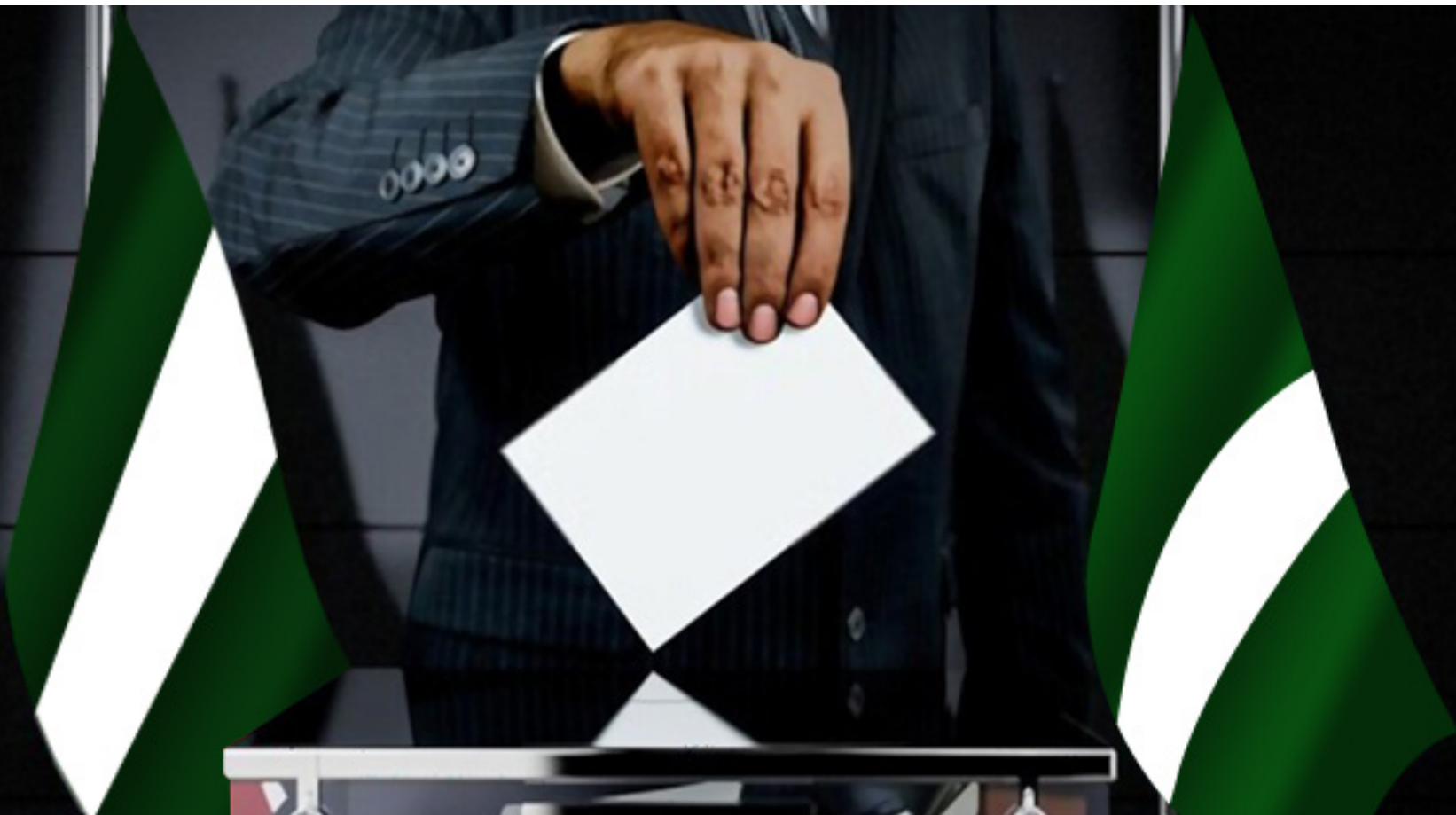


Policyweekly

The Forthcoming Party Primary Elections in Nigeria

Its Link to National Security and Stability



Policy Recommendations

- 1** Political parties should respect the zoning/rotation principles in their parties.
- 2** A law should be made in line with the recommendation of the 1995 constitutional conference to 'constitutionalise' the principle of the rotational presidency because the political parties appear weak in maintaining their own rules.

Introduction

In every political business cycle and prior to general elections, political parties hold the event of choosing their standard-bearers against other parties and interests in the electoral contest. It is called party primary elections because it precedes the main election. When members of political parties in Nigeria gather for party primaries, especially for presidential elections, they do more than party activities. It is a party event as it is an exercise in ethnic, cultural and geopolitical balancing. It is usually a political deal in which representativeness is sought for the diversity of constitutive cultural groups in Nigeria. Thus, party primaries are generally a test of the political sagacity of parties and politicians in understanding the fragile unity of Nigeria, given the deep divisions among the diverse groups in the country. Their selection of candidate is expected to balance asymmetries in the various points of the country's fault lines.

Regarding the presidency, there is an understanding by political parties that political power should rotate between the zones of the country. The two major political parties in the country, the [Peoples Democratic Party \(PDP\)](#) and the [All Progressives Congress \(APC\)](#), respectively, provide for the principles of zoning and rotation of crucial leadership positions. It is to be noted that this desirable convention of political parties is not a law in the Nigerian Constitution. The underlying reason for this understanding is to create a sense of belonging among different groups in the country and manage inclusion and diversity challenges.

Developments that have appeared to alter this understanding have generated national tensions and security issues. One such event was the death of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua in 2010 and his succession by Goodluck Jonathan. At the approach of the 2011 election, President Jonathan's effort to contest the election was a source of tension, [threats and altercations](#) among the political elites based on a claim that the northern part of the country was yet to complete the second tenure of their turn in power due to the death of President Musa Yar'Adua. As the 2023 presidential election approaches, Nigerians expect the chosen candidate to be drawn from the South based on Nigerian political party principles and conventions. However, there is a cross-cutting jostle for the 2023 presidency from both the North and the South. This suggests an inclination toward throwing the principle of zoning/rotation overboard despite the parties' conventions. This development is coming when the country is, more than ever, beset with conflicts arising from claims of exclusion from full rights of belonging by different Nigerian groups. Accordingly, the choice of party flagbearers in the forthcoming presidential party primaries would bear on national security. In this edition of Nextier SPD Policy Weekly, we explore the connectedness of party primary elections to national unity, peace and stability.

Party Politics and Management of Diversity in Nigeria

Since the end of military rule in 1999, political parties have integrated national stability in considering candidates for sensitive national positions. President Obasanjo was, for instance, chosen to be the flagbearer of the biggest party at the time (Peoples Democratic Party), while Chief Olu Falae, a Yoruba like President Obasanjo, stood for the other major contending party. The sense behind this concession to the Yoruba nation is that the June 12, 1993, presidential election won by Chief M.K.O Abiola, a Yoruba, was cancelled. Not only that the electoral victory was annulled, but Chief Abiola also died in a circumstance whose naturalness is yet to be established appropriately. Consequently, the South West of Nigeria became a flashpoint of agitations and threats to national security. There were agitations for justice because it was feared that the

cancellation of the June 12 election had an ethnic undertone. A group among the agitators even went to the extremes of demanding separation as the arrangement that could guarantee fairness for their nationality. Chief Obasanjo and Chief Olu Falae's candidature in the two leading parties at the end of military rule [1999] was a placatory step by political parties to maintain national unity and stability.

After two terms of eight years of Obasanjo's rule, the party primaries by the two major political parties, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), produced only northern candidates. This was understood as only proper since it was an agreed measure of national peace and stability for political parties to respect power-sharing between the North and the South. Hence the contestants in the 2007 general elections were the Late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua and Gen Muhammadu Buhari (ret'd). The death of President Yar'Adua in 2010 led to the swearing-in of Dr Goodluck Jonathan to complete his tenure as the constitution requires. Some politicians had anticipated that President Jonathan should not contest the 2011 presidential elections because the North had not done two terms of presidency, which they believed to be their entitlement. They cited [article 7, section 7.2 \(c\) of the PDP constitution](#) to drive home their point about the need to respect rotation and support equity. However, Dr Jonathan declared interest in running for the presidency and won.

In the years succeeding President Jonathan's electoral victory, the country's security has worsened. Terrorism, banditry and secessionist agitations have continued to rise almost beyond the state's capacity to control. . Farmer-herder conflicts have led to the loss of at least 10,000 lives in the last decade, based on a 2019 report by Foreign Affairs. According to the Nextier Violent Conflict Database, at least 656 lives have been lost to farmer-herder crisis from June 2020 to date. About 3,982 civilians and 395 security officers died in violent conflict occurrences in Nigeria in 2021. The Database also recorded 421 injured persons and 2,799 kidnapped victims. Kidnapping, the menace of unknown gunmen, secessionist agitations in the South East and more have characterised the last seven years. In particular, several agitators seeking an independent state of Biafra have emerged in the past few years and are thriving in the South East.

The secession agitators tend to gain sympathy because the very core of their message is that [the Igbo are not accepted as equal citizens of Nigeria](#) deserving of equal opportunity. This message resonates with common perceptions among the Igbo of the South East that there has been a deliberate glass ceiling against them since the end of the civil war. This feeling of exclusion is usually exemplified by the political opportunity structure for the Igbo in Nigeria. There is a perception of political exclusion, especially with important political positions in the country. One of such offices is the presidency of Nigeria. While

condemning the post-civil war marginalisation of the Igbo, [Shehu Sani](#) noted that “since the end of the civil war, Igbos have been distrusted and regarded as unfaithful and unpatriotic Nigerians.” On that note, there is a high level of reciprocal political distrust for the national state among the Igbo. This is manifested in their abysmally low participation in the ballot and recent aggressive attacks on federal institutions and their personnel around the zone. Thus, a Nigerian president of Igbo extraction comes up in the opinion of [some statesmen and analysts](#) as a possible way to restore peace and national unity. This is one of the options. The other possible remedies are political restructuring or yielding to neo-Biafran agitators’ demand for a plebiscite in their claimed provinces of Biafra.

On a Nigerian president of Igbo extraction, there are six geopolitical zones in the country. The post-military elective rule was started by a Southerner (President Obasanjo), who was succeeded by a Northerner (the late President Yar’Adua). The late Yar’Adua was succeeded by another Southerner (President Jonathan). After defeating President Jonathan in the 2015 presidential elections, the incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari has ruled Nigeria. In the coming presidential elections of 2023, if political parties play by their practice of alternating presidential candidates between the North and South of the country, then the candidate would be a southerner. Moreover, if a sense of rotating the presidency across the geopolitical zones matters, the South East has not produced the President from the South of the country since the restoration of elective rule. However, it does not appear that the ruling group in Nigeria are willing to permit this outcome. PDP recently decided that it is not zoning the presidency, which means anybody can contest.

By the power of numbers, no one is in doubt that the north holds an advantage of population veto by which they can determine who rules Nigeria. Thus, Nigerian leadership would be perpetually determined by the North in a free-for-all contest. This is an advantage that invites caution if national unity and peace should matter. A seasoned journalist noted that none of the two major parties is likely to give an Igbo candidate a ticket because of a festering distrust for the Igbo. He added that such a ticket would have assuaged the Igbo and reduced the tensions and conflicts across the South East (Personal Conversation, April 23, 2022). Another respondent, a Professor of Public Administration, resonated with the same thinking and added, like the first respondent, that giving the ticket to the South-East would

serve the purpose of equity and peace (Personal Conversation, April 24, 2022).

It needs to be noted that although zoning and rotation do not align with the majoritarian rule of democracy, their very content does not contradict the essence of democracy because it is about inclusiveness. It has shown to be a pragmatic solution to restiveness occasioned by injustice, at least in the case of South-West Nigeria. To be sure, agitation and restiveness are not valid pathways to democratic leadership. Nevertheless, managing a fragile unity requires a nuanced approach to understanding the complexity of a society. It is, in fact, useful to experiment with the principle of power rotation as the country’s unique state-building practice is pending when a sense of nationhood is sufficiently cultivated in the citizens to make them see the need to be loyal to the country without compulsion. Accordingly, we invite mindfulness of proactive steps to circumvent political party decisions that may threaten national peace and unity.

Recommendations

The government and top party cadres should consider the following points:

1. The principle of rotation of leadership opportunities is not only appropriate for managing unity in a fragile federation with multiple diversity, but it also supports equity and should be sustained in the Nigerian case, given persisting claims of various groups about exclusion. Thus, the political parties should respect their parties’ zoning/rotation principles.
2. Political interests and ambitions could become overriding sometimes that power-seeking individuals whose quest for power is not served by the rotation/zoning arrangement may, as is presently the case in some parties, insist on contesting elections against those who should have the turn. On this note, a law should be made in line with the recommendation of the 1995 constitutional conference to ‘constitutionalise’ the principle of the rotational presidency because the political parties appear weak in maintaining their own rules.

Conclusion

Societies divided along ethnicity, religion, language and other culturally determined factors

Nextier SPD Policy Weekly provides an analysis of topical conflict, security, and development issues and proposes recommendations to address them. It is a publication of Nextier SPD.

Nextier SPD (www.nextierspd.com) is an international development consulting firm that uses evidence-based research to develop and build knowledge and skills to enhance human security, peace, and sustainable development as means to achieving stability and prosperity in Nigeria, and in the African region.

make democracy difficult. Managing such difficulties invites the rotating of power among the major zones of such a political system to create inclusiveness. Political parties are crucial institutions for maintaining such frameworks of power rotation. Such a role becomes even more imperative when a country's peace, unity, and stability are challenged by a rising spate of violence driven by different kinds of exclusion. The Nigerian security situation is on the brink and needs not get worse. Political parties already have an instrument in zoning and rotation of power in their constitutions to support national peace based on their choice of candidates. The die is cast.

Author:

Dr Ben Nwosu is an Associate Consultant at Nextier SPD and a Senior Researcher, Institute for Development Studies, University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus, Senior Lecturer, Political Science, Nsukka Campus.

Charles Asiegbu is a Policy and Research Analyst with Nextier and he manages the Nextier Violent Conflict Database.

Nextier Sample Publications



Out-of-School Children:
Using a Gendered Analysis for North-East Nigeria
International Women's Day commemoration on 10th March 2022 underscored the need to reflect on the challenges women suffer due to entrenched norms and practices that structure...



Developing a Pragmatic Solution:
Ending the Weekly Sit-At-home in Nigeria's South-East Region
Economic analysis reveals that each day of total shutdown of the South East Anambra State alone loses 19.6 billion or \$47.70 million.



Jihadist Violence and Military Resurgence:
The Crisis of Fragile Democratisation in Africa
In just over six months in 2021, coups made a rude comeback in Sudan, Mali, Chad, and Guinea.



Conflicts and the Dilemma of Traditional Rulers:
Examining Nigeria's North-Central Region
The North-Central Zone has been in the eye of the storm of Nigeria's multiple conflicts for several years.



A Resource Conflict Perspective:
Questioning the Lingering Zamfara Crises
The conflict in Zamfara is one instance of the festering conflicts in the North West of Nigeria with its peculiar grisly tales and very dim prospects of resolution in the near future.



Beyond Farmers and Herders:
Natural Resource Conflicts in the North-Central
Resource conflicts have remained intractable in the North-Central Zone of Nigeria.



Bloodletting Gold in Zamfara State:
Reflecting on Illicit Mining and Violence
Zamfara State has gained infamy for bloodletting connected to illicit gold mining activities.



Planning Development and Navigating Insecurity:
How Soludo can Achieve a Peaceful State
As Anambra State Governor-elect Prof Charles Soludo prepares to take the mantle of leadership on March 17, 2022, a flurry of dreams and great expectations reverberates across the State and beyond.