or tribal politics, religious intolerance and more recently electoral malpractices, well-meaning and patriotic elements in the polity had wrested with the idea of the beat formula that will guarantee peace and stability in the country.

Historically, the highest political office in the land has been dominated by the country's citizens of northern extradition. This was made possible by subsequent military regimes whose brand of leadership has no space for democratic contraception.

The zoning formula was therefore envisaged to enable to northern and southern Nigeria to have an equal chance of producing the president during an eight year presidential cycle. The zoning formula was first adopted by the second civilian administration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari and Dr. Alex Ekwueme in 1979, during the first quarter of President Shagari's second term, the military led by general Buhari truncated the regime, thereby making it impossible for southern Nigerian to experience the plan. During the consecutive 15 years of northern dominated military governance, the zoning formula was forgotten for the past ten years, beginning with Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's civilian regime 1999-2007, and the administration of Musa Yar'dua and President Goodluck Jonathan 2007, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) had started dangling the carrot of the presidential zoning between the southern and northern sections of the country.

Advocates of Presidential zoning often cite peace and sustainable development as the main reason, but Nigerians must ask themselves how zoning both Presidential and Gubernatorial elections in the states have

been able to bring peace and sustainable development? Can zoning or quota produce the best leadership material suitable for development desperately needed at this critical time?

According to Nwanbueze (2021), zoning and rotation principle or policy is part of a democratic culture used for fair play. He went further to say that it counters the negative impulse and tendency of a group of people to remain in office as long as possible and use the resources of the nation to service its narrow and practical interest. It also offers itself as an antidote to a practice that engenders nepotism, promotes corruption, and breed inefficiency, which in turns stultifies growth and sustainable development.

Okwenna (2009) also opined that if power is allowed to systemically rotate between the various zones the political space will not only widen; the process will definitely throw out capable leaders who transform our country and move it to greater height.

The rotation principles on basis of zoning also strengthen loyalty to the nation because it would guarantee access to the highest office of the land to all sections of the polity but these cannot be realized if zoning and rotation does not make fairness, equity and social justice the cardinal principle in which it is practiced. Zones must come as equal and take their turn on the basis of equity, accepting that what is good for the goose is also good for the gander. At the current level of our sociopolitical development, every patriotic Nigerian wants a country where things work. Zoning and rotation if fruitfully implemented will ensure a better Nigeria. The time may however come when these considerations may matter less in our political considerations when we will begin to think more of merit than ethnic or sectional origin. But this may wait until Nigeria becomes a nation state, bound by a chord outside “tribe and tongue” by something stronger than our own brand of “brotherhood” by then rotation and term limits may be considered anachronistic, Huntington (1996).

Presently a majority of Nigerians subscribe to zoning and rotation. Whatever divergent expressions seen in the political horizon are matters of personal opinion which is allowed in a democracy.

Elochukwu (1988), we of the Eastern leaders forum support the principle of zoning and rotation because it is very critical for the sustainable political development of democracy in Nigeria.

Demaki (1999) opines that the principle of zoning is not explicitly mentioned in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as Amended. However, it can be said to be reflected in another principle known as federal characters enshrined in another principle in section 13(3) and (4) of the constitution and it states that: “The composition of the government of the Federation, or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the Federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or form a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or in any of its agencies.

For instance, the People Democratic Party (PDP) was arguable the largest party in Nigeria before the emergence of All Progressive Congress (APC) as the ruling party. Any issue unresolved in the APC may however have a reverberating effect on the political landscape of Nigeria and that is why zoning and rotation are actually enshrined in APC’s Constitution.

“In pursuance of the principle of equity, justice and fairness, the party shall adhere to the policy of rotation and zoning of party and public elective offices and it shall be enforced by the approximately executive committee at all levels”. The contending issue here is rotation and zoning, but to clearly understand the principle of the APC constitution, it is important to understand what a zone represents.

Report committee on zoning (1994) maintains that the issue of zoning has been very contentious in Nigeria, the committee recognized that in a country like Nigeria with its diverse political cultural and economic endowments, true federalism must reflect a genuine attempt to regulate among the groups, as well as, a reflection of these identifiable divergences within a framework of national unity.

Since Nigeria is a nascent democracy, there is need to assess the effect of zoning policy to the socio-political, economic and sustainable development and how it has enhanced democracy in the country. The zoning policy work has been initiated in response to the current tension and regional conflagration involving the north and south over who occupies the highest political office in the country.

If presidential power is allowed to systematically rotate between the various zones, the political space will not only widen, the process will definitely throwout capable leaders how can transform our country and

move it to a greater height. The issue of zoning or equitable power sharing has been very contentious in Nigeria, especially since independence. The committee on zoning or power sharing therefore saw itself being saddled with the onerous task of finding a solution to an age long problem which has not only defied all past attempts at permanent solution but that also has a tendency for evoking high emotions on the part of all concerned each time, it is brought forth for discussion or analysis. For instance, going by the case of the ruling party, All Progressive Congress (APC), it is an arrangement for zoning elective political positions to specific geo-political regions within specific period of time.

Naturally, there are three questions that require an analytic and investigation. Is this practice in conflict with the provisions of the Nigerian constitution? Can this provision prevent a free born Nigerian from, at any time of his or her choosing, aspiring to, freely contesting for, and occupying an elective office for which he is constitutionally qualified in a given period of time? Does this tradition of the APC not preclude fair play in democracy?

It should be noted that Obafemi Awolowo started zoning in Nigeria.

Nigeria is an adversarial federation nurtured by multilateral suspicion. The country was created in 1914 in such a way that the more politically disadvantaged but more economically endowed south, since the north has the power to allocate resources and control the economy to wish she contributes scantily, there has always been the tension of the economically weak appropriating the resources of the economically.

So it is in the attempt to create equity and equal to the commanding heights of politics that the national party (APC), adopted zoning and rotation of execution and political offices. But the more it solved the problem, the more problems remained.

There are two reasons for this paradox, the first is that as critical as the fear of domination is, zoning and rotation were not entrenched in the constitution second; zoning and rotation were just meant to an election game changer rather than a power redistribution mechanism.

The main objective of this paper is to interrogate zoning policy on national development in Nigeria. The questions begging for answers are:

What is the rationale behind zoning in Nigerian democracy?

What potency has zoning policy on the National development of Nigeria?

In what ways could the politics of hatred be totally eradicated in the Nigerian political system?

At this critical time in our democratic development and economic rejuvenation, when all hands are needed on deck to turn the fortunes of the various region and nation for the better, the study tries to give a positive orientation to the people and the government on how the goals of good governance, sustainable development and a peaceful co-existence among the people could be achieved. Indeed the outcome of this study would provide useful inputs on zoning in Nigeria vis-à-vis gearing the government to play its parts urgently in addressing the problem of development.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Zoning has become a reality of every multi ethnic nation like Nigeria. It has also become an effective strategy and major manipulation in the competition or clamor for power by the different regions. It is a reality that cannot be ignored in any heterogeneous and homogenous country like Nigeria.

Scholars differ on how best to define and characterize zoning because it is a relatively new concept on which there is no agreement. But according Demaki there is a general agreement on a few points which are germane to understanding the phenomenon. Demaki (1991) first agreed that though zoning is a derivation of the political struggle between regions, it only occurs in situation involving more than one region or interest group.

Second, to fully grasp the meaning of zoning, one has to start with defining and identifying zoning and the zones or regions involved. This is important because of the systematic differences involved in the definition of zoning and zones, Burgess (1978). Thirdly, zoning is a problematic phenomenon which characteristic is conflictual rather than consensual, which has in fact been founded to be positively corrected with political instability.

Finally, it is agreed that, no matter the level of development, zoning is a political balance in every society that is not mono-ethnic (Glazer and Maryinhan, 1975).

According to Strayer (1971), zoning is a manifestation of the failure of leaders in the various regions to understand themselves and co-operate in order to employ the coercive power of the political system to redistribute income, wealth, opportunity and resources etc. culminated in the emergence of zoning.

Moreso, in the words of Friedrich (1966), zoning or rotation is a pathological feature of developing or third world countries like Nigeria. These features include the problem of creating political order, the problem on national integration, the weakness of central leadership, the problem of development, the crisis of legitimacy and the problem of reign of force. Scott, O. (1970) asserts that the problem of zoning and its activities is the failure to maintain unity among the political units. In his words, the failure to create a unified society from the diverse groups or regions linked by the system is responsible from zoning.

Emefuna (1993), the wind and wave of seeming popular claim against zoning formula or rotational presidency in Nigeria is suggestive of the gullibility of sections of Nigerians and how fleeting, ephemeral and temporal the political maturity could subsist when the wind changes. Unfortunately, political maturity could subsist when the wind changes, unfortunately, political philosophy as the sword, the word and torch bearer in the ultimate search for liberty, fairness and justice can never kin all possible worlds accommodate weather birds in its sanctuary.

Elochukwu (2019) defines regions as “social formation” distinguished by the communal character of either boundary. The relevant factors that characterized or differentiate one region from another are language, culture etc. and as such they only seek to protect the interest of their members. Meaning that no matter the level of development, regions still remain a force in every country or notion.

According to Eliogwu (1985), the emergence of regions clearly point to the fact that the colonial officials failed to accelerate the emergence of wider loyalties to inculcate the idea of Nigerian nation or to fashion Nigerian syllabus upon which loyalties and sentiments could be focused.

In connection to the above was described in the words of Nwachukwu (1987) who applied assent that the tri-national state structure introduced by the British government, marked the beginning of regionalism which was to create many difficulties subsequently for Nigeria political leaders. It contributed to the sense of regional competition of the government by the leaders of the three major regions. This also resulted in political and economic dispute, what is more, the impartial division made the lesser region like the south more aware of their subordination to their larger neighbors which is being manifested in the form of power struggle.

According to Obasi (1999), the debate about zoning is legitimate because it is a vision founded on Nigeria’s unity. Those that want to throw away this baby with the water should better see it as a democratic option open to the long derailed Nigeria’s unity.

According to Nwachukwu (1997), the problem of zoning can be traced to the adoption of policies and strategies that reinforce the problem they are meant to solve such as the failure to practice true federalism. According Richard (1980), central to the deepening crisis in the Nigerian body, politics is the ambivalent matter of power tussle inherited from the colonial masters and expanded considerably since independence in ways which have brought about ambivalence. In his words, the ambivalent nature of Nigeria covers the contradictory features in both the structure of power and the uses to which it has led to the emergence of zoning could be found in the relationship between the government and national economy and also the use of state power in primitive accumulation of capital and wealth by those who have access to it.

Ake (1991), also asserts that the potential nature of Nigerian politics create a gap between the rich and the poor, majority and minority, elite and the masses etc. to him, those that feel marginalized or alienated turn to other means in order to realize their objective, this is the case of the southern region.

Zoning: The Federal Republic of Nigeria is divided into six geopolitical zones, commonly just called zones. They are a type of administrative division grouping the country’s states, created during the regime of President General Sani Abacha. Nigerian economic, political and educational resources are often shared across the zones. The six zones were not entirely carved out based on geopolitical location, but rather states with similar ethnic groups, and/or common political history was classified in the same zone. Nigerian is made up of approximately 400 ethnic groups and 450 languages, there was a need for the government to merge similar groups for effective allocation of resources.

Federation: According to Elazar (1995), it is a compound polity compounded of strong constituent entities and a strong general government, each possessing powers delegated to it by the people and empowered to deal directly with the citizenry in the exercise of those powers. The powers include; legislative, administrative and taxing powers. The fact should also be acknowledged that the representative exercising these powers is directly elected by the citizens as custodians of the powers.

Development: Development according to Rodney (1972) is a many-sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies to increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. Development does not refer to the economic aspect of a nation only, but it means again the quality of life of the individuals in the society, community, state and nation. To Abasiokong (1982), this involves the number of able-bodied to work, the state of their health, the level of birth rate and death rate. For Bankole (2008), development is a sustained pattern of economic growth in which there is a commitment to the implementation of programmes that guarantee social justice, or addresses the multifarious challenges among others, poverty, unemployment, HIV/AIDS, pandemic and other disease, gender inequality, security of lives and property, sustained peace and infrastructural development.

Sustainable Development: Sustainable development focuses on man's ability to harness non-renewable resources rationally without devastating the ecosystem beyond rehabilitation, and to leave some resources for succeeding generation (Frank, 2015). The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) "Our Common Future" also known as the "Brundtland Report" defines sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts:

- The concept of needs, in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and
- The idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs. (WCED, 1987).

Sustainable development is a process for meeting human development goals while sustaining the ability of natural systems to continue to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services upon which the economy and society depend.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The system analysis of the political system with an attempt to see how sustainable development and progress can be maintained constitutes the theoretical framework. It is pertinent to use an appropriate theory that will analyze the true situation in the Nigerian political system. Hence, the work adopts the system theory. This is because it is believed that the system theory will help to licit the relationship that exists between the activities of zoning and democratisation of Nigeria's federation.

The concept of system is to a biologist, Von Bethanlanfy (1920), the system movement to arose out of:

- i. The need to generate a concept that cuts across many disciplines.
- ii. This unifying and organizing disciplines have models, principles, and laws that apply to generalized systems or their subclass irrespective of their kind, the nature of their component elements and the relation or forces between them. It seems legitimate to ask of a theory, not of system of a less special kind, but of universal principles applying to systems in general.

A system may be defined as a set of elements standing in interrelation among themselves and with environment. Progress is possible only by passing from a state of undifferentiated parts. For Parson (1980), modern states emerged to provide security, shelter, food and the provision of other basic amenities of life. This, the activities or situations that bring about zoning is as a result of the failure of modern states to put peace a viable political culture that will ensure equal representation of all regions. The Nigerian polity has also failed to strengthen effective socialization, downward communication linkage and different demands and shifts in demands.

On the areas of integration, Parson (1980) asserts that society is poor to political instability because of lack of integration of the political sub-units. Hence, the activities of some regions as result of failure of the Nigerian state to integrate the whole region; the integrative mechanism that will ensure regulation, co-operation and participation through broad based government increases representatives and effective transmission of goals. It is Parson's contribution that when societies are integrated that allocation of scarce

resources will have a symbolic rewarding legitimacy and thus binding on the entire society. On the area of pattern maintenance, every political system gets reactions of relevant public to her output and that in turn creates unstable pattern of reactions within the political system which may in turn lead to the emergence of a lawless society (Parson, 1980).

According to Chekwa (2001), the theory is a lamp that takes one from the known to the unknown, that is to say that the theory helps to clarify, explain and describe political events; for example theories are made up of interconnected parts, of which all parts must function amicably to give result, this is also applicable to the zoning policy, it is a situation where all the parts agree to share from time to time.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted historical descriptive method. It sought to elicit information from secondary materials such as textbooks, newspapers, journals, online internet sources.

Table 1: NIGERIA’S HEADS OF GOVERNMENT FROM (1960-2023)

S/N	President	Vice President	State of President	State of Vice President	Zone of President	Zone of Vice President	Tenure	Duration of President	Duration of Vice President
1	Sir Tafawa Balewa		Bauchi		North East		Oct, 60 - Jan. 66	5years, 4months	
2	Gen. Aguiyi Ironsi	Brigadier BabafemiOgun dipe	Abia	Ogun	South East	South West	Jan. 66 - Jul. 66	6months	194 days
3	Gen. Yakubu Gowon	Vice Admiral Joseph Edet	Plateau	Calabar	North Central	South South	Jul. 66 – July, 75	9years	8years, 362 days
4	Gen. Murtala Mohammed	Lt. General Olusegun Obasanjo	Kano	Ogun	North West	South West	Jul. 75- Feb., 76	7months	199 days
5	Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo	Major General Shehu Musa Yar’Adua	Ogun	Katsina	South West	North West	Feb., 75- Oct, 79	3years, 7months	3years, 229 days
6	Alhaji Shehu Shagari	Alex Ifeanyichukwu Ekwueme	Sokoto	Anambra	North West	South East	Oct., 79 – Jan. 84	4Years, 4 Months	4years, 91 days
7	Gen. Muhammadu Buhari	Major General Tunde Idiagbon	Katsina	Kwara	North West	North Central	Jan., 84 – Aug, 85	1Year, 8 Months	1year, 239 days
8	Gen. Ibrahim Babangida	Commodore EbituUkiwe	Niger	Abia	North Central	South East	Aug., 85 – Aug; 93	8Years	1 year, 35 days
9	Mr Ernest Shonekan	Admiral Augustus Aikhomu	Ogun	Edo	South West	South South	Aug., 93 – Nov., 93	3 Months	6years, 329 days
10	Gen. Sani Abacha	Lieutenant General Donaldson Oladipo Diya	Kano	Ogun	North West	South West	Nov., 93 – Jun., 98	4Years, 7 Months	4 years, 34 days
11	Gen. Abdulsalam Abubakar	Vice Admiral Michael Akhigbe	Niger	Edo	North Central	South South	Jun., 98 – May, 99	11 Months	354 days
12	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	Atiku Abubakar	Ogun	Adamawa	South West	North East	May, 99 – May, 07	8 Years	8 years
13	Alhaji Umar Yar Adua	Goodluck Ebele Jonathan	Katsina	Bayelsa	North West	South South	May, 07 – May, 10	3 Years	2 years, 341 days
14	Dr. Goodluck Jonathan	NamadiSambo	Bayelsa	Kaduna	South South	North West	May, 10 – May, 15	5 Years	5 years, 10 days
15	Gen. Muhammadu Buhari	YemiOsibanjo	Katsina	Lagos	North West	South West	May, 15 – May, 23	8 Years	8 years
16	President Bola Ahmed Tinubu	Alhaji KhasimShetim ma	Lagos	Borno	South West	North East	May 29, 2023 till date	1 Month	1 Month
					Total		62 Years 8Months	753 Months	659 Months

Source: Author’s Compilation 2023

TABLE II: CUMULATIVE DURATION OF GEOPOLITICAL ZONES BY PERCENTAGE DURING THE MILITARY AND CIVILIAN REGIMES

S/N	Presidential Zone	Vice Presidential Zone	Cumulative Duration for Presidency	Cumulative Duration for Vice Presidency	Percentage for Presidency	Percentage for Vice Presidency
1	North West	South South	21 Years 4Months	19 years, 8 Months	35.1	35.8
2	North Central	South West	17 Years 11Months	12years, 6 Months	28.6	22.8
3	South West	North West	11Years 10 Months	7years, 8 months	19	14.0
4	North East	South East	5Years 4 Months	5years, 4Months	8.5	9.7
5	South South	North Central	5 Years	1year, 8 Months	8.0	3.0
6	South East	North East	6 Months	8 years, 1 Month	0.8	14.7
	Total		753 Months	659 Months	100	100

Source: Author’s Compilation 2023

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

It is quite obvious that sustainable development have been stymied as a result of the inability of leadership to strengthen the zoning policy in the country. In this 21st century, in any elections, all the sections are still contesting even after the same geopolitical zone has produced the outgoing president.

The south Eastern zone are touting for the office of the President because they have only tested the office for six month during the military era. The South East has been calling for cessation because they have not been treated as part of the country, Nigeria.

Development cannot be sustained where there are killings and insecurity as the order of the day. It is high time leadership of the country strengthened zoning as a policy so that each sections of the geo-political zones, know when to contest and allow the particular zone to contest.

CONCLUSION

The essence of the study is to ensure a smooth transition of government with the use of zoning. This zoning process should be properly enforced and adhered to strictly by all the geopolitical zones in order to sustain development and to avert insecurity in any part of the country.

Moreover, the South East really needs to be given an allowance to produce a President for the sake of peace in order to avoid disintegration. As such, it is incumbent on the leadership to make sure that the South East is given the opportunity for Nigeria’s sustainable development.

RECOMMENDATION

1. There should be an executive bill to this effect passed by the National Assembly for rotational Presidency at all times.
2. It is only that section zoned of the geopolitical zones is entitled to produce a candidate for elections.
3. This will usher in peace and sustainable development to that section as they will have a sense of belonging.
4. Zoning will serve cost during campaign and elections and foster unity in diversity.
5. Prosecution of offenders and ban from contesting any political position in the country.
6. The South East should be given the opportunity to produce President as a bonafide part of the country.

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