

Altercation for Zoning Principles: The Political Game and Gain for Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Of recent Nigeria's political landscape has been bombarded with questions, over which ethnic group or geo-political zone's turn it is to govern? Subsumed within the context of political stand-off and lack of party cohesion and discipline. This pathetic state has attracted much misgivings about the future of this great country, prompting a rethinking on adopting a stabilising force, like zoning principle and rotational presidency. Zoning has become both topical and bleeding, it has generated diverse commentaries from the elites. Some are very controversial as it outrightly condemned it, while others have advocated its adoption. These altercations were subjected to critical analysis to dissect the political game and gain in jettisoning it, and the game or gain derived from its adoption and application. For theoretical framework, the paper adopted Zero-Sum Game, a variant of Game theory, while for methodology the descriptive and content analysis was utilized. The paper found a bit of genuineness in some of the expressed fears about zoning, while others are mundane, self serving, and clothed with ethnic and group interests. Sadly enough, the Federal government of Nigeria has not given the zoning principle the required constitutional consideration. The paper came to the conclusion that the peculiarity of Nigeria's political environment and insincerity among the governing elites makes the zoning formula

vulnerable to fostering selfish motives. The paper recommends adoption of zoning for political parties in the interim while being properly monitored,, Its legal constitutionality progressively pursued by the National Assembly.

Key Words: *Altercations; Zoning; Zero-Sum Game; Rotational.*

Introduction

The topicality of zoning principal offices in Nigeria is a bleeding issue that has attracted various comments, some swift disagreements as much as outright support over its practicality. The polity has been heated following the trend of events prior to the epoch making 2022 National Convention of both People's Democratic Party(PDP) and All People's Congress(APC). The situation worsened after the two major political parties failed to adopt zoning principle in the choice and pre-election selection of candidates. During the last political party convention, both parties took the stand of jettisoning the zoning principle. Even when zoning as a party policy was adopted in the 1980s by the National Party of Nigeria. Then the People's Democratic Party in the 1999, 2007, 2015, and 2019 general elections. Though laudable, but its operational mechanism was not rigid enough, proving that the support base for zoning was then very fluid. Moreover, one should not loose sight of the fact that some Nigerians from both South and North are strongly against zoning, while others are in favour of it, influenced by various motives, and depending on where their interest lies. In other word, there has been outright condemnation of zoning principle and rotational presidency by some concerned Nigerians, more so, with the distortion and manipulation of similar policies like the federal character principle, quota system, etcetera.

Just as there are some strong advocates for its adoption, taking into cognizance the unpredictable socio-political realities in Nigeria, though for some political parties, it does not matter if the principle adopted for choosing the presidential candidates is discarded, as long as some personal and group interests are being met by such unpopular actions. There are several interests groups within the two major political parties, All People's Congress (APC) and People's Democratic Party (PDP). The actions or inaction, including statements made by some Politicians, all are shrouded in selfish personal or group interests. Compounded by activities of money bags, whose unwholesome grips on the parties creates factions within each party hierarchy, making party cohesion very.difficult, opening doors and creating loopholes for internal party conflicts, and unwarranted decamping to other political parties.

In recent months a lot of strategizing went on towards forming alliances penultimate to the 25th February, 2023 general election, and then the 18th March, 2023 gubernatorial election, that gulped billions of Naira in its conduction. Based on past experiences, It is feared that those appointed and those recently chosen through the pre-election selection process may not have the requisite capacity and capability to deliver responsible and responsive services to the yearning and aspiration of Nigerians. Well-meaning citizens and international observers have accused the electoral body of poor outing, and electoral process bedevilled with fraudulent malpractices. Independent Electoral Commission is going through a phase of rising agitation and opposition. Of course in Nigerian politics electoral malpractice is a common trend, a familiar terrain for

corrupt politicians. This is because of variation in individual interest and aspirations, while national interest trails behind.

Some have made useful suggestions on the potential benefits of adopting zoning principle and rotational formula in the process of selection of representatives from Local Government to States, then Constituency and Federal representatives. Though such suggestions had been adopted and implemented in the past, but was not without resistance. More resistance to the zoning principle is likely going to increase for no other reason than to maintain the status quo of domination of political leadership by one section of elite group or the other. Yet global trends demands sanitizing the democratic process of choosing candidates and the political leaders. Maybe we should go back and dust up the zoning principle, to sanitize some of the basic criterion, processes and procedures for determining and choosing who should be elected and which zone, ethnic group or constituency should present candidates for political offices.

The paper examines various altercations with regards to the principle of zoning, did an analysis of the principle within the context of rugged politics involved in the choice of presidential candidates for 2023 general election, in this paper, the views of mostly the elites from various ethnic group and zones are examined. From those against adoption of the instrumentality of zoning the office of the president, to those in consonants with the principle. While we embark in the work of objectively analysing the altercations for, and against zoning major political offices and positions, assessing some expressed fears and reasons given by those who oppose it, the paper sought to decipher the genuineness and the mundaneness of the arguments, as well as the games involved, and the gains to be derived.

Theoretical Framework

Zero-Sum Game Theory

Neumann and Morganstern (1943) originally theorized the game theory for economics in their book "Theory of Games and Economic Behaviour". The theory is also popular in Karl Deutsch book, "The Analysis of International Relation", according to him "the players not only win something competitively from one another, but also collectively stand to gain or lose something from an additional player", whose interest may be dissimilar or similar, creating the avenue for opposition to one another. This theory has been adopted and adapted by Scholars for political science In political enquiry. First applied to political science in the 1950s. Plano and Riggs (1973, p.33), explains that it is "a body of thought dealing with rational decision strategies in situations of conflict and competition, which each participant or player seeks to maximise gains and minimize losses". The process of attaining office of the President or Governor is very competitive hence the political game is either to win or loss.

Game theoretical model has other variants, which are the Zero-Sum game and the N-Sum game, amongst others. The Zero-Sum Game is most often displayed in Nigeria's political arena. Politicians embrace the style of political game which encourages politics to be an all-time gain, one political party gain is another political party loss. APC's loss is PDP's gain and vice versa. The north's gain is the south's loss, one person's loss is another person's gain. Meanwhile elites gain has always been a loss to the masses. Politics is played as a zero-sum game, where the winner takes all. Though participants are meant to follow the rules, but because there's no

compensation for the losers, rules are changed, by-passed, or jettisoned, loopholes are created by the players to suit their stand on national issues. Policies are adopted and decision taken for the purposes of gain, and shunned if the group will encounter losses. In such situations competitors minimize their losses while trying to maximize more gains than their opponents. The outcome of N-Sum game depends on performances of the participants and competitors, each benefits from the gains as well as the losses. It does not take a do or die step. Kolawole (1997, p. 270), explains that "a decision of one actor depends on the decisions of other actors, thus it emphasizes the interdependence of actors decisions".

Nigerian politicians decided to adopt zoning principle from 1999 to 2019, but all of a sudden, it was jettisoned by the northern zone for the 2023 election, without considering the political implication and repercussion. For those opposing zoning, it is believed that the principle will not work in their favour and that of their ethnic group, while those in favour support it because they think that if applied as stated, it will work for their interest and in extension the interest of all. This all find expression within the context of game theory. It is a political game, and some persons or groups must win. There is assurance of profitable outcome in the final analysis for each player in this political game. Helpful strategies that enable them to win are skilfully pursued, to minimize loss, while maximizing political gain. Politicians play to win, such as taking decisions and engaging in strategies beneficial to them, and at the same time detrimental to their opponents. The slogan is we win, you loose, nothing more. Whether in discussions of national issues or debates on any policy decision, the selfish inclination is projected. It is always me versus you, we versus them.

Real life is full of situations in which people intentionally pursue their own interests at the expense of others. Whosoever is fielded to stand for a general election does not matter as long as some personal and group interests will be met or fulfilled. Though Ekekwe, (2006), have argued that "resistance to zoning has nothing to do with Nigeria's structural defects, nor religious diversity, not even differences in ethnic configuration or national interests, but selfish elites interest". Political games are exclusively played by elites to sell their ideas in order to score a political goal. Often the players have special interest to protect, their attitude is also selfish. The political players are out to win by all means, no matter how bloody or dirty the means maybe. So ethical considerations such as morality, justice, fairness or equity is out of the equation and very strange when it comes to political arguments.

Nigerian elites compete for supremacy over positions, that can grant them access to amass wealth which is the reason for participation in national activities, the outcome of which invariably is gain to the participants and loss to others. These elites have played enough Chess game with the future of this country, and have continued this game of gain, either in their acceptance or rejection of national issues. The main motive for taking any particular position, for or against the zoning principle, is to gain or win, so as to fulfil some selfish interests. So in rejecting the zoning principle during the process of choosing candidates for presidential election, whether they or the country loose or gain is a matter of time.

Clamour for Zoning and Rotation, a Historical Antecedents

During the 1987 political conference, the issue came up for discussion, but the Political Bureau

did not support zoning or the idea of rotating the office of the President. "The next clamour for rotational presidency was the most heated, following the annulment of June 12, 1993 election and the crisis that followed. The clamouring became more pronounced as the incident renewed fears of unwillingness on the part of Northern elites to accept a non-northerner as the Chief Executive of the federation'(Amadi, 1995). Coming down to June 27, 1994, General Sani Abacha gave a mandate to the National Constitutional Conference members during their inauguration, to discuss on a variety of national issues. On the list for discussion was item 22, dealing with the issue of rotating the office of the president. More than expected, this particular convention of rotating the office of the executive president between the north and south ended up becoming more controversial than ever. Anucha (2010) a member and one of the attendees of the Conference, reports that while most "Southern delegates were in support of rotation, their Northern counterparts were against its adoption on a permanent basis". Some rather prefer a situation where it is not inserted in the Constitution. The worst part of the debate was those that outrightly opposed the zoning principle. Members all had their reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with Item 22 in the agenda. Outside the Conference hall, Nigerians were divided, not understanding its nature and operation.

Though those genuinely in opposition view zoning and rotation as divisive in nature, a ploy to create instability in the country because its success is questionable in countries that adopted it. Besides, some have argued that its adoption in the face of the recent unstable character of Nigerian politics and lack of party cohesion, could fuel seeds of instability in the country. Calling to remembrance the experience of Yugoslavia and Lebanon, where the office of the president and vice were rotated both at the Provincial and the Republic levels. Yugoslavia has ceased to exist as a corporate entity. Lebanon has never seen peace ever, nor has things returned to normalcy. Those arguing against have a point here but, the principle succeeded in Switzerland. Though citizens with the interest of the country at heart are bound to express their fears by opposing zoning. Not forgetting the way and manner similar idea like federal character was bastardized and trivialized, while Federal Character Commission has been emasculated of her powers by the workings of various administrations. Exemplified by the recent skewed nature of political appointments by President Mohammad Buhari's Government, the appointees are mainly persons from the northern extraction. The appointments were done without any recourse to the existence of federal character principle in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Akinyola, (1996), in his book "Rotational Presidency", explains that the "constitution must address the history and ethnological factors,...the defund NPN constructed a model of zoning designed to alternate the geo-ethnic origin of the party's presidential, vice presidential, and chairmanship candidates from one election to the other". These ethnological factors are distinct historical facts in form of cultures and religion with lines of division and cleavages just as the individual differences and diversities are in every group. "Though some of the cleavages and differences may be in-consequential, yet a system of rapport can be created to neutralize and dampen sectional and ethnic outburst that may arise from one social context to another" (Amadi, 1995). Socially approved relations between individuals, the ethnic groups or zones exist within PDP. Its party platform is an avenue for encouraging cordiality amongst Nigerians, expressed by the zoning arrangement, while hoping that this gentleman's agreement will not cease to be honored. Albeit the actions and reactions of politicians about which zone should provide the next

President or Governor in 2023 should not be overlooked. The outburst may not be uncommon, and should not downplay opposing voices as they are actions not just of individuals interests, but the action of groups within groups. Moreover, socio-cultural environment of nations varies, pushing Nigerian politics to a situational politics occurring within a situational state.

Altercation for Zoning, the Game and the Gain

This altercation is an issue of citizens response to such bleeding issue as zoning or not zoning the office of the President, and other top political leaders. The work took a critical look at some exchange or interchange for or against zoning principle. Some had argued that what zoning aim to achieve within the context of preventing domination and marginalization for some ethnic groups by others is already partially inserted in the Constitution in the form of 'Federal Character'. In reacting to the zoning debacle, Ofonagoro (2010) decries "the lost opportunity when situation showed itself ripe for action, had the issue not been expunged from the draft Constitution in 1999, the zoning controversy would not have been an issue" by now, meaning that the matter would have long been settled. There are those on the middle ground, take for instance, Sabe from Jigawa state, he wants such undemocratic principle to be on a transitional basis rather than been inserted into the Constitution. The quest for zoning principal offices is it a political game plan by the elites? Who is gaining in this whole political drama of arguments and counter argument against and for zoning ?

Arguments Against Zoning

Some persons reject zoning principle, as it is believed to emanate from a fragment of the political elites and their bourgeoisie collaborators that are clamouring for rotational principle. Alluring that the reasons are borne out of some narrow selfish interest, aimed at entrenching corrupt and rudderless leadership. Others contend that "rotation of the office of the executive president is very divisive and will polarize the country the more"(David-West, 1977). Given the recourse to ethnicity at the slightest opportunity by the political elites. When it is the turn of the south to present a candidate, disagreement may arise over whose turn it is, whether majority or minority, Ibo or Yoruba, and among the southern minorities. In the North there are Hausa/Fulani and their minority counterparts, zoning policy may increase the tendency for heightened hostility and suspicion of the action of various groups. Ethnic and the religious prejudice are also prevalent in the north, crisis may re-surface at the slightest provocation, thence opening the door for military intervention in politics. Osai (1995), added that "given the realities of ethnicity, which is a sentiment that cannot be wished away or swept under the carpet", what Nigeria need is a system which takes cognizance of the geo-political and ethnic intricacies of the country, (as much as) a "harmonious and durable system of power sharing" especially with such a situational federalism as practiced in Nigeria.

Wada Nas (former Minister of State for Education), states that rotational presidency will pose "the danger of the country being saddled with poor leadership, if it is the turn of a zone that has no qualified person"(Nwankwo,1994). This is an important national issue which is been trivialized by a Minister. If we may ask, which zone in Nigeria does not have qualified candidates for the presidency? Although this line of thought comes head-on with the contention that zoning "will lead to sequestering leadership and encouraging mediocrity. if we may briefly

address the argument of sequestration and mediocrity, it is contended here that in every zone there are credible leadership materials; it behooves the political class of each zone to present it's best for the national assignment when it is their turn"(Osai and Okene, 2011).

Another argument is that when one zone gets the Presidency, there is the likelihood that the government may abandon other geo-political zones in strategic appointments and establishment of development projects. Thus leading the country back again to the vexing issue of poor leadership which is leadership for a zone or section. Such may plunge the country into anarchy. Endemic issues of poor, non-responsive, unpatriotic leadership, political domination by a section, marginalization of minority ethnic groups by majority, political instability, economic mismanagement, militancy, banditry, social chaos amongst others cannot be eliminated by rotating the office of the executive president between the north and south. According to professor Eyo Okon, the former Vice Chancellor of the University of Uyo in THE WEEK, June 5. 1995, "what will move Nigeria with its abundant human and natural resources to greatness, unity and development will be a strong genuinely patriotic, purposeful and visionary president, and a competent team of gifted performers, as Ministers, not a rotated President and six or seven idle Vice-Presidents who will necessarily have to operate as zonal or ethnic bigots". From the foregoing arguments, this school of thought assumes that rotational presidency cannot and will never solve Nigerian leadership question, neither can it help in the achievement of a nationally accepted leadership"(Amadi, 1995).

Also, by dividing the country into two zones, or six geo-political zones, and rotating the highest offices between the six zones, it is argued that you are invariably barring people from certain section of the country from vying for the highest position, and a violation of individual and group rights. Amongst those saddled with this line of thought is Rimi (1995), he argues that rotational presidency will promote sectional interest. In his own words; "I don't want my president to be sectional president, I want a Nigerian president who will be elected by all Nigerians". To clear the coast on such line of argument as presented by Abubakar Rimi, Osai, Kalagbor, Amadi and Okene(2023, p. 60) took the readers down memory lane by reminding us that "during the 2019 election, only candidates from the northern extraction contested for the presidential election while candidates from the south stayed out of the contest as it was believe to be the turn of northern politicians based on the PDP Constitution of 2009 as amended. Unfortunately while preparing for the 2023 general election, the coast was cleared and presidential door flung open by the 37-Man Committee of the PDP. Hence jettisoning the zoning arrangement". Meanwhile the arrangement has the capacity of saving the nation all that distraction, confusion and dissipated force that characterize the choice of leadership, especially at the national level, including during the last party convention and the recent general election of 25th February, 2023.

In continuing his argument, Rimi (1995) reminds his readers that; "if Abiola a southerner could win the 1993 presidential election, any other credible southern candidate was capable of becoming the president of the country without rotation". In other words, Nigerians without consideration to tribal origins are prepared to give sincere support to any leader who epitomizes the national dreams and ideals. This feat was achieved during the presidential election of June 12, 1993 when late Chief MKO Abiola was overwhelmingly elected from both north and south. Lets not forget that the political arena of 2023 and the atmosphere of 1993 are not the same. Even

with the political process, as well as cyclicity and circulation of elites, that notwithstanding, the crop of politicians that operated thirty years ago and the present charade across Nigeria are not the same. Also the organiser and umpire of the 1993 election was the military not civilians. Moreover, exclusive hold on power, domination, inequity, injustices, insecurity and volatility in society has not been so pronounced as been witnessed recently, neither has the country been politically polarized and economically mesmerized as it is today.

Ige (1995, March 4), refers to the zoning principle as "a political time bomb planted or intended to be planted so that it could blow up in the face of those who accepted it, to the advantage of those who do not intend to relinquish power. And for this reason, late Chief MKO Abiola languished and died in jail due to the fact that northern oligarchy did not want to change the status quo which is to their own advantage." In Confirming the above fact the spokesman for the Coalition of Northern Group(CNG), Adulaziz Suleiman, cautions against the zoning arrangement of People's Democratic Party(PDP), referring to it as; unreasonable, unacceptable against Northern interests, no matter the "section of the country, (whose turn it is to produce the president, they) cannot stop the North from fielding and backing candidates for presidency"(THIS DAY. Monday, March 28, 2022). All these arguments find expression within the context of game theory. Knowing that such outlandish, unguarded statement can create unnecessary but mutual fears, and tensions in the polity, fears of political domination by the north. This has over the years opened doors for the culture of intense struggle and contest to grab the highest office and juicy positions whether the candidate has what it takes to lead or not.

How genuine are these fears that are being expressed? What is the game and where is the gain in all these ? "In 1999 general election. The presidential ticket was zoned to the West with Olusegun Obasanjo and Olu Falae as the sole contestants representing the two major political parties. The north was assuaged in 2015, the presidential ticket was zone to the north, this also brought this convention to play as Mohammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar were adopted as the presidential candidates for APC and PDP. All other contestants from other regions stayed out or stepped down since it was believed that it was the turn of the Northern zone to produce the next President"(Osai, et al, 2023, p. 64).

The likes of Senator Dino Melaye in an interview with Channels Television on April 8, 2022, argued against zoning because he had a candidate from the north east zone, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, two-time Presidential aspirant and former Vice President for eight years, as his mentor and wants him at the helm of affairs come 2023. Take a situation where factions in PDP, are working against the presidential candidate already chosen and endorsed during their National convention, meaning that zoning may breed disloyalty by party members when and where the choice of candidate does not favour them. Another voice reacting to the PDP zoning policy is Adamu Hayatu-Deen, the National Chairman of APC, who was quoted recently in THIS DAY, Monday, 28 March, 2022, as saying that "it was wishful thinking and not practical for the Southern region to think the Presidency in 2023 will be zoned to them". On Thursday, March 31, 2022, LEADERSHIP Newspaper reveals that "Hayatu-Deen kicked against plans by the party to zone the presidential ticket ahead of 2023 election"(Ukaibe, 2022). According to him, "I am not aware of any referendum for the Nigerian people to vote on zoning, zoning is a matter of convenience for certain leaders and for parties to discuss and agree among themselves, it is not

an imposition that everyone is bound to abide by".

If a national leader of the ruling Party is taking such a stand and making statements in disregard to the party's Constitution, what do you expect from other members of the party? Anyway, what does the Party say with regard to anti-zoning members? Well by the general consensus of the Party, "it is an implied policy that the Party's National leaders and hierarchy must ensure that an anti-zoning Presidential candidate (that is one who decides to exercise his constitutional rights and defile the zoning policy), is not elected as the presidential candidate of the Party. Electing anti-zoning Presidential candidate is considered highly dangerous to the membership and stability of PDP"(Osai and Okene, 2011). Irrespective of the presence of the zoning principle, the actions and interest of individuals, and groups within groups should not be overlooked or underrated.

Resistance to zoning is also visible at the state level. Abia State PDP Chapter zoned the Governorship slot for 2023 to the Central and North Senatorial Districts in the State. In reacting to party policy, Senate Minority leader, Senator Enyinaya Abaribe, representing Abia South Senatorial District in the National Assembly declared that Abia State PDP Chapter "has no right to stop my ambition to contest next year's Governorship election on the ground of zoning". He advised Abians to disregard the purported zoning as it was aimed at excluding him from contesting. Backing his argument by quoting Sections 42(2) of the Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria, he concluded his statement with "nobody has the right to stop my dream of becoming the next Governor of Abia State"(THIS DAY, March 28, 2022). How do we tackle such views that are engrossed in selfish interest? The PDP provided solution, "where zoning and rotation are entrenched in the Party's Constitution, it must be strictly complied with until amended"(Osai and Okene, 2011). On the issue of zoning at the State and Federal Constituency levels the PDP National Vice Chairman, Chief Ali Odefa corroborates the above statement that, "We said where there are zoning patterns that must be strictly observed and adhered in every state and constituency"(THIS DAY, Monday March 28, 2022). Although this may be the unanimous stand of the party nevertheless there are lots of individual differences on what they understood as party policy. The duo, Osai and Okene(2011), further explains that the "policy of rotation and zoning does not disqualify those opposed to the arrangement from contesting for the Presidency at the National Convention of the Party because the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria gives every Nigerian rights to contest provided he or she is qualified". That not withstanding, some politicians will only obey party directives as long as it does not clash with their personal ambitions. While some are out to thwart party order, so that they will score a point that zoning and rotation is not working.

Arguments For Zoning

For Reverend Asoliye Douglas-West, a strong advocate of inclusive government, that recognizes the nation's ethnic diversities, he avers that the "principle of zoning is an extra-constitutional mechanism which evolved as an appropriate response to deal with moral conscience in enthroning unity and fairness in the distribution of political benefits to satisfy sentiments relating to our ethnic diversity". In support of the above statement, the Southern Governor's Forum after a meeting held in Lagos, on Monday, July 5, 2021, expressed inter alia; "that the presidency of Nigeria be rotated between Southern and Northern Nigeria...and that the next president of

Nigeria emerge from the Southern region". This singular resolution reflects commitment to continued existence of Nigeria as an entity while touching on the thorny issue that raises its ugly head at every turn in our national discourse. Although PDP members from the South-East have endorsed their support for the Southern Governors stand on zoning of presidency, in THIS DAY, Monday March 28, 2022, the National Vice Chairman, Chief Ali Odefa was reported to have said that the Party "unanimously agreed that PDP should zone the presidency of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to the southern part of the Country, ahead of the Party Primaries". He unequivocally attests that PDP South-East stands with the resolution of the Southern Governor's Forum, that the office of the presidency should be zoned to the Southern part of Nigeria.

Douglas-West (2022, April 4), writes that the Governor of Rivers State warned PDP to respect zoning. According to him, "our founding fathers never made a mistake, they know the complexity of this country...for Nigeria to move forward, fairness, equity and justice" must be upheld at all levels. Charity begins at home, so equity, fairness and inclusiveness should be practice from the local, to the state, then federal spaces. If this is not the case then steps must be taken for a paradigm shift and a change of policy, because it will be hypocritical if those agitating for zoning principle at federal space are not supporting its adoption or implementation at the state or local levels. Based on this view governorship aspirants in Rivers State, under the umbrella of APC have agreed to zone 2023 gubernatorial race to Riverine Ijaw. Claiming that the office has been occupied by the upland for the past 22 years since the birth of democratic rule.

Senator Orji Uzor Kalu, the former Governor of Abia State on Tuesday April 26, 2022, argues that "everywhere in the world, politics is situational and that of Nigeria is exceptionally situational. The situation in Nigeria is that without the support of other regions it would amount to a shadow chase for a south easterner to be president". He went on to plead with southern politicians in the two major political parties to rally behind zoning the office of president to the southeast. He made a thought provoking statement that, "if there is anything like fairness, equity and justice, it should be the entire south pushing for a president of southeast extraction. Anything less than that is hypocritical, unjustifiable and inordinate". Because he who must go to Chuku must go with a clean hand and carry equity. Those arguing for zoning on the ground of morality, justice and equity must prove that in their own little corner they are practicing such.

Meanwhile, Chief Ayo Adebajo, national leader of Afenifere declares that "it may lead to disintegration if the north insist on retaining the position of the president"(Vanguard, Monday, May 2, 2022). For the Pan-Niger Delta Forum (PANDEF) leader, Chief Edwin Clark, "it would be calamitous for two major political parties to zone the presidential ticket to the north". In addition to that the National Publicity Secretary of PANDEF, Hon Ken Robinson in an exclusive interview with Vanguard May 1, 2022, affirm that "PANDEF clearly and loudly reiterates that the zoning of political offices has been an intrinsic part of the nation's political arrangement, it cannot be casually jettisoned for any reason now, because there shall be inexorable collateral outcomes". Deji Adeyanju among others are for south eastern presidency. Also, Dr Doyin Okunpe, a non-Igbo makes a case for change of guard to the south-east. On the one hand he favours zoning, he demonstrated this faith in zoning by dropping his presidential ambition come 2023. He prefers the presidential position been zoned to the south-east, specifically to Peter Obi, the former Governor of Anambra State. In his words, "it would be wrong to jettison zoning. Stating that the steps taken is based on the 'spirit of fairness and equity', (he argues that) the top

position (slot) should be zoned to the South East"(THIS DAY, March 28, 2022).

This is another clarion call for the rotation of power to south-east, he specifically demanded that the top slot should be conceded to the Igbos. In the same paper, Former National Vice Chairman of PDP, a member of a 37-Man Zoning Committee, Nze Fidelis Oluchukwu advised "the party not to dump or abandon the zoning principle"(THIS DAY, March 28, 2022). He sent a memo to the Committee citing the case of "former Vice President, Atiku Abubakar, former Senate President Bukola Saraki, and Aminu Tambuwal, all Presidential aspirants in 2015, all left the party as a result of zoning". He Justified why the party must zone the Presidential ticket to the South. Considering the geo-ethnic configuration of the country, and a political culture that is yet to mature, alternating the position of the president will not be out of place, for the purpose of integrating the diverse groups.

Those in support of rotational presidency argues that it will provide for an equitable power sharing formula, while giving every sections of the country opportunities to produce the president of the federation, especially the marginalized southern minorities. The advocates believes that the system will give every section a sense of belonging to the national polity. Not only that, "it will minimize the hot scramble for the presidency... since they will be sure in the knowledge that sooner or later the presidential powers shall be theirs to exercise."(Osai and Okene (2011). How the policy will perform this function we do not know. Yet the writers adds that "there is the nagging need for Nigerians to fashion and uphold a system that has the capacity to guard against any potential waft towards brinkmanship and war of words over what tribe, ethnic nationality or section of the nation should hold what political position in the system. Such altercations plant seeds of preventable national catastrophe". According to Okon (1995, June 5), a delegate to the Constitutional Conference, argues that "rotational presidency will form the basis for a much more responsible and a much more responsive presidency." Another delegate, Alali Makinde added that the policy would "solve the substantial problem of the country" Considering the fact that if the leadership question is answered, the other questions will be taken care of, such as the national question, ethnicity, revenue sharing question and gender questions. Covering such issues as distribution of political and economic power, choice of a nationally acceptable leadership, revenue allocation formula, etcetera.

Anucha (2010) gave his voice to the call for a constitutional amendment that will make way for ethnic minorities to produce the President of this country. In his words "there should be a rotational presidency among the various geo-political zones in the country. This arrangement will give minorities some hope to run the affairs of this great country". Though this dream came to pass with Goodluck Jonathan's Presidency but not through the method most southerners had envisaged, as he served for just one tenure. National President of the Middle Belt Forum and Spokesperson Dr Bitrus Pogu on Monday January 17, 2022, issued a Press statement in support of power shifts to the south in 2023. Cautioning Northern Leaders of Thought over their stand and opposition to power rotation to the South. He stated that such stand "amounts to violating the arrangement on power shift(between North and South)," The principle they believe will help in mitigating tension among politicians, as much as reduce the intense struggle for power, thereby shifting especially the position of the president to Southern geo-political zones. Within Northern Governor's Forum, 13 out of 19 Governors through a press conference called for power shift to the South, affirming their "believe in the unity of the country and fairness to every group

that make up the country". They appealed to the APC to allow the South to take the turn of producing the next President.

Politics is a game to be gained by the much smarter player cum schemer. During the period of the convention of the PDP and the APC, each carefully watched the other to ascertain from which zone they will pick their presidential candidate. Now that PDP has thrown all cautions to the wind, rejected the zoning principle in their Constitution, and went ahead to choose Alhaji Atiku Abubakar another northerner as their Presidential flag bearer for the 2023 general election, meaning that if he eventually wins, power will remain in the north for another 8 years. Meanwhile APC chose Ahmed Tinubu from the South West, he too decided to shun the precepts that denied him the Vice Presidential ticket in 2015, with a clear understanding that the country was not ripe for a Muslim-Muslim ticket then. So what makes the APC as a political party think that in 2023, Nigerians would embrace or welcome Muslim-Muslim ticket, coupled with recent political volatility, insecurity, suspicion, tensions and internal party crisis, how can all these socio-political tensions persuade or convince Nigerians to welcome Muslim-Muslim ticket.

Southern politicians forgot that Nigerian politics is not played on the platform of fairness and sentiment. They must wake-up to the stake reality of brute politics where morality is thrown overboard and the strongest carry the day in the order of Machiavellian's end justifying the means. Election winners in Nigeria are the strongest elites, in term of economic power, business elites's, and the best riggers. Such travesty must change if the country wants to make a head way politically and economically. Money bags unwholesome control of who goes in and who does not has not helped Nigeria's democratic development. Going through communique issued at the end of Nigerian Political Science Association Round table on 'Attaining Electoral integrity in the 2023 General Election in Nigeria', they observed that, "the party system encourages a zero-sum approach to politics". Meaning that the game displayed in the political arena is the zero-sum game, winner takes all, no equity, no fairness, no justice, no concession and no morality. That is why the political terrain is bogged down with the calibre of leadership that has not been able to steer the ship of the country in the right direction. In addition to much political manoeuvring, so much rooms has been given to so many carpet crossings and defections.

In situating the above altercations within the context of rejecting or adopting the zoning principle in the choice of presidential or governorship candidates for the 2023 general election, the entire political trajectory has opened the door for Nigerians to look beyond the two major political parties for another alternative. Presently there is a third party to watch, and that is the Labour Party, they skilfully chose Peter Obi, a Christian from the South East, he in turn chose his Vice a Muslim from the North West. The duo with little or no structure on ground, yet they are making waves. The Labour Party not only adopted the zoning principle in the selection of the top most positions, the candidates chosen have penetrated the nooks and crannies of the country to sell their manifesto and vision for a better Nigeria for all Nigerians. it is left for electorates to decide through the ballot box where the next President will emerge whether from the north or south? The onus is on the electorates to choose a citizen to pilot the country's affairs and not an idiot or a tribesman according to ancient Greeks classification.

Conclusion

Democracy means rule by majority, besides, politics is a game of numbers, and because of acclaimed disparity in the population figures between the North and South, some concerned citizens from the Northern zones are using it as a strong argument against zoning claiming that it is undemocratic to bar certain sections of the country from vying for the highest position, as electorates in the affected zone may display apathy towards the political system. In other words, when it is the turn of the South to produce the presidential candidate, voters in the North may exercise their franchise with reservation and vice versa. This is the main crux of the argument of those against zoning or rotational president. Such altercations plant seeds of preventable national catastrophe. We advise that a precedent have been laid down and should be followed, that is what makes for unity in a multi-ethnic diverse country and helps for nation building in a situational federalism like Nigeria.

Sifting through the whole argument by anti-zoning group, one can sift out a mixture of selfishness, intermixed with this political game. Reasons given might be borne out of some narrow and selfish motives, rather than for national interest which is a gain. From the arguments it could be noticed that it is a fragment of the elites and their political collaborators that are clamouring for jettisoning rotational principle so as to entrench themselves. Though critical as it may seem, howbeit one has to be conscious of the erroneous impression that the survival of the country depends on the geographic location of her leaders. Also, the nation is argus with so much uncertainties and policy somersaults, rotational presidency may or may not work in this political dispensation because the present crop of politicians cannot be trusted to keep their words, neither do they obey precepts for the sake of the country. Meanwhile zoning can be pivotal for attaining free and fair election at each zonal level, but its constitutionality must firstly be determined.

The paper conclude that the peculiarity of Nigerian political environment and insincerity among the elites, makes the adoption of zoning formula vulnerable to fostering selfish motives. The APC government that rejected zoning during the selection of presidential candidates in 2022, has now after the February 25, 2023 general election dusted out and reintroduced the zoning formula for some strategic positions, to take effect after the swearing in of the new administration. Though the electorates have spoken, chosen and given their mandate to a leader that can possibly lead them out of the road that lead to no where, but the political trajectory of executive impunity, corrupt electoral umpire, with crude uncivilized politicians bent on continuing with undemocratic methods of electoral violence, electronically tampering with the collation of election results are out to thwart and truncate the people's verdict and choice of a better candidate amongst the players. Coming from the same environment, will the judiciary not be entangled and tarnished with the crude politicking in the country? The outcome of the various election petitions will vindicate them.

Recommendations

1. Though the proposal for zoning was expunged in the 1995 Constitution, the paper recommends that those political parties that already have the formula, its execution should be properly monitored, and Its legal constitutionality progressively pursued by the National Assembly, to minimize political domination of the many by the few. We enjoin politicians not to jettison the principle of zoning, rather it should be adopted in the interim, pending when it will be enshrined in the constitution. To douse the flood/charade of agitations that may reach frenzy

heights after the general election of 2023.

2. Public policy formulators should give serious thought to enshrining it in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Getting it enshrined will give legal backing to the pro-zoning bandwagon. Zoning can be a panacea for achieving a free and fair election in a country divided by group and individual interests.

3.. Whatever consensus agreed upon by the elites, should not allow personal or group interests to override national interest, therefore, we want to also add that if zoning will enthrone responsible and responsive leadership, it should be given a serious thought and if possible adopted by political parties.

4. Southerners should put their house in order and support the credible candidate that has been accepted nationally for 2023, and should not allow the power house from other zones to choose a consensus candidate that will act as a willing tool to maintain the status quo of predatory governance for this country. Q.E.D.

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