

RESEARCH ARTICLE:

Nigeria and 'Negotiated Elections': Examining the Impact of Rotational Presidency on Peace, the National Question, and Development

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Abstract

Nigeria is a country consistently tilting towards one violent situation or another. Since its independence in 1960, Nigeria has witnessed numerous ethnoreligious conflicts that have threatened its corporate existence. For example, age-long feelings of relative deprivation by certain sections of the country, have given rise to the continuous reference to a need to address the national question: a phenomenon that describes the aggregation of concerns by the different nationalities on how they can or should cohabit in the same federation. However, elections, and the entire electoral process, often serve as precipitates of ethnoreligious conflicts in Nigeria. Aside from the tensions that always sprout about who becomes what, there is a more prominent challenge of where the candidate comes from. Thus, elections in Nigeria often get reduced to geographical linings of candidates, rather than their competence or political ideology. This is often festered by the need to provide opportunities for all geographical sections of the country to produce the President, thus giving rise to the idea of a rotational presidency as a negotiated approach. The article examined the rotational presidency, vis-à-vis its implication for inclusiveness, peace, the national question, and development in Nigeria. The study utilised historical materials, elite theory, and the consociational model of power sharing to explore how the political activities towards elections have shifted the attention of the populace away from the pedigree and the leadership potentials of the aspirants/candidates to their ethnic and religious backgrounds. The study suggests how good leaders can emerge without jettisoning inclusiveness.

Keywords: elections; rotational presidency; development; national question; peace

Introduction

Nigerian elections are some of the most turbulent in Africa. Deep ethnoreligious differences between the country's diverse nationalities often rear their heads during elections, sometimes leading to overt violence resulting in loss of lives and property. The precipitates of such violence include flawed electoral processes and longstanding feelings of relative deprivation and exclusion. These contestations, according to Labinjo (2007) and Adebayo (2016) have always been due to the propensity of certain ethnic and geographical parts of the country wanting to hold on to political power in ways that undermine the political aspirations of other groups. These feelings have historical antecedents. For example, under military rule, which lasted for almost thirty years, most of the country's Heads of State were of Northern extraction. The only time a Southerner occupied the position was during the regimes of Generals Aguiyi Ironsi and Olusegun Obasanjo.

Thus, expectedly, shortly after Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, there were calls for a renegotiation of the country's political landscape, vis-à-vis the contestation of power. The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) adopted a rule on a rotational presidency to mitigate the feelings of marginalisation to foster national unity. The arrangement saw the emergence of Olusegun Obasanjo, a Christian from Nigeria's South West, and Atiku Abubakar, a Muslim from the North

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East as the President and Vice-President, respectively. The 'agreement' meant that the next President after Olusegun Obasanjo would be a Northerner and probably a Muslim, who would be expected to choose a Southerner as deputy. Interestingly, although there are no provisions under the Nigerian constitution for the rotational presidency, the arrangement also considers, in some instances at the state level, candidates' religious beliefs before pairing them to run for office (at the state and federal levels).

Scholars have argued that the rotational presidency, at least as practised in Nigeria, has played a significant role in ensuring a semblance of unity. For example, Eborka (2016) posits that although deep-seated resentments and feelings of relative deprivation cannot be assuaged by a rotational presidency, it has the potential to mitigate ethnic agitations and reduce the propensity for violent elections. This study explores the concept of the rotational presidency, including all its intricacies and dynamics within Nigeria's context. The goal is to examine the positions for and/or against the rotational presidency and proffer recommendations on how the rotational presidency can be a tool for peace, inclusiveness, and national development.

Conceptual and Theoretical Underpinnings

Democratisation may pose a problem if the liberal democratic practice of first-past-the-post system of election is applied in multi-ethnic societies (Ukiwo, 2005). Power sharing has been devised as a tool to promote inclusiveness in governance. Rotational presidency is a form of power sharing, and it is best situated in the consociational model of power sharing. Consociationalism encompasses sharing, dispersing, and limiting power (Lijphart, 2012). It means power is not restricted to a group based on its geographical, ethnic, linguistic, population, or religious affiliation/advantage. Political elites agree on sharing powers based on one or a combination of geographical, ethnic, linguistic, or religious factors. Hence, power is shared, dispersed, and limited to have an inclusive society.

Consociationalism has four principles. These are government by grand coalition, group autonomy, proportionality in representation, and minority veto. Rotational presidency is located within grand coalition. Grand coalition may basically take the form of a representative and multiparty coalition cabinet, informal advisory structure, and rotating presidency (Lijphart, 2008). It is an elite cartel's fabricated response to the problems of fragmentation that emanates among unfriendly subgroups (Lijphart, 2008). Grand coalition is a catalyst for security and inclusiveness because it guarantees the input of the minorities in decision making (Traniello, 2008). It mitigates the number of groups that are shut out from decision making and this reduces relative deprivation which is the root cause of marginalisation and agitation. The plurality of the Nigerian state makes grand coalition one of the tools to address the negative effect of being plural. In the Nigerian spectrum, sharing power for offices at various levels are zoned on religious and ethnic basis which are rotated based on tenure. At the level of the presidency, it is called rotational presidency. Other countries that have embraced power sharing in different forms are Zimbabwe, Kenya, Switzerland, Lebanon, among others. Power sharing is an elitist device to attain power, therefore, the theoretical framework for this study is elite theory.

The crux of elite theory is that power in the society is vested in a minority who attain such a position through possession of wealth, force, or intellect (Higley, 2010). Elites sustain their dominance through replacing themselves, by 'empowering' non-elites into the elitist position, crossing from one elite group to another (López, 2013). However, political elites are the backbone of the elite class because they influence what goes on in other elite folds. They dominate the political scene. They orchestrate policies that guide most of the activities of economic elites, religious elites, military elites, academic elites, the masses, among others. Political elites mostly call the shots in presenting the candidates to be fielded by political parties in Nigeria. The interest of political elites is the attainment of power. They have a strong influence on political decisions because of their positions (Higley and Moore, 2001). The decisions they make are primarily to

serve their interest, and secondarily for the benefit of the society. They are major stakeholders in determining the events that result in peace, solution to the national question, and development.

Political elites, just like every other elite group, differ or agree on matters based on their interest at any point in time. Whichever side of the pendulum they are, especially in developing countries, the interest centres on access to power and by extension state wealth. Elites' differentiation thwarts a monolithic situation, promotes plurality, and concretises checks and balances (Burton and Higley, 2001). Elites may also mobilise their supporters to exacerbate conflict situations by raising the anxieties of the latter (Azarya, 2003). Put differently, if elites' differentiation is not well managed, this may also balloon into conflict among their supporters. Groups engage in conflicts, and elites tactically support such moves (Azarya, 2003) to protect their interest. So, settling differences has a positive effect on societal peace. Elites' cooperation infers elites' accommodating themselves, which is transmuting from being divided into consensual elites (Burton and Higley, 2001). This is in congruence with consociationalism. For instance, instead of elites from different ethnic and religious groups competing against themselves in Nigeria, they sometimes cooperate across ethnic and religious lines to have wider acceptability. This may breed a scenario where the majority elite groups align with minority groups to increase the chances of the former, or rotation of power between majority and minority groups.

Rotational Presidency in Nigeria

Zoning the presidency has been an important channel to actualise the interest of political elites. It is an element of power sharing which means rotating political offices among the regions (Asogwa, 2018). In Nigeria, these regions represent the North and the South which are further divided into the six geo-political zones which are North West, North Central, North East, South West, South South and South East. In the Nigerian context, zoning the Office of the President is called rotational presidency. It is "a situation where people from the different regions that constitute a particular socio-political formation shall in the course of time alternate the position of the President in an ordered sequence among themselves" (Eboraka, 2016: 35). The socio-political formation is the Nigerian state while the time of alternation is every four or eight years depending on each situation. Zoning also affects the positions of the Vice-President and principal officers in the National Assembly. Zoning should bring a sense of belonging so that a particular section of the country will not continue to rule. Although zoning the presidency among all the ethnic groups will take hundreds of years. That is why it is zoned among the six geo-political zones. Religion is also a major factor in rotational presidency. For instance, since 1999; if the President is a Christian, his deputy will be a Muslim and vice versa. The religious mix is also considered in determining positions of principal officers of the National Assembly, Secretary to the Government of the Federation, and the Chief of Staff to the President, among other positions. This is done to avoid the concentration of these offices in one religion. The geo-political and religious permutations are done to mitigate ethnic and religious disaffection.

Three main factors can be adduced as the *raison d'être* of the rotational presidency in Nigeria. The first is that the Northern region had ruled the country the most since independence. The second is the annulment of the 1993 presidential election, while the third is the 1994/95 Constitutional Conference. The North dominated the leadership of the country, especially during military regimes. From 1966 to 1999, the North ruled the country for over 29 years while the South ruled for over four years. Southern elites, shortly before the commencement of the Fourth Republic (1999 till date), saw this as inappropriate. The 1993 presidential election was adjudged to have been won by a Southerner. As of 14 July 1993, the National Electoral Commission had published results from 15 states with the candidate of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), Chief MKO Abiola, a Yoruba Southerner, leading convincingly, and regionalism jettisoned because Abiola's lead spread across regions beyond the South West (News from Africa Watch, 27 August 1993). Also, he and his running mate were Muslims, and the electorates did not factor religious sentiments in their voting. His campaign was not based on ethnic and religious undertones but was rather development-focused, and most Nigerians perceived a high level of sincerity. The government

suspended the announcement of the result on 16 June 1993. Results later released showed that the SDP had 58.36 per cent (8,341,309), while the National Republican Convention had 41.64 per cent (5,952,087) of the votes in the presidential election (African Elections Database, n.d).

However, Babangida who is a Northerner, annulled the election on the premise that Abiola emerged victorious on a platform that brewed ethnic dissension, that the two parties bought votes with funds, and that the national election apparatus was not secure enough to stop electoral malpractices (Falola and Heaton, 2008). President Babangida carried out this act on 23 June 1993, and it led to turmoil in different parts of the country, and scores of people were killed (Babalola, 2016). The backdrop of the annulled 1993 election and the need to address other ethnic and religious issues that had threatened the stability of the country snowballed into the 1994/95 Constitutional Conference. The Conference endorsed that the presidency should be rotated between the North and the South and for the Office of the Governor, it should be among the three senatorial districts, while for the Local Government Chairman, it should be among the three sections the local government area is divided into by the state electoral commission (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1995). It made provision for three Vice-Presidents of which two should not be from the geographical area of the President, and one is to be of the President's geographical area (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1995). The outcome of this conference further made the political elites buy into the idea of a rotational presidency.

The fielding of two Yorubas from the South West as candidates for the 1999 presidential election was not a surprise. It was seen to pacify the South West region which had been short-changed through the 1993 election. This has been the practice since 1999. The PDP and the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) have embraced the rotational presidency at different times for over two decades. This practice is not in the constitution but has been a party arrangement. The South West, South South, and North West have ruled the country since 1999. This arrangement has been the yardstick in determining who emerged as the leader of the country. Although with a minor alteration after the death of President Yar'Adua in 2010, which culminated in his successor, Goodluck Jonathan from the South South contesting the 2011 election and subsequently winning. The North felt that the position should have been zoned to their region in that election. However, despite zoning, there are concerns that the country has not reaped the dividends of democracy, of which development is a hallmark.

Pros and Cons of Rotational Presidency in Nigeria

If the agreement on rotating power is respected by stakeholders, it promotes belonging and stability. Groups, especially the minority, will not feel excluded or threatened. It prevents ethnic domination. Osaghae (1999) posits that ethnic domination whittles unity. Minority groups will see themselves as major stakeholders in the country despite their minority status, which is majorly due to their low population compared to majority ethnic and religious groups. A very good example is that if not for zoning, Goodluck Jonathan would not have become the President in 2010. His emergence made the Ijaws and Niger Delta have a sense of belonging considering the years of environmental degradation in the region. In a nutshell, it boosts integration because it reduces feelings of deprivation.

The practice has its weaknesses. It may downplay merit. Sometimes, because of the political relevance given to power sharing, an individual who has good leadership skills and is more transformational in orientation may be overlooked because power has not been shifted to his zone or religion. The country may be denied a good leader, but if rotational presidency is 'objectively' practised, a good leader may emerge from the zone or religion whose turn it is to produce the President. Fragile party structure premised on low internal democracy, frail ideologies, and programmes that tend not to lead to the emergence of competent candidates, may frustrate the emergence of skilful leaders (Eboraka, 2016). Rotational presidency may be an anathema to peace and development because if a leader with low leadership skills emerges, peace and development may be relegated.

Rotational presidency is also a tool used by political elites to manipulate the masses with the instrumentalities of ethnicity, religion, poverty, and illiteracy. The masses are hoodwinked into voting based on ethnicity and religion on the pedestal that if they vote for candidates of their ethnic and religious extraction, it comes with some benefits. These political patrons provide the followers with jobs and other resources in exchange for the political support from the latter (Ojukwu and Shopeju, 2010). However, such provisions are just for the very few, while holistic measures that can promote peace and development are not given any attention. Tables 2 and 3 show that this has not transformed into development nor promoted peace. With respect to unity, the elites promote sectional integration and not national integration through such acts. These pros and cons show that it is salient to explore rotational presidency in the continuum of the national question, leadership, development, and peace.

Rotational Presidency and the National Question

It can be argued that the reasons given for rotational presidency above are rooted in the age-long discourse around the national question in Nigeria. As earlier mentioned, the rotational presidency became a serious national discourse when it became obvious that the Nigerian state would not survive the lop-sidedness that characterised political positions and appointments. According to Labinjo (2007), the idea of the national question was born out of a desire for social change as the iconoclastic effects of the French Revolution had the consequence of evaporating the identities of nationalities. Cultural and linguistic entities with centuries of common history were getting incorporated into large formations, forming the nation-state. Suberu (2007) believes that the growing formation of nation-states in the late 18th Century gave rise to the issue of the national question, as many challenges arose regarding accommodating communities with diverse cultures and identities within the framework of a single, cohesive, nationwide political system.

In Nigeria, the national question is interlaced with the issue of federalism, which is often characterised by the irreducible basis for sustaining the country's unity in diversity (Adebayo, 2016). As Adebanwi (2007) puts it, the national question is core to the very idea, creation, and existence of Nigeria. Many of the varied contentious issues, which today constitute the fabric of the national question, emerged simultaneously with the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Protectorates to form a single country in 1914. It is instructive that in the narratives of Nigeria's nationhood by politicians, scholars, journalists and commentators, there is a constant reference to this date. These references are hardly ever conducive to a sense of nationhood, which has been promoted in the country over the last century. Instead, 1914 is often remembered as the beginning of the present 'problem'. Hardly ever has the year been remembered as the touchstone of happy and rewarding togetherness. Adebanwi (2007) accentuates that in a bid to correct what he regards as 'the mistake' of 1914, the idea of rotational office (at the state and federal levels) became more engrained in national discourses. It is important to state that there is no single answer to the 'national question'. The national question, in the Nigerian context, does not require an answer, it requires a series of intentional steps geared towards historical redress and inclusiveness.

The start of the Fourth Republic on 29 May 1999 gave Nigerians a glimmer of hope that the 'mistake' of 1914 could be corrected with the exit of military rule from Nigeria's political life. Sadly, as noted by Badmus (2009), the dawn of this Republic saw a return of politicians to their ethnic assemblages. It seemed that the ethnoreligious fault lines that led to the bloodbaths of the early 1950s and late 1960s gradually reared their heads again, with calls for the implementation of Sharia law in Nigeria's mainly Muslim North, agitation for greater resource control from the Niger Delta, and clamour for self-determination from sections of the country. Under such conditions of visible widening fault lines, it would have been imprudent to maintain the status quo of handing political power to the region with the largest population and votes. The rotational presidency, with all its attendant shortcomings, is seen as a common ground upon which the national question can further be discussed. As opined by Galtung (1996), until there is negative

peace (the halting of open conflict), positive peace (conditions where injustice, inequality, and structural violence are eliminated) would be impossible.

Leadership and Development

The emergence of a good leader is commensurate to good performance. Leaders at all levels and sectors record success if they possess and apply the right skills to lead their followers and effectively harness the resources at their disposal. A good leader should be transformational by placing priority on service to the institution or territory he is leading more than pursuing parochial interests (Bass, 1999). A leader must be assertive, decisive, and have confidence (Morrill, 2010). Ashkenas and Manville (2018) posit that a leader should be visionary, such visions should be translated into strategies that will determine actions that should be taken or not be taken, work with people to execute such strategies, and put in place a good monitoring and evaluation system, with an ability to breed new leaders as well as improve as a leader. In Nigeria, leadership is devoid of most of these qualities because leaders pursue their selfish interest. This is evident in the corruption status of the country spearheaded by the political class. The Nigerian political class is so corrupt that possessing good leadership qualities is close to being a mirage. A good leader should not be directly involved in corruption or encourage it. Table 1 below shows the Transparency International Corruption Perception which is a representation of corruption in the public sector.

Table 1: Transparency International Corruption Perception Biannual Index from 2000 to 2020

S/N	Year	Rank/Score	Score (changed from 2012)	Countries/Territories Surveyed
1	2000	90	1.2	90
2	2002	101	1.6	102
3	2004	144	1.6	146
4	2006	142	2.2	163
5	2008	121	2.7	180
6	2010	143	2.4	178
7	2012	139	27	176
8	2014	136	27	175
9	2016	136	28	176
10	2018	144	27	180
11	2020	149	25	180

Source: Compiled by the author from Transparency International Corruption Perception Index²

Countries are scored from 0 to 10 and a clean score is 10. It changed to 0 to 100 in 2012 and 100 means a clean score. Nigeria scored below half in the years covered. This shows that the country has ranked very poorly. The dismal performance of Nigeria shows that corruption is pervasive in the country. This corroborates Ojukwu and Shopeju's (2010) view that Nigeria's political class is greatly corrupt with a limited desire for nationhood and uses the state as an instrument of wealth accumulation. This means their quest for power is to acquire the state's wealth for self-aggrandisement. The public sector includes elected and appointed political office holders and government employees in the public sector. For instance, a lot of former governors are facing corruption charges. Some serving governors have been accused of some corrupt practices, and yet some of these past and serving governors have aspired, and are still aspiring, to hold different political offices. The public sector corruption index extends beyond the activities of the political class. An example is a civil servant and former chairman of the Pension Reforms Task Team, Abdulrasheed Maina who embezzled ₦2.1 billion from the pension fund (Thisday Newspaper, 12 November 2021).

The years under review in Table 1 cover the Fourth Republic and this is a sign that political elites focus less on how to reduce corruption in the country. The fact that politicians are corrupt makes it easy for public servants to also be corrupt. Put differently, the corrupt activities of the

² <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/>

politicians give the public servants the ‘license’ to be corrupt. They prefer to present their candidates on an ethnic and religious basis, irrespective of corrupt antecedents. Therefore, elite corruption is one of the key reasons for the poor social, economic, and political development of Nigeria since independence (Ojukwu and Shopeju, 2010).

Corruption in the public sector implies the wrong use of positions and that funds meant for providing public infrastructures are being diverted for private use. This whittles good governance. The Mo Ibrahim Foundation defines good governance as “the provision of political, social, and economic public goods and services that every citizen has the right to expect from their government, and that a government has the responsibility to deliver to its citizens”³. Hence, if the government fails to render these goods and services, there will be low development. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report defines development based on the level of life expectancy at birth, education, which is the expected years of schooling and mean years of schooling, and standard of living, which is linked with gross national income. Table 2 below shows the position Nigeria has occupied since the year 2000.

Table 2: UNDP Human Development Biannual Reports from 2000 to 2020

S/N	Year	Rank
1	2000	151
2	2002	148
3	2004	151
4	2006	159
5	2007/2008	158
6	2010	142
7	2012	Not Available
8	2014	152
9	2016	152
10	2018	157
11	2020	161

Source: Compiled by the author from the UNDP Human Development Reports⁴

This represents the span of the Fourth Republic, and it reveals that rotating the presidency has not resulted in good leadership since 1999. These indicators of development show that past governments at all levels have failed to adequately provide basic infrastructures like good roads, hospitals, sanitation, water, housing, and a quality education system, among others. Political leaders locate projects in some places without checking the needs of the communities and prioritise politics, probably to compensate their communities, compensate political allies, or to secure the support of the locals for election. For instance, the immediate needs of some areas where government universities are sited may be good roads, stable electricity, and portable water, among others. The same applies to establishing some military formations in the hometowns of military commanders and politicians. These corrupt practices and misplaced priorities are responsible for the poverty and illiteracy in the country. In Nigeria, illiteracy and poverty have put the masses in a vulnerable state such that elites present ethnicity for the latter as a tool to alleviate their present conditions (Metumara, 2010). Those who are poor in the country, based on those whose per capita expenditures are less than N137,430 per annum, amount to four out of ten (Nigerians National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Hence, beyond ethnicity, this situation has made it easy for the political elites to give electorates money for their votes. These dismal development indicators and the intricacies that come with rotational presidency have implications on peace.

³ <https://mo.ibrahim.foundation/iag>

⁴ <https://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi>

Rotational Presidency within the Spectrum of Peace

The security implication of poor development is that people resort to violence to make their grievances known to the government. This has led to the challenges of ethnic militia groups, militancy, kidnapping, and terrorism that have threatened the stability of the country. The Global Peace Index below shows the extent of instability in Nigeria compared to other countries.

Table 3: Global Peace Index from 2010 to 2021

S/N	Year	Rank	Number of Ranks Per Year
1	2010	137	149
2	2011	142	153
3	2012	146	158
4	2013	148	162
5	2014	151	162
6	2015	151	162
7	2016	149	163
8	2017	149	163
9	2018	148	163
10	2019	148	163
11	2020	147	163
12	2021	146	163

Source: Compiled by the author from the Institute for Economics and Peace⁵ Global Peace Index

The Global Peace Index is measured through the indicators of ongoing domestic and international conflicts, societal safety, and security as well as militarisation. The militancy in the Niger Delta, terrorist activities and banditry in the North West, North East and North Central, electoral malpractice, and kidnapping, among others, are indications that Nigeria is battling several domestic conflicts, and societal safety and security is being threatened. The nexus between the threat to peace and development is that the latter suffers a setback if there is no peace, and development fosters peace.

Rotational presidency also influences the peace of the country. The 2011 post-election violence was the backdrop of a breach in the rotational presidency agreement among political elites. Many were killed and displaced in some Northern states after the emergence of a Southerner as the winner of the 2011 presidential election (Human Rights Watch, 2011). This threatened the peace of the country. It polarised the North against the South. Jonathan, a Christian left office in 2015. Buhari, a Muslim from the North West has been ruling the country since then and his tenure is expected to end in May 2023. The emergence of Atiku Abubakar, as the flagbearer of the PDP (with a South South and Christian deputy) has generated reactions because the incumbent is a Muslim (Eyoboka, Ajayi and Jannamike, 2022). It has also come with an ethnic reservation because by rotational calculation, the position should go to the South. Hence, if Atiku emerges the winner of the 2023 election and he is re-elected in 2027, that means the North would have ruled for 16 years. This may cause agitations in the South and Middle Belt and may further polarise the country on an ethnic basis and lead to violent reactions which may threaten the country's federal stability.

However, the fact that Ahmed Tinubu emerged as the candidate of the APC has put pressure on the polity. The attacks by bandits and terrorists, especially on churches, and the killings and kidnappings of Christian clerics (BBC News, 6 June 2022; Hassan-Wuyo, 2022) have generated concerns. This does not mean that Muslims are not victims of terrorism and banditry (Faluyi, Khan and Akinola, 2019; Mosadomi, 2021). There are insinuations that these bandits and terrorists have extreme Islamic ideologies. Hence, the religious dimension to the attacks. Consequently, Christians are calling for a religious mix of who becomes the President and deputy in 2023 (Nnabuife, 2022). They feel this will make them major stakeholders in the next

⁵ <http://economicsandpeace.org/>

dispensation and secure them from further attacks. These have been exacerbated with the emergence of Tinubu, a Muslim from the South West and Shettima, a Muslim from the North East as Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates respectively, of the APC. The Christian Association of Nigeria and some Nigerians are vehemently opposed to this based on disrespect for zoning and religious tolerance (Abati, 2022a; Eyoboka, Ajayi and Jannamike, 2022; Nnabuike, 2022). Also, the implication is that if Tinubu wins the election, and wins a second term in 2027, there is the likelihood that a Northern Muslim may aspire for and win the election in 2031 and probably rule until 2039. Mathematically, a Muslim would have ruled the country for 24 years. Christians may therefore feel marginalised and even more threatened, and this may widen the gulf between Christians and Muslims in the country and metamorphose into instability.

The level of corruption, and the poor state of peace and development in the country, have not prevented political elites from presenting incompetent leaders to run for political offices at all levels. Hence, the masses still vote for these candidates every four years even though they are not oblivious to their weak leadership prowess. The tools of ethnicity and religion are used to justify zoning. Other factors that allow the elites to have their way are illiteracy and poverty, which allows vote buying, electoral violence at polling stations, among other electoral manipulations. The country's history of human rights abuses frustrates people's efforts to challenge bad governance within the ambit of the law. These flaws, nevertheless, if only a section of the country produces the President, will result in other sections not to have a sense of belonging. This emphasises the need to view zoning within the purview of good leadership, development, and presidential elections in Nigeria in the Fourth Republic. Although leadership failure is not adduced to the President's office alone, it is leaders at all levels, especially political leaders.

The Link between Rotational Presidency, Leadership, and Development

Elections in the Fourth Republic have been characterised by the zoning of political offices. This study is not against zoning, but it postulates that zoning brings a sense of belonging and inclusion, however, any zone or religion that is to produce the President or leaders at all levels should present good leaders. The dossiers of most of these political elites indicate that they have antecedents that do not qualify them as good leaders. Members of the political class who have failed to deliver good leadership are still the ones who keep vying for different political positions. For instance, politicians who failed to perform in the positions they held before still showed interest and some even won. Those who have corruption cases in courts or who have been alleged to be involved in some corrupt practices have also shown interest. Even those who were not involved in active politics hitherto won their elections with the support of politicians who have failed the country. In addition, candidates who have refused to condemn the abuse of rule of law in the country have also emerged victorious.

Most Nigerians are oblivious of the crux of the manifestoes of the political parties. Campaigns and presidential debates, which should be the platforms to publicise the parties manifestoes and commit the candidates to good performance in the future, have not achieved these purposes. Campaigns have been carnival-like where musicians come to sing the praises of politicians. These gatherings have also been avenues to make derogatory statements about the opposition political parties. How many of the past presidential candidates have taken part in pre-election debates? For those who took part in past debates, was there a performance commensurate to the promises made? The answer to the first question is that the disregard for the opinion of the masses makes some of these candidates ignore fora that can build accountability. The response to the second question is the position of Nigeria in Tables 1, 2 and 3. The implications of this is that people vote with a shallow knowledge of what the political parties and candidates have to offer.

Electorates vote based on sentiments despite the low leadership skills of the candidates and faint information about what the latter are required to contribute to the development of the county. Political elites still manipulate the process. Politicians have latched onto the level of illiteracy and

poverty in the country to induce voters to vote against their conscience (Ebiri, Osahon, Okafor, Richards, Abuh, Obansa, and Akubo, 2019). At the level of the compilation of results and declaration of winners, politicians sometimes threaten returning officers to declare the result in their favour (Okeoma and Achonu, 2019). Political elites and their supporters also connive with security agents to prevent a smooth electoral process (Onyeji, 2019). Weak leaders, the bad attitude of politicians and the poor management of the electoral process have been the bane of elections at all levels in Nigeria in the Fourth Republic. These have been made possible because of reluctance in properly implementing the relevant laws that address them and the loopholes in previous laws. Although, some provisions of the Electoral Act, 2022 address these issues. For instance, Section 22 – vote buying, Section 121 – bribery and conspiracy, Section 127 – undue influence, Section 122 – placing prominence on secrecy in voting, Section 125 – disorderly conduct at elections, among others have become punitive measures to prevent these (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2022).

Nevertheless, the ripple effects of elites' personal interest pursuit may defeat the post-election peace that will consolidate the process. The 2023 presidential election is about a year away and the red flag shows that history may repeat itself. President Muhammadu Buhari is from the North West, and he has ruled the country since 2015. The next President is to be sworn in by May 2023 and by rotational calculation, the person should emerge from the South. To be more emphatic, the South East should be the zone to produce the next President. The late Nnamdi Azikiwe (from South East) was the first President of Nigeria in the post-independent Nigeria, a ceremonial position associated with the Westminster parliamentary system, while the executive power was vested in the late Tafawa Balewa from the present North East zone. Aguiyi Ironsi, another South Eastern military general, became the military Head of State on 15 January 1966, when the military deposed the civilian regime. He spent less than seven months in power before he was assassinated in a counter coup on 29 July 1966.

In the race for the 2023 presidential elections, two major political parties have the highest probability of producing the President because of large followership. Although, the Labour Party (LP) is increasing in followership and may pull strings in the election by producing the winner. The other parties have very few followers. Hence, most of the aspirants who could pull a crowd and who showed their intention to become the President are from either PDP or the APC. The ruling APC settled for a presidential candidate from the South, while the PDP settled for North. However, those who contested in the parties' primaries were from the North and South and were Muslims and Christians. The implication of this is that both parties threw the contest open across ethnic and religious lines. This was made possible because zoning the presidency is not in the constitution. Peter Obi (South East and Christian), a former PDP aspirant, moved from the party to the LP and has become its presidential candidate. His deputy is from the North West and is Muslim. The regions the aspirants and candidates come from are a pointer to who supports zoning and who is against it regarding the 2023 presidential election. Whenever political elites from the North or South feel they will benefit from zoning, they will support it, but if they feel it will not be of benefit to them, they jettison the idea (Ambali and Mohammed, 2016). This has always been the case in previous elections (Nwaneri, 2019) and it shows that political elites are not interested in serving the masses but rather in promoting their selfish interest. Excuses have been given by those who do not support zoning and those who are in support.

A PDP chieftain, Kenneth Imasuagbon, a Southerner advocated that zoning, should pave the way for merit, intellectual capacity, and exposure of a leader who can solve the country's security, infrastructural, and economic problems (Adedipe, 2022). However, he tactically supports zoning within the PDP and not nationally. He feels that former PDP Presidents, Olusegun Obasanjo and Goodluck Jonathan had ruled the country for about thirteen years in total and they are from the South, while the late Yar'Adua ruled for only three years. Hence, the next presidential candidate should come from the North (Adedipe, 2022). A former governor of Kano State and the present governor of Bauchi State share a similar opinion

about zoning (Abati, 2022b). Some Northern groups posit that for the 2023 presidential election, the North has the same right as any other part of the country to run for the presidency in 2023 because there is no constitutional provision for zoning (Abati, 2022b). This is a sharp contrast to the position of the region in 2011 when Jonathan emerged the winner of the election. Similarly, Atiku Abubakar, the Presidential candidate of the PDP, played down zoning because it is not in the constitution. He promised to use his experience to address the poverty, disunity, and security challenges in the country (Okere, 2022). Others have supported the power shift to the North based on merit, experience, and the need for the younger generation to rule.

Nevertheless, some Northern governors in the APC agreed that the presidency should be zoned to the South in 2023 (Ajayi, 2022). The Southern Governors Forum, ethnic socio-political organisations like the Ohanaeze Ndigbo, the Southern and Middle Belt Leaders Forum, Pan Niger Delta Forum, and Afenifere have insisted that power must shift to the South (Abati, 2022b; Adonu, 2021). Ironically, some Southern and Middle Belt governors and politicians have supported the APC Muslim-Muslim ticket by placing party interests and political permutations above the resolution of their regions and they have also given competency as the reason for their support (Majeed, 2022; Sobechi, Akubo, Nzor, Michael, Alabi and Todo, 2022). The yardstick for their competency remains a subject of debate. This study does not question the competency of the APC or PDP candidates and their deputies. However, competent members of the party, who are of Northern and Christian extraction, in the case of vice-presidential candidate of the APC, and a Southern presidential candidate in the case of PDP, if well searched, will be found. These will serve the dual purpose of consolidating peace and promoting good leadership.

The issue is that these politicians and groups are not looking out for good leadership skills, but they are after producing leaders from their zones or the regions they support. Those who presently support merit are probably doing so because the zoning calculation will not be in their favour at the moment. The antecedents, as well as the leadership qualities of those not in support and those in support of zoning, still point towards poor or mediocre performance if elected. This is because most of these politicians have held some positions, some have been political godfathers or stooges of those who have held political positions in the Fourth Republic, and the performance of the government has been poor, as seen in Tables 1, 2 and 3. The poor state of the economy, bad security situation, human rights abuses, and disobedience to court orders among other flaws have been on the increase in the past few years. The focus of political parties and aspirants should be on how to address these problems. However, the masses are yet to have a clear-cut understanding of the solutions the candidates would proffer to solve these issues.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study identified that national integration has been weak due to the poor management of Nigeria's diversity and the selfish interest of political elites. Consociationalism and elite theory were the conceptual and theoretical lenses of the study. It explored rotational presidency within the Nigerian context and its pros and cons. It recognised that the national question has been a puzzle yet to be demystified in Nigeria and that a rotational presidency is one of the responses to the disunity in the country. It established that bad leadership is responsible for the high level of corruption in the country, huge infrastructural deficits, poor development, and threats to peace and security. It acknowledged that these factors are responsible for poverty and illiteracy, which coupled with ethnicity and religion, have made it possible for political elites to continue to present bad leaders to lead the country at all levels. These have been the bane of the smooth electoral process and the emergence of good leaders in the country, and indicators show that the 2023 presidential election may be no different.

Given these flaws, there are pragmatic measures that can be taken. Parties should make their ideologies and manifestoes clearer. Civil society organisations should engage political parties to make known what the latter represents. Hence, political parties will be forced to create more

awareness of their ideologies and manifestoes. Candidates should also actively take part in pre-election debates organised by independent bodies and the public should be allowed to ask questions. Political campaigns should be avenues to showcase the skills and credibility of candidates and educate the masses on voting based on their conscience and why they should reject incentives from the political class. Elections should be more credible, and the people should be able to vote for the leaders of their choice. Vote buying and all sorts of electoral manipulations should stop and there should be strict and unbiased punitive measures for those who engage in such acts. Reports of manipulation made by electoral officials, or the electorates should be thoroughly investigated, and necessary sanctions should be placed. Law enforcement agents should not be biased in the electoral process. The Independent National Electoral Commission and the judiciary should be allowed to carry out their duties of punishing electoral offenders without interference from politicians. The proper implementation of the Electoral Act, 2022 will have positive marginal implications in actualising these.

There should be a mechanism to hold leaders accountable. There should be an annual assessment to measure the success of a leader and remove failing leaders. The first is that their integrity and background should be checked. Leaders and their cronies with corruption cases or alleged corruption cases should be tried and if found guilty, should be punished without double standards. The second is that assets declared by leaders before assuming office should be reviewed annually. That means if the assets they possess after the review surpass the remuneration of their office or previous investments, such a leader should be removed after a thorough investigation. The third is that there should be a performance and expectations timeline drawn by a coalition of civil society groups, political parties, and members of socio-cultural groups. This should be subject to an annual review and if the leaders do not meet expectations despite the availability of economic resources favouring them to perform well, they should be removed. Poverty and illiteracy should be tackled in the country. This can be well facilitated if good infrastructures are provided. Also, there should be impact assessments to know where to situate infrastructures so that the masses will benefit from such. This will promote development and such will have a positive effect on poverty alleviation and the promotion of literacy. As well as this, the electorates should be educated more on the dangers of voting for bad leaders. This will reduce the propensity of the electorates to be manipulated to vote for incompetent leaders and make them ask salient questions from leaders about good governance.

Conclusively, zoning should continue because it makes the ethnic and religious groups in the country see themselves as part of the Nigerian project. The manipulation of the arrangement can be eradicated if it is in the constitution. Above all, any geo-political zone that is to produce the President should produce someone with good leadership skills.

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