

# Peace and Conflict Resolution: Biafra Agitation and Zoning of Presidency in Nigeria

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## Abstract

The Nigerian State over the years, experienced continuous attacks from the Boko Haram insurgent group since the period of 2009 to date and that has affected the country's national security. These continuous attacks have claimed the lives of so many Nigerians and its spread to other countries such as Chad, Niger and Cameroon, and have thus, called for the attention of the international community. Tracing the root causes of the insurgency, similar approach reveals for the new call for Biafra's secession from Nigeria in 2015. This research paper seeks to investigate the role of zoning and rotation of presidency between the Nigeria's six geo-political zones as a panacea for resolving the conflict between the North and South, as well as ethno-religious conflicts that bedeviled the peaceful co-existence of the Nigerian State which has the largest population in Africa. The research paper made use of qualitative approach through the conduct of interviews, review from previous literature, online newspapers and other internet sources as means of data collection. The findings, thus, reveal that the Igbo ethnic nationality from the South-East geopolitical zone foresee no hope of occupying the seat of the President of Nigeria hence, the need for secession from Nigeria in order to achieve self-determination through the Republic of Biafra which was fought for in 1967-1970 during Nigeria's civil war.

**Keywords:** Biafra Agitation, Nigeria, Peace and Conflict Resolution, Zoning of Presidency.

## 1. Introduction

Over the years, the quest for power and the control of Nigeria's presidency remains in the hearts of the minority and majority ethnic nationalities. This issue may appear to some as a no go area referring to it as predominantly, the seat of power which should be occupied by some certain group of people within the Nigerian state. Nigeria, a country endowed and blessed with different ethnic groups sought to revolve this burning issue in order to sustain her national unity and national security. The country's peaceful co-existence is bedeviled by the activities of the Boko Haram insurgent group since they started their activities against the country in 2009 (Onuoha, 2010).

Boko Haram activities became the major source of worry after the Niger Delta crisis was handled through a peaceful resolution during the President Yar'Adua administration that introduced the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme. Through the Amnesty programme, the Niger Delta militants dropped their arms against the Nigerian State and some of them gained the opportunity through the government sponsored higher education outside Nigeria to go back to school for further training (Egwemi, 2010; and Oluwaniyi, 2011).

Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999 witnessed one form of attack or the other such as the Niger Delta militant attacks, the Boko Haram attacks and in 2015, the new agitation for the establishment of the Republic of Biafra from the activities of the Nigeria's South-East youths. How then do we resolve these issues and what led to the new agitation for the formation of Biafra Republic after the country's civil war in 1967-1970 over the old agitation for the Republic of Biafra that led to the Civil War? These are the issues that would be discussed in this research paper.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this paper include:

- i) To investigate the issues that led to the new Biafra agitation in 2015.
- ii) To explore the need for rotation of presidency in Nigeria.
- iii) Recommend measures that can be taken to resolve the issues that led to the agitation for secession in Nigeria.

### 3. Discussion of Findings

#### Zoning of Presidency 1999-2007

Zoning as discussed in the work of Terwase, Abdul-Talib, & Zengeni (2015) refers to it as a principle which was designed to give equal representation, justice and fairness to all quarters of the Nigerian geopolitical system. Table 1 below represents how zoning was practiced from 1999 to 2007. The top political positions were equally distributed among all the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria, the position of the President of the country went to the South-West and that of the Vice President was zoned to the North-East.

The position of the Senate President was zoned to the South-East between the periods of 1999 to 2003 and 2003 to 2007. As such, the Igbo people were equally represented in Nigeria as occupying the number three position in the country. Their representation as occupying the number three position which is the seat of the Senate President showed that they were not marginalized. Zoning/rotation of Nigeria's top position as shown in table 1 below indicates that, the issue of ethnicity was equally addressed since the top positions such as President, Vice President and Senate President were occupied by the Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani and Igbo ethnic nationalities respectively. Even the minorities were equally represented having the positions of Secretary to the Federal Government and Chairman of the then ruling political party, PDP, occupying the seats to represents the South-South and North-Central minorities respectively.

**Table 1: ZONING POLITICAL OFFICES IN NIGERIA 1999-2007**

Political Office	Geopolitical Zone	Duration
President	South-West	1999-2007
Vice President	North-West	1999-2007
Senate President	South-East	1999-2007
Speaker of Federal House Representatives	North-West	1999-2007
Secretary of the Federal Government	South-South	1999-2007
Chairman of PDP	North-Central	1999-2007

**Source:** Terwase, Abdul-Talib & Zengeni (2015).

There was a power shift from the South to the North when the seat of the President was zoned to the North in 2007 and that brought in President Yar'Adua from North-west and the Vice President from South-South as seen in table 2 below. At this time, the South-East geopolitical zone was represented with the position of the Chairman of the then ruling political party, the PDP and that gave them a sense of belonging.

**Table 2: ZONING POLITICAL OFFICES IN NIGERIA 2007-2011**

Political Office	Geopolitical Zone	Duration
President	North-West	2007-2011
Vice President	South-South	2007-2011
Senate President	North-Central	2007-2011
Speaker of Federal House Representatives	South-West	2007-2011
Secretary of the Federal Government	North-East	2007-2011
Chairman of PDP	South-East	2007-2011

**Source:** Awopeju, Adelusi, & Oluwashakin, (2012). Modified by Authors

Terwase, Abdul-Talib & Zengeni (2015) observed in their work as power was again shifted from the North to the South when the President of the country, President Yar'Adua died on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May, 2010 and that gave way for another power shift since the Vice President, Goodluck Jonathan, who hails from the South-South geopolitical zone took over power as the President of the country.

President Jonathan later contested in 2011 for the position of the President and he won the general elections that ushered him into power to rule from 2011 to 2015. His administration as seen in table 3 below, appointed an Igbo man from the South-East geopolitical zone as the Secretary to the Federal Government of Nigeria. During President Jonathan's leadership as the President of the country, the issue of agitating for the creation of the Republic of Biafra was not in place. Zoning and rotation of Nigeria's presidency was challenged by the Northern

political class who sought for the position of the president to have remained in the North from 2007 to 2015 ranging to a period of eight years as seen in 1999 to 2007 when power was residing in the Southern part of the country.

**Table 3: The 2011 Truncated Zoning Arrangements**

Political Office	Geopolitical Zone	Duration
President	South-South	2011-2015
Vice President	North-West	2011-2015
Senate President	North-Central	2011-2015
Speaker of the Federal House of Representatives	North-West	2011-2015
Secretary to the Federal Government	South-East	2011-2015
Chairman of PDP	North-East	2011-2015

**Source:** Terwase, Abdul-Talib & Zengeni (2015).

Table 3 have shown how zoning was truncated which could have granted rotation presidency between the North and South as well as its rotation across the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria. In 1999, The Presidency went to the South-West and they ruled from 1999 to 2007, which within, the South-East was represented having occupied the seat of the Senate President. In 2007, the South-East occupied the seat of Chairman of PDP, which was the period of 2007 to 2011. In 2011, The South-East occupied the seat of Secretary to the Federal Government of Nigeria and that period lasted from 2011 to 2015.

**Table 4: No Zoning Arrangements in 2015**

Political Office	Geopolitical Zone	Duration
President	North-West	2015-2019
Vice President	South-West	2015-2019
Senate President	North-Central	2015-2019
Speaker of the Federal House of Representatives	North-East	2015-2019
Secretary to the Federal Government	North-East	2015-2019
Chairman of PDP	South-South	2015-2019

**Source:** Developed by Authors

In 2015, there was a change of power from the ruling political party, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) to All Progressive Congress (APC) when their candidate, President Jonathan of PDP was defeated in the 2015 Presidential elections by the candidate of APC, General M. Buhari who later took over power as the President of Nigeria on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May, 2015 (Terwase, Abdul-Talib & Zengeni, 2015). Table 4 of this work thus, reveals that, the leadership of the country having the position of the President went to the North-West, the Vice President from the South-West and the Senate President from the North-Central. The position of the Speaker of the Federal House of Representatives and that of the Secretary to the Federal Government went to the North-East. The South-South occupied the seat of the Chairman of the Ruling Political Party, the APC.

This development became clear to the people of the South-East when they lost out of the political equation that distributes top positions as seen in table 1, table 2, table 3 and table 4 of this paper. Hence, the issue of marginalization of the Igbo people in Nigeria's political system came in place. The new agitation for the creation of the Republic of Biafra became prominent in the South-East and some part of the South-South where protest for the new agitation took place. Kumolu (2015) noted that, prominent elders and leaders from the South-East geopolitical zone had gathered to deliberate on the issue affecting the zone and they dismissed that point that, the youths from the zone were protesting because of the inadequate infrastructure and the collapsed roads due to erosion as some may have held as assumptions as to why they protested.

Kumolu (2015) further revealed, the elders from the South-East zone noted that, the protest by the youths from the zone is as a result of the current exclusion of the South-East from the political equation in relation to governance of the Nigerian polity. Their expression can be related to, as seen in table 4 of this paper where no Igbo man or woman is holding the positions such as President, Vice-President, Senate-President, Speaker of the Federal House of Representatives, Secretary to the Federal Government and Chairman of the Ruling Political

Party within the current governance of 2015-2019. Although, apart from the position of the president, the rest of the positions mentioned were held by Igbo people from the South-East between the period of 1999-2003, 2003-2007, 2007-2011, and 2011-2015 as seen in table 1, table 2, and table 3 of the research paper. Such exclusion of the Igbo representatives within the top positions show the reason behind the protest and agitation for the sovereign state of Biafra as the people from the zone are pained, and they express their feeling which is from a psychological pain.

Zoning and rotation of presidency is another factor that bedeviled the unity of the people and peace and stability of the country. Between 1999 to 2003 and 2003 to 2007 as seen in table 1 above, key positions were zoned to each of the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria. Three positions went to the North and three to the South. In 2007, the same was practiced before the death of President Yar'Adua as shown in table 2 where three key top positions went to the North and three to the Southern part of the country. In 2011, when zoning was truncated, only two positions went to the South and this time four positions went to the North. As zoning was also rejected in 2015, the North went away with four key positions leaving only two to the South and these positions are the seat of the Vice President to the South-West and seat of the Chairman of the Ruling Political Party to the South-South geopolitical zone. This development and political equation could not favour the South-East since no position was left for them.

The South-East again is yet to rule the country since the end of the civil war that took place in 1967 to 1970. Akinola (1996) argued that, rotation of presidency and zoning of other top positions in Nigeria should be practiced within the Nigerian democratic system. This is an approach to ensure peace building and political stability of the country where national unity would be promoted. The work of Uwazurike (1997) argued that, there should be even if in five years, a single tenure of the rotation of presidency in all the geopolitical regions and at all levels of governance. This is aimed at doing away with the ethno-religious problems where peace and national unity could be ensured.

The work of Terwase, Abdul-Talib, Zengeni and Terwase (2015) also connotes on the issue of ethno-religious conflict as it leads to division and political unrest. Such could lead to people who may pass through psychological trauma as seen in the case of Boko Haram victims within the country. Nigeria witnessed a state of insecurity in the country especially from 2009 to date (2016 under study), and there is need to have resolution on issues relating to the said subject where the Nigerian people can be united and the country's stability would be achieved.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In view of obtaining a peaceful co-existence among all Nigerians irrespective of where you come from, be it North or South, Muslim or Christian, minority or majority ethnic nationality, this paper attempts to bring to the fore reasons that could lead and have led to agitations especially relating to positions in Nigeria's political system. The paper also brings out the core reason for the new Biafra agitation among the people of South-East geopolitical region. The region seems to be excluded in the political equation since zoning of political positions were truncated which made the North to go away with four top positions, while the South with two positions as seen in the work. This created tension in the South-East that later led to protests by the youth from the region and an agitation for the creation of Biafra State out of the Nigerian State.

#### **5. Recommendations**

This paper therefore, recommends the following:

- i. The Federal Government should negotiate with all the geopolitical zones where the issue of zoning/rotation of Presidency would be enshrined within the Nigeria's constitution. This would give equal opportunity to all the geopolitical zones to have equal participation and representation in governance at all levels.
- ii. The early warning mechanism should be put in place by the Federal Government of Nigeria where issues patterning to conflict be addressed at an early stage so that it would not lead to violence within the country (Terwase, Abdul-Talib & Zengeni 2015).

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