

ROTATIONAL PRESIDENCY AND DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

BY

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ABSTRACT

There has been an unjust feeling by a section of the nation because the north has had the privilege of holding presidential power for too long and to the exclusion of other ethnic regions. As result of that, the need to deliberately reverse the presidential slot for the section of the nation perceived to be most politically marginalized arose. That feeling of exclusion was regurgitated in the annulment of June 12 presidential election. In an effort to ensure that each of Nigeria's component units was provided with the opportunity of producing the number one citizen for Nigeria, rotational presidency was adopted. The aim of this paper is to assess the implications of rotational presidency for democratic development in Nigeria. The research adopted a documentary approach. Data was analyzed using descriptive technique. The paper recommends proportional representation at all levels of government to make for government of national unity.

Keywords: Rotational presidency, implication, democracy, development.

1. INTRODUCTION

The domineering influence and alienation of presidential power have been at the national level in Nigeria, seen in terms of monopoly of power by the north, and the use of this power to secure political privileges for themselves (Isumonah, 2011). The peak of such sad experiences of domination and alienation got to its climax in the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election, perceived as a Northern unwillingness to hand over power to a non-northerner (Idowu, 2004).

Amidst that, rotational presidency is an even rotation of the office of the President among the six-geopolitical zones of the nation (Gbolahan, 2011). In that light, the presidential space was left for two south westerners to contest in 1999. Obasanjo contested under the auspices of the Peoples Democratic Party and Olu Falae of All Nigerian Peoples Party. At the expiration of Obasanjo's first tenure, he initiated plans to recapture power a second time. In that direction, it became contentious whether the

office of the President would be retained by the south for another four years or made open for contest to everybody. The north was grieved and requested that power should return to them against the agitation of the southerners to retain presidential power. At last, the National Executive Committee of People's Democratic Party casted a vote and the north had only two votes. Power continued in the south bearing in mind that after Olusegun Obasanjo's bite, power would return to the north for another uninterrupted eight years (Okafor, 2010).

In an effort to satisfy the quest of the northerners, Olusegun Obasanjo relinquished power to late President Umaru Musa Yaradua to take the turn of the north for eight years. Unfortunately, President Yaradua died on seat in 2010 and presidential power shifted unexpectedly to the erstwhile vice-president Goodluck Ebele Jonathan in an acting capacity (Nwozor, 2014). The Northerners felt shortchanged and perceived the death as an interruption of their turn when Goodluck Jonathan declared his interest to contest the 2011 presidential ticket of People's Democratic Party Akanmode, (2011). However, Jonathan's overwhelming victory over Atiku Abubakar indicated that his candidacy was a deviation from the party's unofficial rotational policy (Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2018).

Given that situation, the northerner's perceived it as an opportunity to wrestle power that unjustly eluded them (Nwobi and Umar, 2018). Surprisingly, Mohammadu Buhari's victory over Goodluck Ebele Jonathan led to the emergence of a northern president (Monks Words, 2014) contrary to the principle of equity because north-west held presidential power from 2007-2010 (Radiobiafra, 2018). This jostle led to stunting of the nations development as a result of distrust and lack of national unity. On that premise; this study assesses the implications of rotational presidency for democratic development in Nigeria.

2.0 Conceptual Clarifications and Literature Review

2.1 Rotational Presidency

Rotational presidency is the sharing of key political offices such as the office of the President, vice-president, senate leader and speakers of house of representative among the six geopolitical zones (Haruna, 2011). In the same perspective, rotational presidency implies that the office of the President ought to rotate evenly among the different geo-political zones of the nation (Philip and Merriam, 1993). It suffices to say that rational presidency was to make every geo-political zone have access to power so as to have a sense of belonging.

2.2 Presidency

It is most often referred to as the office and functions of a president who is the elective head of constitutional republic. In the same light, is the incumbency or administration of a particular president, an elective head of state or government or both (Gould and

Kolb, 1964). Similarly, presidency could mean the job of being a president of a country and the duration of someone's stay on the job (Hornsby, 2015).

2.3 Democracy

Democracy connotes a system for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide through a competitive struggle for the people's vote. In other words, political offices are filled via regular, free, and fair election between the parties in a competitive manner such that the winner assumes office freely (Ijere, 2015). Essentially, democracy is characterized by three key qualities, non violence, political participation and control and political equality (Lawal and Olukayode, 2012).

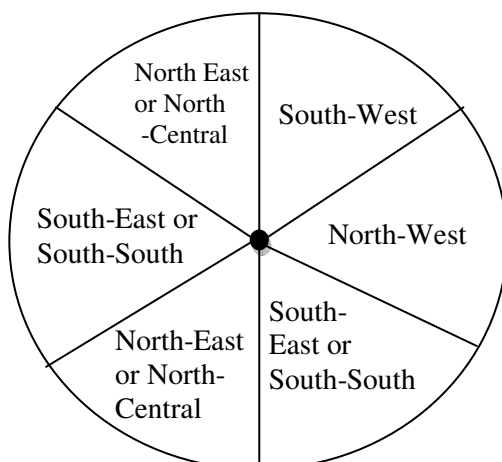
Similarly, is a form of government in which the society as a whole reserves the right to participate, at every stage in decision making process and sustain the control (Boutros-Ghali, 2013). In addition, people reserve the right to have their aspirations and programmes in politics, economic, cultural, and religious. It suffices to say that the domineering influence of oppression and exploitation is supposed to come to an abrupt end in a democratic setting (Akindele, 2002).

2.4 Rotational Presidency Trajectory in Nigeria

The late Dr. Alex Ekwueme was a major proponent on the campaign for rotational presidency between the south and north (Nwachuku, 2018). It emanated from the National Constitutional Conference of 1994/1995 to give a sense of belonging with access to important state offices to the minority ethnic groups (Eresia-Eke and Eberiyé, 2010). It was in that context, that the current idea of splitting the nation into six geo-political regions and a recommendation that the office of the President rotates among the six geo-political zones was adopted (Amanze, 2005).

The proposed rotation was to cut across six zones namely North-East, North-Central, North-West, South-East, South-West, and South-South. The office of the President was meant to rotate on North and South basis starting with South-West, North-West or North-Central (Adeniran, 2010). The diagram below represents the six geo-political zones in Nigeria.

Geo-Political Zones of Nigeria



Source: Adeniran (2010, September 19) The truth about PDP rotation and zoning *This Day*, 12.

Furthermore, rotational principle proposed multi vice-president such that in an event of death of the President in office, incapacitation, impeachment or resignation, the vice-president takes over in an acting capacity for 90 days until election is conducted. This is because every zone is entitled to an uninterrupted tenure as provided by the Constitution (The willing, 2018).

Beyond this incidence, there is still an option of a constitutional review to introduce the office of a deputy president who should be someone from the same zone with the President who will complete the tenure of the President in an event of death, incapacitation, resignation or impeachment. In addition, the office of the incumbent vice-president has to be from other geo-political zones (Nwobu, 2010).

Unfortunately, it generated a very sharp division between the southerners who massively supported it and the northerners that largely opposed it. It resulted in a deadlock; therefore, the matter was referred to the conference at large for resolution. In the end, the modality for the implementation of rotational presidency was not concluded before the death of General Sani Abacha in office (Bello, 2001). Shortly after, General Abdulsalami Abubakar was ushered in as the next president (Idachaba, E, 2001). Surprisingly, rotational principle was not used but the 1979 Constitution that does not have provision for rotational presidency was adopted (Bello, 2001).

Given that situation, rotational presidency between the North and the South was adopted as an unofficial policy by People's Democratic Party which became a key factor in presidential campaign for political parties (Editors of Encyclopedia

Britannica, 2018). The table below represents the geo-political spread of heads of state and duration in power.

Table 1: Nigeria's Heads of State/Government (Ethnic, Tenure and Geopolitical Spread) October 1st 1960-May 29th 2015

S/N	Names	Title	Period	Ethnicity	Ethnic Tenure	Zone	Region
1	Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe	President	1/10/60-5/1/66	Igbo	6yrs	S-E	East
2	Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa	Prime minister	1/10/60-5/1/66	Jarawa	6yrs	N-E	North
3	Major General JTU Aguiyi Ironsi	Head of state	16/1/66-9/7/66	Igbo	6mths 14dys	S-E	East
4	General Yakubu Gowon	Head of state	29/7/66-9/7/75	Angas	9yrs	N-C	North
5	General Murtala Mohammed	Head of state	29/7/75-3/2/76	Hausa	7mths	N-W	North
6	General Olusegun Obasanjo	Head of state	13/2/76-0/9/79	Yoruba	3yrs mth 1dys	S-W	West
7	Alhaji Shehu Shagari	President	1/10/79-31/12/83	Fulani	4yrs 3mths	N-W	North
8	Major General Muhammadu Buhari	Head of state	31/12/83-27/8/85	Fulani	2yrs	N-W	North
9	General Ibrahim Babangida	President	27/8/85-26/6/93	Gwari	8yrs	N-C	North
10	Chief Ernest Shonekan	Head of state	26/8/93-17/11/93	Yoruba	3mths	S-W	West
11	General Sani Abacha	Head of state	17/11/93-8/6/98	Kanuri	5yrs	N-W	North
12	General Abdulsalami Abubakar	Head of state	8/6/98-29/5/99	Gwari	1yr	N-C	North
13	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	Executive President	29/5/99-29/5/2007	Yoruba	8yrs	S-W	West
14	Alhaji Musa Yaradua	Executive President	29/5/2007-6/5/2010		2yrs 11mths	N-W	North
15	Dr. Goodluck Jonathan	Executive President	7/5/2010-29/5/2015	-	5yrs	S-S	South
16	President Muhammadu Buhari	Executive President	29/5/2015 Till Date	Fulani	3yr	N-W	North

Source: Adapted from (Ozigbo, I. 1999, p. 218). *A history of igboland in the 20th century* Enugu: Snap Press Ltd. Updated by the author

The table above indicates that the North-central has been in power more than other zones followed by North-West, South-West, North-East, South-South and South-East respectively. This has been a major problem as each zone cried of being marginalized by the other zones which made rotational principle a means to further ethnic sentiment. (Okurounmi, 2006) substantiated this by explaining that out of all the Presidents or heads of government produced by Nigeria from independence till date (a period of about 56 years) the North-West zone would have produced six heads of government ruling for a total period of about fourteen years seven months (Murtala Muhammed, Shehu Shagari, Mohammadu Buhari, and late Sani Abacha, Alhaji Musa Yaradua). The North-Central would have produced three heads of government ruling for a total period of about eighteen years (Gowon, Ibrahim Babangida, Abdulsalami Abubakar) while the North-East zone would have produced one head of government ruling for six years (6yrs) (Tafawa Balewa). In the South, the South-West zone has ruled for about twelve years four months by producing two heads of government (Olusegun Obasanjo and Ernest Shonekan). The South-South has ruled for about five years (Goodluck Jonathan). The South-East produced one head of government ruling for about six months (6mth) Aguiyi Ironsi. **N:B** Late Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe of South-East was just a ceremonial president.

2.5 Hypothesis

The study was guided by the following hypothesis

- ✓ There is a significant relationship between rotational presidency and democratic development in Nigeria.

2.6 Theoretical Consideration:

Group theory was used as the theoretical umbrella for this discourse. The major proponents are Albio Small (1885), Arthur Bentley (1908), James Bryce (1909), and Harold Laski (1917) (Garson, 2007). Group is a mass of activity directed by interest and the social system that consists of a large number of groups is the arena for group interaction (Verma, 2001).

In the light of this, the perennial struggle for power amongst the geo-political zones was borne out of personal interest (Monks Words, 2014) for control of presidential power and resources of the nation as championed by the elites of various groups either to gain control of the State or ethnic community over the central rivals or local rivals. They achieve this through influencing decisions and most importantly allocate values authoritatively in their favour (Onah, 2005) since groups are the major medium of carrying policies into action (Wright, 2007).

2.7 Tenets of the Theory

Politics is directly by group interest. The interest groups try to influence political process in their favour. This is because the most radical politics emanate directly out of our identity. Interestingly, such social identities like ethnicity, sexuality, gender have an essential influence on an individual's political motivation, affiliations and political commitments.

2.8 Application of the Theory to the Study

The application of group theory to the study is premised on the fact that decision making lies with the government but the competing groups with different interest also have the ability to influence policy making decision of government through the use of their resources (Garson, 2007). In an effort to capture presidential power to influence decision geared towards redistributing the wealth and utility of the nation, men joined different groups (Tollison, 1998).

The struggle for presidential power led to bitter resentment and violent conflict as a particular ethnic group dominates presidential power. In the light of this, the nation was grouped into six geo-political zones to ensure equitable distribution of presidential power and resources because of the differences in wealth, incomes, education, social status and living standard (Nwabueze, 1993). Within these groups, the ethnic champions dine and wine with their counterparts from other ethnic groups who seek for avenues to capture presidential power. As soon as their interest is threatened, they preach about being marginalized because they lost presidential power and ministerial appointments. The multiplier effect falls on the masses who are the real victims of bad governance deprived of their health care, education etc (Dinneya, 2004). Given this situation, the domineering influence of presidential power by a particular ethnic group at the national level is an offshoot of group arrangement.

3.0 Research Methodology

3.1 Method of study

To ensure an effective research, the study adopted a documentary research method. In other words, the research was based on documents related to rotational presidency and democracy.

3.2 Method of Data Collection

The secondary source was largely adopted from works of experts in the area of rotational presidency and democracy especially those with relevance to Nigeria. The research made use of journals, textbooks, newspapers and internet resources that treated issues on rotational presidency and democracy.

3.3 Method of Data Analysis

The documentary data adopted from the secondary source were analyzed using qualitative approach or descriptive method.

4. Implications of Rotational Presidency for Democratic Development

The implication of rotational presidency is that since emphasis is on zones rather than good governance, once it is your turn to have the presidency and you do not create a paradise on earth for your people, ethnic group, you don't expect other ethnic groups to do so for your group. In other words, rotational presidency placed an embargo temporarily on a group of people on the basis of geopolitical zones from contesting for any elective office and it does not enhance democratic development. In addition, when it is not your turn, you suffer deprivations silently and patiently wait for your turn. This fact creates disaffection between the zones reflecting the inability of rotational presidency to bring national unity geared towards development (Haruna, 2011).

In the same perspective, it enhances division instead of fostering national unity. It divides Nigeria into regions, tribes, and makes people to regurgitate their differences. That is a violation of the principle of human equality and dignity enshrined in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Ezeibe, Abada and Okeke, 2016).

Rotational presidency has become an avenue for the bourgeoisie class to perpetuate themselves in power. The inter class struggle is not seen by the elites rather they are more interested in capturing power. It is a deceit of the masses because democracy in Nigeria would become a government of few families, their friends as well as their business acolytes against democratic tenet of popular participation. The people who are supposed to be the pivot of democracy are marginalized and left in obscurity. The ruling elites live in extreme affluence, while the majority of citizens wallow in abject poverty (Tolu and Ogunro, 2012).

The beneficiaries of rotational presidency would wish it continue. Again, the elites, zones that are excluded from presidential power as a result of rotational principle may have disaffection for rotational presidency because it will willfully alienated them from taking part in sharing the national cake which is the right of everybody (Njoku, 2005).

In the same manner, rotational presidency proposed that power rotates within the six geo-political zones. Even among the six geopolitical zones, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) Constitution does not state the strategy for the implementation of Rotational Presidency in Nigeria. That heightened the suspicion and fear among the zones.

Rotational presidency does not allow 100% active participation of the people in presidential election. The majority of the people cannot make their choice in election. More so, the elected president would not be answerable to all Nigerians because only

the people in the President's ally will enjoy the dividends of democracy since the President will be sensitive to the challenges of his/her geo-political zone (Njoku, 2005). On the other hand, those outside the ruling geopolitical zone would not be favoured. Furthermore, the ethnic zones that are not at peace with the zone in power would be extremely marginalized (Okolie, 2011). That will translate into the surrendering of right forcefully by the loosing geo-political zones (Sekibo, 2010).

Rotational presidency encourages all forms of electoral malpractices (ballot box snatching, stuffing and manipulation of electoral results at collation centers) to maintain a specific region or zone in power. This will breed disaffection among the geo-political zones and sacrificing of national unity and democratic development for zones (Omodia, 2012).

It has intensified the fear of ethnic domination among the geopolitical zones. It will subvert national security and enhance regionalism because every zone will interpret its chances as a golden opportunity to maximize its benefits to the disadvantage of others. The implication is that continuously, five of the six zones, about 83.33% of the nation will be living under perpetual subjugation and retrogression translated into accentuating our differences where each of the zones will ask for a turn to be the President instead of national unity (Aloyu, 2014).

It will lead to the emergence of unqualified persons as presidents. When presidential power is given to a particular geo-political zone where there is absolutely no qualified candidate, just for the heck of rotation, an unqualified candidate will be elected to govern for four years. In the course of that, sycophants at the expiration of their tenure will ask for a second term (Odetunde, 2006). In addition, once the presidency is restricted to a particular geo-political zone, we may never have the best president. Instead of each of the six zones having at least a presidential candidate each, we are confined to only the two or more who are presented by a single zone. The probability of having the best president will drift from a whole as guaranteed by the Constitution to only one-sixth if rotational presidency is adopted.

The study revealed that there is a significant relationship between rotational presidency and implications for democratic development because rotational presidency by any arrangement was outlawed by the constitutional provisions because it does not guarantee freedom to vote and be voted for (Kukuwa, 2010). It is to placate the different people of Nigeria and to disabuse their fears of northern domination of the presidency perpetually leading to creation of geo-political zones unconstitutionally. Furthermore, it does not provide the peaceful atmosphere that can bring development (Agagu, 2004).

5. Summary

The study has made an effort to explore rotational presidency and its implications for democratic development. The study employed documentary research method. Data was collected through the secondary source such as journals, text books, newspapers, internet resources etc. data was analyzed using descriptive technique. The theoretical umbrella was group theory. Rotational presidency placed an embargo temporarily on a group of people on the basis of geopolitical zones from contesting for any elective office which does not enhance democratic development. It became a means for the bourgeoisie class to perpetuate themselves in power which enhanced division rather than fostering national unity. Tenets of democracy were violated and poverty was persistent as inflation increased the economic hardship.

5.1 Recommendations

The following recommendations were made.

- ❖ There should be proportional representation at all levels of government to make for government of national unity. This is possible by giving all parties involved in each election, positions proportional to the percentage of vote's scored at the polls. The number of seats won at the general elections should also be given to parties.
- ❖ There should be an end to ethnic crisis and other forms of sectional politics like the North-South differences in a nation where good governance prevails. This could be achieved through a linkage between the rulers and the ruled because respect for the people any where is respect for the people everywhere. This respect will remove lack of civility in relations among politicians in the political process since politicians serve one people or another, each of them deserves respect.
- ❖ There should be deep rooted, sincere concern for the removal of constraints on the poor masses, low level of dividends of democracy by the leaders because good governance is not achieved by giving the vote to the people while remaining indifferent to the crippling constraints of poverty that persists among the masses. When poverty prevails, the leaders are able to exploit the dependence of the citizens on the 'big men' in their communities, manipulate local identities and indulge in bribery and intimidation of the citizens. This makes voting a metaphor for powerlessness and exploitation. Additionally, leaders must devote effort to fight against defeatism, docility and opportunism among the citizens.
- ❖ Nigeria needs a leader that must show demonstrable patriotism, high integrity, and transparency in their behavior, accountability in their actions and God fearing. Leaders that will use their power judiciously for the good of their society. This is feasible through making moral choice of leaders, because there cannot be development taking place at the physical realm without development taking place at the spiritual realm given that the universe is moral, and as people begin to apply moral truth in their lives, they will begin to lay moral foundation for all.

- ❖ Heads of states/governments should exercise power, authority in line with the tenets of democracy, widely accepted rules and principles as the Constitution demands. Of all the principles are transparency and accountability. Transparency means the quality of the President and the citizens, while accountability is the principle of justice and collaboration in their relations. Justice and equality demands respect for the rule of law by the presidents. By this no one will be subjected to the whims and caprices of another or any form of inhuman treatment with good and democratic governance.

5.2 Closing Remarks

It was evident from the study that rotational presidency would not improve the situation. Instead, it will encourage all forms of electoral malpractices which would not create opportunity for 100% active participation of the people in presidential election. The idea of rotational presidency should be thrown into the trash basket because it would not improve the development of the masses or add flesh to the well-being of the nation. In the light of this, rotational presidency has become suspicious since the northerners could not hide their impatience to recapture power at every point the issue of presidential power was raised. Essentially, the aforementioned recommendations are the necessary drivers to cushion the implications of rotational presidency for democratic development.

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