
Party Politics, The Zoning Policy Paradox, And Consolidation of National Unity: An Assessment of the Two Major Political Parties in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *The word “Zoning” has dominated the present political struggle in Nigeria. To a reasonable degree, zoning has been omnipresent in the genesis of Nigeria’s politics right from the first Republic and influences the formation of government (both military and civilian), and has been a subject of debate amongst scholars. It is right to reaffirm that the intention of those who brought the idea of the zoning policy into Nigeria’s political space was to ensure fairness in the rotation of key political offices across the country, but the politics and contentions associated with the actual practice of it is something to worry about. This is due to the fact that Nigerian politics over the years have been played on the basis of ethnicity as zoning seems to be an arrangement made to favour a particular set of people, who by reason of numbers acclaimed to be the majority, as against those who are regarded as the minority. In fact, zoning has practically turned out to represent the interest of few elites, who want to perpetually remain in power, and it is also defined by them, against what the masses may consider zoning to be in the sense of justice and fairness. With the 2023 general elections in sight, the issue of zoning is once again central and, as usual, contentious. This paper is an attempt to interrogate the extent to which the zoning of political offices during electoral contests, appointments, and the distribution of amenities will help in sustaining national unity in Nigeria and help in harmonizing and actualizing party interest(s). Scholars have written extensively on the zoning arrangements in Nigeria, some have even gone as far as tracing its origin to the second republic, but one thing which has remained a gap in their efforts is their inability to capture appropriately how zoning can help keep the country together by not just stating or making mention of zoning, but applying it in spirit and in principle. In gathering data for the study, the paper made use of the secondary method of data collection, while the generated data was analyzed using content analysis. Using John Rawl’s Theory of Justice, the paper finds and exposes the marginalization in the undue application of the zoning policy in Nigeria. This is because political actors have always placed their personal and party interests above fairness and justice. In order to ensure political justice, and consolidate National unity in the country, the paper recommends that the interest of the diverse religion, languages, and tribes that make up the country should be considered always so as to overcome the feeling of marginalization and domination of one region over the other which is about to tear the country into pieces.*

KEYWORDS: zoning policy, marginalization, political party, Nigeria, national unity, political justice

INTRODUCTION

After more than thirty years of military regimes, Nigeria embraced a democratic system of government in 1999, which allows for a constitutional civil rule. And one thing which has remained the concern of political leaders and actors is how to keep the country united. As of 1999, Nigeria's population is more than one hundred million people (Statistica.com), with intense ethnic polarization and conflict (Mustapha, 2005). Many scholars and writers have commonly put the number of ethnic groups in Nigeria to 250. Some estimates put the number at over 400 (Mustapha, 2005). Presently, the population of Nigeria has climbed to over 218 million (Statistica.com) with over 525 languages and still 250 ethnic groups (Pereltsvaig, 2011), filled with so many insecurities throughout the country. Nigeria has been marked with conflict and dissension not particularly untypical of a plural society. Consolidating the unity of the country is now more needed than ever before. This has become a concern to both the elites and the masses. Both local and foreign observers have predicted the breakup of the country. There was a controversial prediction by the United States National Intelligence Council, NIC in 2005, about the breakup of Nigeria in 2015 (Ndujihe, 2020).

One factor which keeps tearing the country apart and is also able to consolidate the unity of the country is power, not just any kind of power but political power. According to Odubajo & Alabi (2014), the provision of adequate political power processes has been one major problem of heterogeneous states. This political power process in Nigeria rests on political parties' shoulders. Akindele et al (2000) in Awopeju; Adelusi & Oluwashakin (2012) highlighted the importance of the political party in a liberal democratic setting like that of Nigeria when they posited:

Political parties encourage stability of the governing process because once elected for a fixed term, the government knows its life span at the corridor of power, and the opposition parties to be aware of this. Thus, both the government and the opposition would operate along this political axis.

Any nation practicing liberal democracy must have a party system since the functioning of modern democracy would be completely impossible without the presence of political parties. (Awopeju et al, 2012). This is because the political party plays a vital role in both political communication and participation, thereby giving the common man the opportunity to exercise his democratic right and civil obligations. Party politics is not the only important practice in a democratic setting, the zoning policy is also important in a state like Nigeria. Agbakoba (2011) in Awopeju et al (2012) seems to understand the importance of zoning in Nigeria when he posited that "the call to abolish zoning seriously underestimates and ignores the complex political character of Nigeria". In fact, Awopeju and others concluded by saying that the rising issues in a divided society can be abrogated through a substantial zoning/power shift arrangement. It is from the above belief that this work intent to

expose how fair and justified party politics in line with the zoning policy can consolidate the national unity of Nigeria.

Scholars have written extensively on the zoning arrangements in Nigeria, some have even gone as far as tracing its origin to the second republic, but one thing which has remained vacant in their speeches is their inability to capture appropriately how zoning can help keep the country together by not just stating or making mention of zoning, but applying it in spirit and in principle. This paper is therefore divided into ten parts, the second part after this introduction is the conceptual framework, the third part handles the theoretical framework next is the methodology, the fifth part discussed briefly politics of zoning in Nigeria since 1999, the sixth and seventh parts dealt extensively on the political zoning arrangements of the PDP and APC succeeding, the next parts discusses the internal party politics versus the zoning policy and the last two parts is the conclusion and recommendations.

Conceptual Clarification

- **Party Politics Conceptualized**

The Cambridge dictionary defines party politics simply as all the political discus and activities relating directly to political parties, and not just to any issues about the country. Party politics refers to the activities of political parties in the course of capturing state power and in exercising that power through the formation and implementation of public policy as initiated and executed by political actors (politicians) that direct the affairs of political parties (Oba-Okpowoghaha and Bojang, 2021). This definition focused more on the formation and activities of political parties. Olaniyan cited in Awopeju et al (2012), captured his own as all those activities by party politics that are directly targeted towards helping them gain control of the available political offices, through the stated rules of election in a democratic setting. This definition above made it clear that political parties exist only when there are elective principles, which can only be present in a democratic state, which recognizes the legitimate choice of the citizens to elect their representatives. In Omilusi (2010, p.175) party politics were clearly depicted as;

activities of formal structure, institutions, or organizations that compete through the electoral process to control the personnel and policies of the government, with the aim of allocating the resources in a state through an institutionalized means or procedure.

He went further to posit that the main objective of every political party is the seizure and consolidation of state or government power. Omodia, (2010) viewed party politics as functional analysis, which includes political socialization and recruitment, interest articulation, interest aggregation, and political communication, derived from Almond's view of the political system. Thus, he described party politics in the degree to which political parties in Nigeria have been successful in carrying out the aforementioned political duties as a support system for democracy and also national unity.

- **Zoning Policy**

Before the term was brought into the political lexicon, zoning simply means a technique for urban planning in which a municipality or other levels of government split the land into sections called zones, each of which has a unique set of rules for new construction. But when it comes to party politics, it could be seen as a political arrangement that tends to make sure that no region of the nation is excluded from any political party's program. Thus, zoning is an arrangement where all the zones in a political party agree on how they will share power with one another. The order can be south, north, and sequentially like that (Culture Custodian, 2022).

Because many in positions of authority in Nigeria, both past and present, have abused their positions of control, zoning as a policy serves as a protest against power abuse. (Premium Times of May 2022). Zoning policy has been in Nigerian politics since the second republic; thus, Zoning became a fundamental and unofficial policy in Nigeria when we began our democratic system transition in 1999, and it remains so to this day.

According to Ezeibe, Abada, and Okeke (2016), one example of ethnic nationalism's manifestations in Africa is zoning (Salawu & Hassan, 2011). Zoning a public office, in layman's terms, refers to sharing, rotating, moving, or pushing a political office(s) from one region to another. It could depend on a region (from the North to the South or East and West or vice versa). Zoning may be based on religion or one of the major ethnic groupings (between major religious groups). Political parties in Nigeria used the zoning system to secure a rotating presidency and other important offices, according to Chuba Okadigbo, a former president of the Nigerian Senate. He defended the practice by claiming that it will foster national harmony, political stability, and economic development in Nigeria. He added that zoning was anticipated to make all ethnic communities identify with the Nigerian Constitution and feel that they are a part of the federation (Vanguard, 5th April 1989 cite in Ezeibe et al, 2016).

Zoning possesses two main characteristics which according to Olaiya et al (2014) are the rotation of political offices and power shift, while the former is often used interchangeably with the principle itself, the latter was the result of southern discontent and annoyance with the unfavorable political supremacy of the north in the middle of the 1990s.

By including the Federal Character principle in Section 14 of its constitution, Nigeria's 1999 constitution also adopted the zoning formula. The Federal Character concerns the allocation of political and public sector jobs, including the President's office, among the six geopolitical zones (Busari, 1989). Since the federal character is a constitutional principle, zoning is the political label for it. The goal was to eradicate the ugliness of ethno-regional dominance in Nigerian society (Nwala 1997). The quota system is another way that the zoning of political positions is expressed. Nigerian public universities place more emphasis on quota systems than on passing admissions

prerequisite exams. In Nigeria, the quota system is crucial for employment in public institutions (Ezeibe et al, 2016).

- **National Unity**

A situation where people from various political, social, and economic systems are brought together to work toward a single objective is referred to as national unity. There is mutual respect, love, cooperation, and trust between the people. They are one, accepting, and proud of their country. National cohesion, national integration, national building, and social solidarity have all been terms used to describe national togetherness (Zamare and Karofi,2015). National unity, as defined by Ojo as described in Zamare and Karofi (2015), is the process of bringing society together in a way that tends to make it a peaceful city, based on the order its members consider as fairly peaceful. Cohesion, cooperation, and commitment to a shared agenda are mental states or dispositions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Men's battle or demand for a share of scarce resources leads to the subject of fairness in the history of political philosophy. According to Kabuk (2015), in such a conflict, the strong ones take control of the resources while the weak ones are elbowed out. To illustrate the potential unfairness that may have crept into some areas of the Nigerian state since 1999, we used John Rawl's Theory of Justice.

The political philosopher John Rawls (1921-2002) wrote A Theory of Justice in 1971. In it, he tries to offer a moral theory that is an alternative to utilitarianism and that deals with the issue of distributive justice. The first virtue of social institutions, according to John Rawls, is fairness, just as the first virtue of philosophical systems is truth.If a theory is false, it must be abandoned or reconsidered. Similarly, if laws and institutions are unfair, they must be changed or eliminated, regardless of how effective they are or how well-organized they are (Rawls, 1971).

Justice, according to Rawl, is a fair balance between conflicting claims. It refers to avoiding taking advantage of someone else by taking their possessions, rewards, positions, or the like, or by depriving them of what is rightfully theirs, such as the keeping of a promise, paying off a debt, treating them with respect, etc. (Rawls, 1971).

The goal of Rawls was to give a view of justice that generalizes and elevates the well-known social contract theory found, for example, in Locke, Rousseau, and Kant, to a higher degree of abstraction. He described social justice as fairness; not that they both have the same meaning, but the outcome of a just agreement or contract is the principles of justice. He contends that these justifications are made under the cover of ignorance. The result of natural chance or the contingency of social circumstances will not favor or disadvantage anyone in their choice of

principles thanks to this. Since everyone is in the same situation and none can create rules that will benefit their unique circumstances, (Rawls, 1971).

According to Rawl, a society or group of persons, say as Nigeria, must, first of all, determine once and for all what constitutes justice among them, and those choices will determine their conception of principles of justice. Secondly, in accordance with the previously agreed-upon principles of justice, they are to adopt a constitution, and a legislature to pass legislation and other important decisions.

According to Rawl (1971), justice as fairness has two components:
Two things are claimed to be agreed upon:

1. An interpretation of the initial scenario and the dilemma of options presented there; and
2. A set of principles.

When Rawl started his reflection, utilitarianism was the prevailing political and moral doctrine in the Anglo-American world. Rawl sought an alternative (Kabuk, 2015). Critics contend that in comparison to utilitarianism and other prevalent theories of his era, Rawl's egalitarian theory seems more tenable because it offers a systematic basis for moral judgment in all situations and may even be consistent with all democratic norms.

John Rawl's theory of justice will serve well in consolidating national unity in Nigeria. The hope of Nigerians in 1960 with the installment of the first democratic government, was to observe the equitable distribution of natural resources in order to improve the standard of living for all. However, that was history (Zamare, 2015). This occurred as a result of the leaders' efforts to settle personal disputes and maintain their authority by fostering regionalism, tribalism, and religious feelings (Sani 2018; Zamare, 2015). The idea of Rawl, that the principle of justice is chosen behind a veil of ignorance and no one will design a principle that will favor his particular conditions, is refuted by the elites' creation of a situation that resulted in civil, tribal, and religious unrest, as well as feelings of social injustice linked to nepotism and sectionalism. And as a result, the first republic fell in January 1966, ushering in a period of military government. This, sectionalism and ethnic politics have remained with us up till this fourth republic. In fact, according to Zamare (2015) from the time of colonial rule till now, the administration has not paid substantial attention to building national unity; there hasn't been any significant progress made toward achieving unity in diversity, which will help Nigeria establish a long-lasting democracy.

In line with the above, Sani (2008) cited in Zamare (2015) explanation is that, if national unity is achieved, the democratic process in Nigeria will be a factor in the attainment and promotion of Nigeria's status and position in terms of development, socially, economically, and democratically. It has been stated that the democratic practice in Nigeria is to a large extent promoting class

interest, social injustice, inequality of citizens, poverty, and backwardness associated with the corruption of the political class.

The hallmark of the above is to sustain and consolidate national unity in Nigeria, and to achieve that using political power as a tool, there must be an agreement among the diverse ethnic and regional groups on the rotational presidency, the appointment of major and minor political offices in a just and fair and such will be enshrined in our constitution, as postulated by the two parts of Rawls theory. This also portrays the idea of Zamare (2015) When he stated that social structures and roles in society that bring about social order, as well as ethnic groups maintaining their oneness within political settings, are what allow for national unity, p 87.

Onifade (2013) in Zamare (2015) believes and agrees that all Nigerians must come to a consensus on the nation's destiny. By stating that the nation is indivisible in the constitution, the military drafters of that document disregarded the will of the Nigerian people and the notion that sovereignty belongs to and is exercised by the people. The administration needs to start paying attention to the populace and take action to right years of wrongs and injustices if it hopes to prevent a replay of the Arab spring in the nation. (Zamare, 2015, p.88)

METHODOLOGY

Data for the study was generated and gathered using the secondary method of data collection through documentary sources, while content analysis was used in analyzing the generated data.

Politics of Zoning in Nigeria Since 1999

The balanced distribution of political power among the numerous factions that make up the federation, however, continues to be a struggle for many federations. How power is to be distributed and cycled among the various ethnic components that comprise the political body is one of the concerns that frequently arise in Nigeria's federal system, as it does in other federal systems. This topic has caused disputes among different ethnic groups and continues to pose a risk to the political system's stability. Another significant issue is the ongoing competition among Nigeria's largest ethnic groupings for the presidency. The unhealthy competition among the many ethnic groups for the presidency has caused tension and political instability inside the government over the years. The federal character concept and the system of geopolitical zones are just two of the several ideas put out by the various succeeding regimes to appropriately solve this particular difficulty. The need for power sharing among the leading ethnic groups persists notwithstanding the implementation of this structure. The phrase "zoning and power rotation formula" was then used. The formula was developed as a tactic to make sure that the dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria had an equitable share of presidential power. The terms "zoning" and "power rotation" are used interchangeably in the context of this study.

General AbdulsalamiAbubakar presided over Nigeria from 1998 till the start of the Fourth Republic in 1999. Chief OlusegunObasanjo was then democratically elected president, serving in that position from 1999 until 2007. Umaru Musa Yar'Adua was elected again to serve as president from 2007 to 2010, but because he passed away before finishing his term, GoodluckEbele Jonathan was elevated to the position of president for the remaining two years. Later, GoodluckEbele Jonathan ran for office, won, and served as president from 2011 to 2015. The 2015 general election brought MuhammaduBuhari, the current president, to the office (Akinboye and Anifowose, 2008). To this purpose, Table 1 below lists the numerous heads of state, their geopolitical regions, the time they have been in office, and how long they have been in power overall since the establishment of democracy in 1999.

Table 1: Presidents of Nigeria from 1999 to date and their Geographical zones.

S/N	President	Geographical Zone of Origin	Period in Power	During in Power
1	OlusegunObasanjo	South West	29 May 1999-29 May 2007	8 years
2	Alhaji Musa Yar'Adua	North West	29 May 2007-5 May 2010	2 years +11 months
3	Dr.Goodluck Jonathan	South South	6 May 2010-29 May 2015	5 years
4	MuhammaduBuhari	North West	29 May 2015 to date	

(Source: www.waado.org, in Oladele, 2018)

From the table above, it could be seen that North East, North Central, and South East have not had any share of the Presidential slot since 1999. While North West has been on that seat for almost 10 years, South West for 8 years, and South-South for 5 years. Nigeria is made up of three major ethnic groups, namely: Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba. While the Hausa have occupied the presidential seat for close to 10 years, the Yoruba has been there for 8 years, and also the Hausa has occupied the seat of the vice-president for 13years and the Yoruba for close to 8 years, the Igbos have not tasted both the presidential power and also vice-president since 1999.

On May 29, 1999, Nigeria officially welcomed democracy after around 16 years of military rule. Nigeria had previously engaged in party politics with a variety of philosophies, manifestos, and party constitutions. All of them function as policies, principles, and rules for how these political parties should conduct themselves in Nigeria's democratic environment.

POLITICAL ZONING ARRANGEMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PDP) 1999-2015.

The PDP proposed zoning as a strategy in 1999 to address the issue of presidential elections among Nigeria's dominant ethnic groups. Following the North's rapid succession of producing the nation's President and Head of State, this clause gives the Southerners a sense of belonging. As compensation for the Southwest's loss in the 1993 June 12 presidential elections, the PDP chose to zone the presidency to the South (Awopeju et al, 2012). The PDP constitution's Article 7 subsection 2(c) specifies how elective and party offices should be distributed or allocated. The party's charter poignantly states:

The policy of rotation and zoning of the party and public elective offices must be followed by the party in accordance with the principles of equality, justice, and fairness, and it must be upheld by the relevant executive committee at all levels (PDP Constitution, 1999).

The above was also captured in article 7 subsection 3(c) of the 2012 amended constitution of the PDP. With that, the PDP laid a standard for the zoning of political offices in Nigeria. The clause, which was unwritten until it was inserted into the PDP's constitution in 2009, essentially mandates an eight-year power rotation between the North and the South. According to some proponents of zoning, OlusegunObasanjo won the presidency in 1999 and was re-elected in 2003 on the basis of this. The late UmaruYar'Adua assumed control in 2007 to lead the North for an additional eight years, but on May 5, 2010, he passed away in office due to a protracted illness. His passing made it possible for Goodluck Jonathan to become president, which prompted calls for him to abandon the zoning plan and run in the 2011 presidential election (Oguntola, 2010; Awopeju et al, 2012). According to Ezeibe et al (2016), The PDP in Nigeria ruled from 1999 to 2010, and at that time the zoning provision was put into effect for both elective and appointed offices. Thus, this approach made guaranteed that at least one notable National political officer was produced in each of the six geopolitical zones. The zoning formula was also taken into consideration for appointing ministers, directors, heads of parastatals, and ambassadors. Because most elections were essentially ritualistic, the competition was not fierce. A replacement was often chosen from the same zone as the prior occupant of the position in cases when changes resulted from incapacitation due to death or impeachment. The issue of national security in Nigeria worsened after President Goodluck ran for and won the 2011 Presidential election (Omodia, 2012). Awopeju, Adelusi, and Oluwashakin (2012) assert that the North did make Nigeria impossible to rule.

The zoning system was modified following President Goodluck Jonathan's victory in 2011. the Vice-President from the North-West, the Speaker of the House of Representatives from the North-East, the Secretary to the Government of the Federation from the South-East, and the Head of Service from the South-West. The President is from the South-South. The PDP's zoning policy was fundamentally violated by President Yar' Adua's passing and the subsequent return of a

Southerner to the presidency from 2010 to 2015. (Kamal & Bello, 2014). The PDP's loss in the 2015 presidential election to an opposition party (APC) may have been the biggest result of the formula's failure. Religious intolerance, ongoing hostility between ethnic groups, and geopolitical zone friction increased, especially after the PDP zoning regime collapsed in 2010. (Ezeibe et al, 2016).

POLITICAL ZONING ARRANGEMENT OF THE ALL PROGRESSIVE CONGRESS (APC) 2015-DATE

The South-West, which produced President Obasanjo from 1999 to 2007, joined forces with the North-East, North-West, and North-Central to form the All Progressives Congress (APC), which they used to successfully usurp power from the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the rest of the South (South-East and South-South). Hate speech was used in public forums to achieve this (Ezeibe et al, 2016). Zoning was a secondary concern as the party concentrated on unseating the incumbent party.

In general, the Bola Ahmed Tinubu-led southwest played a significant role in the APC's political success in 2015, which resulted in President Buhari being declared the victor. Salihu T. Y. (2022) claims that there was an understanding that power would go to the southwest when Buhari's second term ended. But the powers that be seemed to be breaking their word when President Buhari was re-elected in 2019 based on their body language. It appeared as though these "powers that be" were attempting to prevent someone from the southwest from being the party's presidential nominee. The initial scenario proposed by Salihu (2022) called for a candidate from the south-south or perhaps the southeast. In this context, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, the immediate past president of the country, who everyone regards as the number one enemy of APC was also mentioned as a potential contender by certain APC stalwarts. The second option under the judgment was to also nominate a south-east-based serving minister of Buhari to run for the top position.

However, one aspect of the aforementioned two attempts may have been flawed in that the southeast and south-south did not significantly contribute to the APC's victories in 2015 and 2019. This may have been the driving force for some party leaders' efforts to zone the party's presidential ticket to the northeast, a region that appears to be sharing the same fate as the southeast. Senate President, Ahmed Lawan was their choice. Unfortunately for these 'powers that be' and fortunately for the south-west, Bola Ahmed Tinubu won the APC presidential ticket for the 2023 election, this was at the party's presidential primary election that took place in Eagles Square Abuja on Wednesday 8th June 2022 (Erezi, 2022). And in order to balance the equation, former Governor of Borno state, Senator Kashim Shettima who held from the north-east, was unveiled as the party's vice-presidential candidate.

Shettima and Tinubu are both Muslims, with Shettima hailing from the northeastern part of the country and Tinubu from Lagos in the country's southwest. Concerned Nigerians, religious authorities, opposition parties, and the Christian Association of Nigeria had criticized the ruling party for fielding a Muslim-Muslim ticket in the 2023 elections. (channelstv online news, 2022). Away from the APC, the People's Democratic Party on the 28th of May elected former Vice President AtikuAbubakar as its presidential candidate for the 2023 general election; this was as they ignored the clamour to zone the number one seat to the south. AtikuAbubakar is from Adamawa state, a northeastern state. A former Governor of Anambra state in the southeast, Mr. Peter Obi emerged as the Presidential candidate of the Labour Party; this was as the party conducted its primary election on the 30th of May, 2022 in Asaba Delta state. The distribution of various ranks among Nigeria's six geopolitical zones from 1999 to 2019 is compared in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Zoning Distribution in Nigeria by Geopolitical Zones, 1999-2019

S/N	POSITION	May 1999- May 2007	May 2007- May 2010	May 2010- May 2011	May 2011- May 2015	May 2015- May 2019	May 2019- present
1	President	South-West	North-West	South-South	South-South	North-West	North-West
2	Vice-President	North-East	South-South	North-West	North-South	South-West	South-West
3	Senate President	South-East	North-Central	North-Central	North-Central	North-East	North-East
4	Speaker House of Representative	North-west	South-West	South-West	North-East	North-Central	South-West
5	Secretary to the Government of the Federation	South-South	North-East	North-East	South-East	North-East	North-East
6	Head of Service	North-Central	South-East	South-East	North-West	North-East	North-Central
7	Deputy Senate President		South-East	South-East	South-East	South-East	South-South
8	Deputy Speaker House of Representative	South-South	North-East	North-East	South-East	South-West	North-Central

Source: Ezeibe, Abada&Okeke, (2016, p.332-333). Updated by the Author.

Table 2 above demonstrates that during the People's Democratic Party era, the first six elected and appointed positions were fairly allocated among the six geopolitical zones. Although the zoning formula for the Presidential seat was truncated from May 2010. But it could be seen that the first six seats were not won by the All Progressive Congress in any of the six geopolitical zones. South-South and South-East had none during the first administration of the APC in 2015; it was only by chance that the office of the Deputy Senate President was given to someone from the South-East; as a result, the South-South was never represented among the eight positions above. The North East alone held three of the first six positions during that time. The South-East was left out of the second regime starting in 2019, which saw the North-East and South-West occupying two of the six high positions each. South-South received only the position of Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives as compensation.

It is a fact that the South-East and South-South did not add more to the success of the APC in their first and second regime, it could also be the reason the two zones were sidelined by the party, but such could also be described as an injustice to the two zones. And such injustice and unfair treatment are capable of breaking the country apart, no wonder insecurity and the call for the separate state of Biafra by the South-east worsened since the regime of APC.

Internal Party Politics versus the Zoning Policy

To some extent, the politics of the two major parties in Nigeria since 1999, has jettisoned the fairness and justice which serves as the bedrock of the zoning policy in Nigeria. For instance, in 2017, In order to allow the Northern region to produce the Presidential flag bearer, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) assigned the office of party chairman to the southern region. Thus, on December 8, 2017, Uche Secondus from the south-south zone won the chairmanship position (Saraha Reporters, 2017). And as stipulated, the 12 Presidential aspirants of the party in 2018 were from the Northern region, thus the south respected the zoning arrangement of the party. The result of the party's presidential primary held in October 2018, confirmed Atiku Abubakar from the North East as the presidential candidate of the party (Punch Reporters, 2018). This was also to balance the 3 years of Yar-Adua and 4 years of Buhari from the North against the 8 years of Obasanjo and 5 years of Jonathan from the south. This fairness was also the reason that made the APC elect President Muhammadu Buhari from the North as its party presidential candidate in 2015 and 2019. Since, the tenure of President Muhammadu Buhari which will come to an end in 2023, will complete straight eight years for the North. It would have been fair and just, to zone the Presidential candidature to the South, and in fact to the Southeast, as the only zone in the Southern region that has not occupied the seat for a long time. We believe, it was on the bedrock of this fairness that PDP zoned the chairmanship of the party to the North, so as to zone their Presidential candidature to the South. Hence, in October 2021, The 13 PDP governors were clear that they preferred a consensus agreement over a competitive political environment, which saw them pick the 21-man national officers list to serve the party, of which Iyorchia Ayu from the North became the chairman (Umoru and Yakubu, 2021).

It was expected that the zoning arrangement will also reflect itself during the 2022 election primaries. Surprisingly, the party decided to shun its tradition of zoning the presidency to a particular zone in line with its rotation principle. The Northern elements in the party stood against the zoning arrangement in order to suit their interest. The desperation to seize power for the North through the party platform made a former Senate President to organize other Northern elements and toured Nigeria, consulting PDP supporters about who should become the region's consensus candidate. (Yakubu, 2022). This was in a quest to gain strong support that would help them slug it out with the southern elements. This was a direct injustice to the South, and especially the South-east. While the southern leaders of the party demanded the ticket to be zoned to their region, northern leaders demanded an open race, and they got. 14 aspirants drawn from the six geopolitical zones participated in the primary election (Iroanusi, 2022).

The development in the party attracted condemnation, and social and cultural organizations like OhanaezeNdigbo, who argued that political parties like the PDP and the APC should zone its ticket to the South-East geographical zone, criticized the decision. (Oyero, 2022). This also made one of the strong aspirants from the southeast resign from the opposition party and withdrew from the presidential primary. Former governor of the Anambra state, Mr. Obi, gave an explanation for his departure, citing "recent developments" within the party. (Oyero, 2022, Iroanusi, 2022). The victory of AtikuAbubakar at the PDP presidential primary seems to have raised some dust. It has never been in the nature of the party to have both its presidential candidate and national chairman from the same region. IyorchiaAyu the national chairman of the party is from the North-central zone, while AtikuAbubakar is from North-East. Despite the pressure from notable personalities of the party, Ayuhas refused to resign from the position. This has thrown the party into two factions. The scenario above has portrayed the party as a collection of individuals who are equally committed to using its platform to gain power. This kind of politics is against democratic principles which the party should stand for.

The All Progressive Congress (APC) on its own, are not free from this injustice and unfair politics. although as noted before, the party was not founded on the principle of zoning arrangement and has always negated the principle of fair justice in their political arrangement since 2015. Although the party was able to select a presidential candidate from the south, that was not without so much rancor and the contest between southern aspirants and aspirants from the North. one would have thought that after 8 years of MuhammaduBuhari, the party will unanimously zone the ticket to the south, and in fact, south-south or southeast since the Vice-President was from the south-west. In fact, Southern Governors and 14 APC Northern Governors, and some members of the national working committee had to fight hard against the attempt to impose Senate President AlmedLawanas a consensus candidate, even though he is from North East. With no zoning arrangement in place for the party. 22 aspirants from the six geopolitical zones jolted for the ticket. The scenario made some presidential aspirants under APC from the South-East voice out their dissatisfaction, in fact, one of them was absent at the venue of the presidential primary convention.

Former Senate President Sen. Ken Nnamani had to withdraw from the presidential race when he noticed the lack of sincerity of the party leadership concerning the zoning arrangement. “But the events of the recent day created the impression that zoning had been jettisoned in the APC” (Majeed, 2022). Another aspirant under the same party who hail from the southeast, Dr. OgbonnayaOnu recalled how they worked for the success of the party in 2015, but now have been rewarded with injustice (Ajayi, 2022). The question remains, where is justice? The politics which these political parties are playing, do not show their statesmanship toward ensuring a united Nigeria. It appears that some elements from a particular region and tribe have vowed to perpetually remain in power, without minding the adverse effect of such on the consolidation of democracy and national unity of Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

From our analysis above, we discovered that so much political party affiliation has so far served as a hindrance to the promotion of national unity, when it comes to political activities and political offices, both elected positions and appointed ones. Political actors have placed their personal and party interests above fairness and justice. Although political zoning is not constitutional, it was meant to serve as a check against the feeling of marginalization, and this marginalization has widened so much in recent times. For instance, during his inception as the 4th democratic president of Nigeria, Buhari jettisoned zoning and its fairness to the six geo-political zones, according to him, he will only work with those who voted for him. This was the major reason it was hard for the South-South and South-East to get a reasonable position among the major political offices, a setting which the PDP ensured was disturbed fairly, as shown in Table 2 above. In fact, the regime of President Buhari has been characterized by so much marginalization. The just concluded primary elections have also shown that Political parties and political actors are not concerned about fairness in zoning arrangements. Taking the PDP as a case study, not minding the incumbent President is from the North-west and his vice from the South-west, and that it is fair and just to shift the Presidency to the South, especially the South-east, since they are the only zone from the south that has not had the President since 1999. Yet, the party jettisoned zoning, and in the end, elected a candidate from the North in order to replace another northerner. This arrangement is a serious threat to national unity. National unity which should be first considered in the interest of people with diverse cultures, religions, and languages, has been traded on the altar of partisan politics.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to consolidate national unity in Nigeria, using political power, this paper recommends the following.

1. The interest of the diverse religions, languages, and tribes that made up the country should always be considered. For instance, if the APC considered that the country has two major

contending religions, they would not have preferred a Muslim-Muslim ticket over fairness and justice.

2. Political parties should see political regimes and transitions as one, whether they are the ones in power or not. This is to make sure that one tribe does not dominate the political space using different party platforms.

3. The six geo-political zones representing diverse languages, religions, and cultures should also come together to formulate a good zoning formula that will be void of perceived marginalization.

4. Zoning policy should also be enshrined in the constitution or enacted as an Act of the National Assembly, so as to ensure fairness and equity as noted by Rawl.

5. Political actors should have the spirit of statesmanship by allowing the consolidation of national unity to ride above their personal and party interests.

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