

**MICROZONING ELECTIVE POSITIONS AS RECIPE FOR  
PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE IN KOGI STATE,  
NIGERIA**

**USMAN SALISU OGBO, Ph.D.**

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**ODIJI OKPANACHI LINUS**

Department of Political Science, Kogi State University, Anyigba  
usmansalisuogbo9@gmail.com; okpasspecial@yahoo.com

**Abstract**

While the practice of zoning elective positions seems to be gaining momentum in Nigeria particularly with the observed apportioning of elective positions to selected geopolitical zones after the 2019 general elections, this advocacy paper posits that the manner with which the ruling elites dictate who gets what, how and when instead of allowing positions to microminiaturely rotate successionaly among component units of the federation is unfair. With the Theory of Equity serving as a guiding compass and unfolded events in the politics and governance of Kogi State since its creation as analytical data, we argue that the extant modus operandi more often than not favours sections of the polity at the expense of others as the power-players do not only arrogate lucrative positions to their enclaves, but also selfishly amass state resources. This is one of the root causes of the ethnic based conflicts as well as minority agitations which have engulfed the Nigerian political environment. As a recommendation therefore, we admonish the governing elite to adopt micro-zoning of elective political positions in order to give every component part of the federation a sense of belonging as this will surely engender peace as well as promote national security and development.

Keywords: Micro-zoning, State, elective position, Recipe, Peaceful coexistence

**Introduction**

One major reason which has been adduced for the calls on the rotation of political power positions in Nigeria is because the practice have served as a phenomenon used to ensure the continuity and integration of ethnically-diverse federal states such as Switzerland. But in the case of Nigeria, the issue of power shift has become a recurring decimal (Awopeju, Adelus & Oluwashakin, 2012). It was observed for instance that the zoning of elective positions particularly the office of the president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, was born out of the need to pacify the aggrieved nerves from the south western part of the country that vehemently fought for the revalidation and restoration of the June 12 election results. According to Siollun (2019), the grouse of the pro-democrats with the northern elite who purportedly annulled the election was the fact that the north has controlled the country more than the other section since independence. This fact gave credence to the agitation for zoning or the rotation of political offices.

Another imperativeness or need for zoning in Nigeria is the fact that though the country is made up of approximately 250 ethnic groups, only the major ones using their demographical strength have called the shot in the political affairs of the country leaving the minorities to wallow on the sideline of the political pitch. The need for fairness, equity and justice would naturally demand that other segments of the state

be given the chance to have the taste of power. This obviously shows how the more populous ethnic group(s) always has their way whenever elections are conducted. This indeed is responsible for the trend of violent conflicts that have over the years characterised the nation's political terrain. It is in the light of this that the issue of zoning in party politics dates back to the Second Republic when the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) operated the formula as a strategy for the re-unification of the country after the civil war (Awopeju, Adelusi & Oluwashakin, 2012).

Just as the division of the country into geo-political zones is for the purpose of rotational presidency after the annulment of June 12 elections (see Zik, 2010: 12), so also each of the 36 states in Nigeria is politically partitioned into three senatorial zones. One of the greatest challenges often faced by these states some of which are multi ethnic and religiously diverse entities is the difficulty inherent in maintaining and sustaining the system in such a manner that political harmony and peaceful coexistence are guaranteed through zoning. This has observably resulted to the lingering conflicts and violence which feature in many of these states during elections (Domingo & Nwankwo, 2010). Some of the states which have featured on the pages and footages of the news media for power rotation and tenure related crisis based on ethnic or geographical sentiments are Benue, Kaduna, Kogi and Rivers.

Though as one of those who keenly studied the practice of zoning political offices in Nigeria, Simbine (2002) had opined that the formula seems to fit into the heterogeneous and federal nature of the Nigerian state, helping to accommodate all groups as much as possible and therefore reducing complaints of domination and marginalization. Other scholarly commentaries such as Ololajulo (2016) have alluded to the capacity of such informalities for conflict mitigation and consensus formation in plural societies. The author however argued that though the practice of zoning has the capacity for maintaining peaceful political order, it has rather occurred more as an elites' strategy to negotiate continued participation in the political process and access to the national wealth. There are those that have hardly seen anything benevolent about the arrangement. Kunle Adegoke for instance who was reported in Ogbonikan (2018) grossly faulted the preference for zoning when choosing candidates, saying it is a strategy to narrow the political space to favour a weak candidate. Others such as Domingo & Nwankwo (2010) and Mudiaga-Odje (2010) who bemoaned the practice have cited how it has generated so many furore in the polity particularly with the controversy that surrounded President Jonathan's intention to run for the presidency in 2011 and 2015 when the northern political elite believed it was still their turn to maintain the position. Following this debate, the intention of this work is to carry out a systematic analysis on this issue in order to present a more critical and holistic essay.

### **Conceptual and Contextual Clarification**

Understanding microzoning of state elective positions as a recipe for peaceful coexistence in Nigeria demands both conceptual classification of state within the Nigerian context. In general terms, a state is connoted as an organised community living under a system of government; either a sovereign state, constituent state, or federated state. It equally refers to a form of polity that is typically characterised as a ~organ-i-sa-tion. Although there exists no single, undisputed de-f-i-n-i-tion of what constitutes a state (Cudworth, 2007; Barrow, 1993), a widely-utilised description is the one positing a state as being a political system which within a given ter-ri-tory main-tains a mo-nop-oly on the use of force (see Cudworth, 2007 and Salmon, 2008). Because of the differing characteristics of what constitute a state, so many other definitions abound. For instance, while some states are sov-er-eign, other states are sub-ject to ex-ter-nal sov-er-eignty or hege-mony where supreme au-thor-ity lies in a mega state (Marek, 1954). Akin to this is the situation whereby a state can refer to ~that are mem-ers of federal arrangement in which sov-r-ignty is shared be-tween mem-er states and a fed-ral body.

he most com-only used de---ion isthat of Max Weber as used by Cudworth (2007); Salmon, (2008); Earle (1997) and Dubreuil (2010) which de-scribes the state as a com-pul-sory po-lit-i-cal or-ga-ni-za-tion with a cen-tral-ized gov-ern-ment that main-tains a mo-nop-oly of the le-git-i-mate use of force within a cer-tain territory. Gen-eral cate-gories of state in-sti-tu-tions in-clude ad-min-is-tra-tive bu-reau-cra-cies, legal sys-tems, and mil-i-tary or re-li-gious or-ga-ni-za-tions. An-other com-mon-ly ac-cepted de-f-i-n-i-tion of the

state is the one given at the Montevideo Convention on Rights and Duties of States in 1933. It sees the state as an entity which should possess: (a) a permanent population; (b) a defined territory; (c) government; and (d) capacity to enter into relations with the other states.

Understanding micro zoning as a recipe for the equitable distribution of political power positions in an ethnically-diverse polity like Nigeria, demands a proper comprehension of the term zoning and micro-zoning in relation to state elective positions. But before going into this conceptual exercise, it is imperative to note that the Nigerian federation as is historically known is bedevilled by lot of challenges principal amongst which are the violent conflicts arising from the struggle for power and resources among its diverse ethnic groups which comprise the system. It is in an attempt to douse the tensions and forestall the violence that usually arise as a result of the struggles for powerful political positions that the political elite adopt some form of zoning models for the distribution of political offices (Usman & Odiji, 2019).

The conception of zoning in this work is not different from the common meaning attached to it by the users of English language. It simply refers to any means of arrangement or marking-off into zones (See Webster Dictionary, 2013). In this regard, it connotes partitioning of a city, local council, state or country by ordinance into sections reserved for different purposes. Understanding zoning from the parlance of politics would mean that a politically administered system is separated or divided along geographical configuration and meticulously named for purposeful identification. As a policy and practice, the idea of partitioning and zoning of political offices along geographical areas has consciously been adopted by the founding fathers of the country. This is in line with the federal character principle of the Nigerian laws as clearly stated in the 1999 constitution. The practice allows for the sharing of contestable political office positions so as to be equitably distributed amongst the variously recognized geopolitical enclaves of the country, states or local governments as the case may be. Particularly, Sections 14 articles 3 and 4 of the 1999 Constitution provide categorically that the composition of governments of the Federation, states and Local Government Areas (LGA), or any of their agencies, shall be carried out in such a manner that would reflect the federal character of the country.

It is in an effort to explain and recommend zoning within the context of the Nigerian federation that Agbakoba (2011) as cited in Awopeju, Adelusi and Oluwashakin (2012) posits that the the Federal Character principle at Section 14 which informs the zoning of public offices is about inclusion of the six geopolitical zones in the allocation of political and public-sector appointments including the office of President. As far as Antonia Simbine (2002) is concerned the zoning formula fits into the heterogeneous and federal nature of the Nigerian state helping it to accommodate all groups as much as possible and therefore reducing complaints of domination and or marginalization. The author further posited that the system is more inclusive of almost all if not all identifiable groups and therefore more supportive of what is now known to be the democratic culture. It also serves as an act of balancing conflicting demands and one of the requirements of nomination of candidate in order to embrace the principle of federal character in a cleavage society.

One of the challenges which have bedevilled zoning itself in the Nigerian context is the continued recycling and repetition of individuals from the same areas in elective positions in such a manner that some other zones are eternally excluded from active participation of governance. Whereas Sakanko & David (2018) had clearly stated that the introduction of the zoning system into the country's political space was to aid the smooth rotation of key political positions across the country. This policy according to the authors was to achieve peace, fairness and equitable distribution of resources. Defining zoning as a formula which partitions or divides a country into different electorate zones, for the purpose of rotating major political offices, the authors observe that the practice did not just commenced in the fourth republic but was adopted and implemented during the politics of the second republic particularly between 1979 and 1983. Despite being initially designed for the federal level, the formula was consciously replicated in states and local authorities for easy diffusion of government.

Summarizing the essence of this practice in the Nigerian context, Orji (2008) emphasized that the principle refers to an aggregation of the states into six geographic zones on the basis of which positions are allocated. The main purpose of zoning is to make sure that the different offices are rotated amongst the regions. The second function was to make sure that power would shift from one region to another, thereby hindering one region from politically dominating others. It is on this basis that microzoning which further partitions a state's geographical zones into miniature areas such as senatorial districts, federal constituencies, local governments and wards for the sake of rotating elective positions is admonished in this discourse.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Theory of Justice is employed here to serve as a guide for this analysis. Expounded by John Rawl in 1971, the theory posits that every individual or group of people has the same infeasible claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties. It is a work of political philosophy and ethics by Rawls, in which the scholar tries to address the problem of distributive justice (that is, the socially just distribution of goods in a society). Rawls argues for a principled reconciliation of liberty and equality that is meant to apply to the basic structure of a well-ordered society (Merten, 2005). Central to this effort is an account of the circumstances of justice, inspired by David Hume, and a fair choice situation for parties facing such circumstances, similar to some of Immanuel Kant's views. Principles of justice are sought to guide the conduct of the parties. These parties are recognized to face moderate scarcity, and they are neither naturally altruistic nor purely egoistic. They have ends which they seek to advance, but prefer to advance them through cooperation with others on mutually acceptable terms. Rawls offers a model of a fair choice situation (the original position with its veil of ignorance) within which parties would hypothetically choose mutually acceptable principles of justice. Under such constraints, Rawls believes that parties would find his favoured principles of justice to be especially attractive, winning out over varied alternatives, including and 'right wing' libertarian accounts.

It revolves around the adaptation of two fundamental principles of justice which would, in turn, guarantee a just and morally acceptable society. The first principle guarantees the right of each person to have the most extensive basic liberty compatible with the liberty of others. The second principle states that social and economic positions are to be (a) to everyone's advantage and (b) open to all. According to the First Principle, each person or group is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all. For the Second Principle, social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both: (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just savings principle and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity." (Rawl, 1971). These principles are lexically ordered, and Rawls emphasizes the priority of liberty. The first principle is often called the greatest equal liberty principle. The second is the equal opportunity principle (Voice, 2011).

The first principle of equal basic liberties is to be used for designing the political constitution, while the second principle applies primarily to economic institutions. (Sampurnaa Dutta 2017). This articulated complex idea of justice by Rawls is meant to provide a procedural method of distributing political rights and economic benefits to the citizens as moral agents in any given society, especially, in a democratic set up where there is free economy and individual liberty. This perhaps aims at maximizing the welfare of the citizens, especially the worst-off group. It is in accordance with Rawls' doctrine of procedural principles of fair treatment that Nigeria adopts the federal character or the zoning system as a formula of distributive justice which aims at achieving a fair play in politics as well as equal distribution of burdens or opportunities and other social goods (economic and social benefits) Kabuk (2015).

### **Methodology**

Secondary data was principally utilised for this work. Information was garnered mainly from events which unfolded and reported in journals, textbooks and the news media. Party documents, such as their

constitutions and guidelines were equally of great benefits. Using the critical and expository methods of presenting information, the salient points of this discourse were duly presented and analysed.

#### **Brief History of the Politics of Zoning in Kogi State**

Kogi is a state in the Middle-Belt region of Nigeria otherwise known as North central region. It is popularly called the Confluence State because of the confluence of River Niger and River Benue at its capital, Lokoja, which is the first administrative capital of modern-day Nigeria. The state was created in 1991 from parts of Kwara State and Benue State. The state as presently constituted, comprises the people of the Kabba Province of Northern Nigeria. There are three main ethnic groups and languages in Kogi which are Igala, Ebira, and Okun (a Yoruba Group) with others such as Bassa-Nge, a people of Nupe extraction in Lokoja and Bassa Local Government Area, Bassa-Komo of Bassa Local Government Area, Gwari, Kakanda, Oworo people (A Yoruba Group), Ogori, Magongo (Ehimony, 2007). Like every other state of the Nigerian federation, Kogi is divided into three Senatorial districts which are: Kogi East, Kogi West and Kogi Central producing one senator each during election. The State consists of twenty-one (21) Local Government Areas which are recognised by the FGN (1999) as: Adavi, Ajaokuta, Ankpa, Bassa, Dekina, Ibaji, Idah, Igalamela-Odolu, Ijumu, Kabba/Bunu, Koton Karfe, Lokoja and Mopa-Muro, others are: Ofu, Ogori/Magongo, Okehi, Okene, Olamaboro, Omala, Yagba East and Yagba West. Out of these 21 LGAs, 9 belong to the Kogi east senatorial district, 6 to the Kogi west district and the remaining five belonging to the Kogi central.

As Fanwo rightly noted in 2015, the creation of Kogi State in 1991 by the Ibrahim Babangida military administration came with the struggle for relevance as a characteristic feature of the polity. The marriage of inconvenience between the major ethnic groups that formed the state such as the Igala, Ebira, Okun, Bassa and Nupe has been the political stamp on the confluence state. While the Igalas in the present day Kogi East came from the old Benue State, the Ebira and Okun formed the bureaucratic locomotive of the old Kwara State. Unlike the Ebira and the Okun, who were relevant in the politics and bureaucracy of their former state, the Igala were crammed in between the battles of supremacy that featured between the Tiv and the Idoma of the old Benue State. Thus, the Igala came into Kogi fully armed with the knowledge of the practical meaning of marginalization (Fanwo, 2015).

While Kogi East, which is predominantly Igala has nine LGAs, the Okun-dominated Kogi West has seven LGAs while Ebira-dominated Kogi Central has five LGAs. The Igala struck hard from the beginning to break the gourd containing the political future and fortune of the state. From 1991 when the aborted third republic was conceived to 2015, Kogi East produced the Governor of the state in all the five elections which were conducted producing Prince Abubakar Audu twice, Alhaji Ibrahim Idris twice and Captain Idris Wada once. Out of these five electoral contests and victories to the position of governorship, Kogi central produced four deputy governors two of which went to Okene LGA, the other two to Okehi LGA and one to Kogi west.

Dissatisfied with a situation where a section of the state hold sway on the governorship, a few elements from the Central and West began the agitation for power rotation in 2003. It became clear according to the likes of Late Prince Olusola Akanmode and the late Sen. A.T. Ahmed that the East had an agenda to retain the governorship of the state (Fanwo, 2015). All their attempts were frustrated at the primary election level, with the structural superiority of Kogi East. It became clear that the political parties were helpless as far as power rotation was concerned. The only time PDP lost the governorship of the state was when the party gave its ticket to a non-Igala in the person of Late Architect Stephen Olorunfemi who was the party's candidate in the 1999 contest.

#### **The Imperatives of Microzoning for Equity and Fairness**

Following the provisions of the federal character principle as contained in section 21 of the 1999 constitution, political parties which had actively participated in the country's polls since democracy returned have consciously chosen their flag-bearers from various sections of the polities. The Peoples

Democratic Party (PDP) and All Peoples Party (APP) and later All Progressive Congress (APC) were particularly careful to be faithful to this principle when they included in their party guiding documents the resolve to adhere to and abide by the principle of power sharing. In the preamble to the constitution of the PDP, it highlighted that it will:

Create socio-political conditions conducive to national peace and unity by ensuring fair and equitable distribution of resources and opportunities, to conform with the principles of power shift and power sharing by rotating key political offices among the diverse peoples of our country and evolving powers equitably between the federal, state and local governments in the spirit of federalism.

The party further emphasized in her main document that in pursuant of the principles of equity, justice and fairness it shall adhere to the policy of rotation and zoning of party and public elective offices and it shall be enforced by the appropriate executive committee at all levels (section 7 (2) (c) of the PDP Constitution, 1998). It is in obedience to this guiding principle that the various deputy governors under governors Idris and Wada were picked from areas other than where the governors hail from. Other positions such as the speaker of the State House of Assembly and deputy speaker were carefully selected to reflect and abide by the principle of federal character and zoning. Similarly, at the times when the APP and APC managed the affairs of the state, the same principle was observably taken to cognisance in fielding candidates for elective positions. This adherence to the federal character principle is clearly stated in article 20 (iv) of the APC's constitution which reads that:

Without prejudice to article 20 (ii) and (iii) of this constitution, the national working committee shall subject to the approval of the national executive committee, make rules and regulations for the nomination of candidates through primary elections. All such rules, regulations and guidelines shall take into consideration and uphold the principle of federal character, gender balance and geopolitical spread and rotation of offices to as much as possible ensure balance within the constituency covered.

As far as Kogi State is concerned, the positions which the zoning principle applies are: LGA chairmen and their various ward councillors, house of assembly and federal house of representative membership, the senate and presidency. All these show that despite the covert appearance of the idea of zoning in the Nigerian constitution, political parties operating in the country have demonstrated the extent to which they cherish it ideals within their own limits and capacities.

The appreciation and adoption of the zoning principle as demonstrated by the political parties above notwithstanding, the fact remains that the so called zoning has been more of a recycling of the elite class who usually pursue their parochially permanent interest of perpetuating themselves in power. For instance, how can one explain a situation where the sons and brothers of those who have fully tasted power as governors now jostle for the same position in spite of the fact that other component units of the system have not had any shot at the same position? While candidates have often emerged from axis which fall within the enclaves of the tribes with majority such as the Igala, Ebira and Okun-Yoruba, the minorities such as the Bassa Nges, Bassa Komus, Kotos, Nupes and Ogoris have often been marginalised in these direction. So, where is equity and justice in all of these? This means that the politicians who have governed the states and their kinsmen who are jostling for the position at this point in time do not care if members of other constituencies, LGAs or wards other than theirs do not have a taste of these major political positions. Most times, these other folks are only unable due to lack of campaign finance or access to power. The need therefore to microzone elective power positions in the state in order to accommodate all and sundry becomes imperative.

### **Conclusion**

Using the principle of equity and fairness as popularised by John Rawl to reflect on democratic politics and governance in Kogi State especially as it concerns and addresses the issue of zoning of political power positions, this paper though cherishes the current informal understanding of peaceful circulation of power positions between the various zones and divisions in the state, it however decry the circulation of same people from same localities while depriving others of the same opportunity. Since franchise have often been described as the right to vote and be voted for, and democracy is about equal rights and justice, democratic governance therefore should be anchored on equal opportunities and privileges to

every bona fide citizen irrespective of where the citizen hails within the polity. It is in the light therefore that we posit that zoning of elective power positions should not just be considered on the basis of the three senatorial zones of Kogi East, Kogi Central and Kogi West but that each zone should endeavour to microzone competitive elective positions to various parts of the political enclave so that at every point, it is contestants from the district, constituency, local government, or ward where the office has been zoned that will jostle for the position.

This is not to diminish the fact that attempts have been made by some political parties and elite groups to rotate and share power among ethnic nationalities and enclaves in the country and states respectively, it has however been observed that religious and ethnic sentiments, political and financial influences, as well as the sit-tight syndrome exhibited by the ruling elite and their supporters have often undermined these arrangements so that they do not achieve the intended objective. While agreeing with the part of Adibe's admonition in 2017 that it will be helpful to institutionalize or codify the attempted conventional system of power sharing and rotating the presidency between the Northern and Southern Nigeria as an interim measure, the position of this paper is that even within the North and the South, microzoning arrangements should equally be internalised and institutionalised.

### **Recommendations**

Having concluded that the extant practice of zoning in Nigeria as observed in the politics and governance of Kogi State is far from being inclusive as many minority groups face difficulties in substantially participating in politics, hence the advocacy for microzoning, the following recommendations are hereby made:

1. Microzoning of all elective and appointive positions should be encouraged by all political parties which seek to participate and manage public offices in the state.
2. The said microzoning and rotation of elective power positions should be done first, on the basis of the three senatorial districts which the state is divided. Second on the basis of the federal constituencies which each senatorial district is partitioned. Third, is on the basis of LGAs which are inherent in each constituency and fourthly the wards should be considered in the arrangement.
3. Because this cannot be effective or successful in the absence of the requisite legal framework, the political class particularly the governing elite should find a way of imputing into the constitution or electoral law this principle and practice to give it the necessary legal backbone which it deserves. By time this is done, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) would then be able to reject the candidates of parties which fail to comply as well as impose sanction appropriately.
4. The regulatory and implementation agencies such the Electoral Management Body, political parties and interest groups as well as civil societies should endeavour to carry out massive political education and sensitization programmes in this direction so as to give room for proper understanding of the rule of the principle at the various levels.

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