

# LANRE BANJO GOVERNORSHIP CAMPAIGN

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**For Immediate Release**

Contact: Ogbeni Lanre Banjo

[campaign@lanrebanjo.com](mailto:campaign@lanrebanjo.com)

<http://lanrebanjo.com/>

## **ZONING OF ELECTIVE OFFICES IS DESTRUCTIVE! IT FOSTERS DISUNITY!**

One serious question facing all Nigerians today is whether it is helpful or destructive to zone our country for political leadership. It is a salient challenge, yet it presents such enormous implications for our national development and existence that the question must be tackled in a resolute way. The ruling party at the federal level, the People's Democratic Party (PDP), has ruled that zoning is their lifeblood, a winning prescription that cannot be done without. However, we must ask ourselves if zoning is lawful, right, helpful and desirable to our nation before it stymies or destroys the democratic society we fought hard to win.

Zoning is an undemocratic formula used by political parties to share power according to loosely-defined geographic 'zones' that are neither clearly explained nor sanctioned by the electorates. It is used to goad the citizens and railroad them into perpetual subservience to political elites. Zoning has become so tightly integrated into our political structure that it is being applied to all levels of representation today. A zone could be a ward, a constituency, a town, a section of a state, an ethnic group, a state or national region, depending on the office in contention. The periodic restriction of political opportunity to selected groups in a political entity, no matter the intention behind it, is dangerous and divisive. It promotes mediocre performance among the elected, hinders community development and becomes a catalyst for rigging elections. At this point of our democratic development, our focus should be on protecting our people and unifying our nation. Our eyes should be centered on electing people of good character, intelligence, drive, and vision who are prepared to perform and bring gains of democracy to the people.

As a gubernatorial candidate in Ogun State, I have been confronted by this question and have never shied away from presenting my views. Those views, which I have shared with my constituents, have now become so relevant to our national development that I have decided to challenge people of good conscience at all strata of the society to weigh in on this question. Why do I think I should speak openly on zoning at this time? A good leader must not only enlighten and educate; he must also take positions, comfortable or not, on what he believes in. That position may not be popular, but those who hide from the truth for the sake of political correctness are not fit to lead., By this public statement, I am further addressing this horrible misguidance, not only as an issue in my state but one which currently threatens our nation.

I will narrow my presentation to four main areas, namely:

- The danger of zoning;
- How zoning encourages rigging and other electoral malpractices;
- Why zoning promotes mediocrity in governance and underdevelopment for the nation and;
- How it causes disunity.

### **Zoning is a Dangerous Political Formula**

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Zoning is a prescription that kills instead of heals. Our nation, Nigeria, almost fell off the cliff some weeks ago, but for a quick tweaking of the law by the legislature, after a stubborn refusal to ensure a smooth transition of presidential powers that the constitution guarantees by those who maintain, in the ruling party, that power is zoned to President Umaru Yar'Adua's region of birth. These people maintain that power must not change hands even if the nation stands at the precipice of failure. The huge hurricane that just missed Nigeria by the whiskers serves as a warning to people of good conscience to confront the problem now before it consumes the nation. Permit me to go back the memory lane to recall how zoning killed our second democratic experience.

In the Second Republic, there was a gentlemanly agreement within the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) that when the term of President Shehu Shagari expired, power would travel from the North to the West. The intention was to ensure a kind of 'Federal Character,' a supposedly equitable sharing of power among the geographic components of the party. Chief M. K. O. Abiola, who was eagerly expecting the zoning windfall to fall his way, was a major financial sponsor of the party. He supported Alhaji Shehu Shagari not because of his vision, wisdom, love of the nation and ability to govern. Chief M. K. O. Abiola was not only denied this zoning windfall, he was humiliated by Umaru Dikko, who claimed the presidency was not for the highest bidder. Feeling cheated, Abiola moved against those who used zoning to bait and punish him. He left the party and opposed the Shagari administration. Consequently, the military snuffed life out of democracy. In 1983, zoning not only failed as a principle of equity, it contributed to the death of the Second Republic. Those who were saying 'North today, South tomorrow' benefited but the rest of us suffered.

Zoning, which is some kind of "Federal Character", is being pushed by the same people who are now against Federal Character. Today, Mr. David Mark, the Senate President and General Ibrahim Babangida are calling for the abrogation of "Federal Character." What a paradox? The self-confusion and internal conflict among the leadership of the PDP should tell the nation that zoning is nothing but a self-serving solution whose beneficiaries are its proponents.

Suffice to say that General Muhammad Buhari, a Northerner, who emerged as the Head of State picked General Tunde Idiagbon, also a Northerner, since by their geographic design, Kwara State is also part of the North. While their administration erred in certain area of respect of human rights and governance, Nigeria somehow accidentally benefited because our currency was stronger than what it was under Shagari's administration, our debt was reduced and certain sanity was restored in our political life and the country's economy. This combination of leadership from the same part of the country provided a focused, serious and, without doubt, disciplined administration which performed palpably better than the shared ones before and after it. At the time of the Buhari-Idiagbon administration, we did not have any cause to complain that the country was being governed by two Northerners and two Muslims. We were happy with the result of good governance and that is what we should continue to yearn for today.

While under Buhari-Idiagbon, regime zoning was ignored and a fair government resulted, the pre-occupation with zoning long before then gave us problems. The zoning system was the catalyst for Theophilus Danjuma, who shot and killed Major General Aguiyi Ironsi in 1966 to enable his zone to maintain power thus allowing Yakubu Gowon to mount the saddle of governance on the back of regionalism. The bullet-riddled bodies of Ironsi and Adekunle Fajuyi were later found in a nearby forest. So, how does zoning benefit our people, if at all? Zoning always benefits the cabals. For example, forty four years after Danjuma came to power, he told the nation that when he made five hundred million dollars from no-bids oil contract from his former subordinate, Sani Abacha; he did not know what to do with the money. Yet my fellow Jukun people and other indigenes of Taraba State have no access to portable water, good schools and still sleep in darkness. As Plateau State is immersed in rioting that has rendered thousands homeless, those who gained from zoning and amassed vast wealth like Danjuma have not considered the plight of my people from that zone. Zoning only matters when there is

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a need to gain power, not to help the people they had represented. General Obasanjo who also benefited from zoning is the highest land owner in Nigeria today. He introduced and entrenched the “do or die” electoral process because of zoning.

## **BASIS FOR RIGGING AND VIOLATION OF ELECTORAL LAWS**

Former President Obasanjo admitted that in 1979, he instrumented the transfer of power to the north to achieve an illegal wish that he later rationalized. One would have expected that he would not repeat the same mistake he made in 1979. Well, oops, he did it again in 2007! The General violated all the electoral laws when he picked, without restraint, Mr. Umaru Yar’Adua to lead his political party and Nigeria on the basis of what zone of the nation he hailed from. The effect of that arrangement was massive rigging of the election at all levels, which the beneficiary, Yar’Adua admitted and promised to correct in future elections. Tied to rigging were numerous litigation, political assassination, and colossal waste of money. It has been proven time and again that the only way to enforce the zoning system is by rigging elections, and rigging, we all know presents danger to our democracy and adulterates our name in the committee of nations.

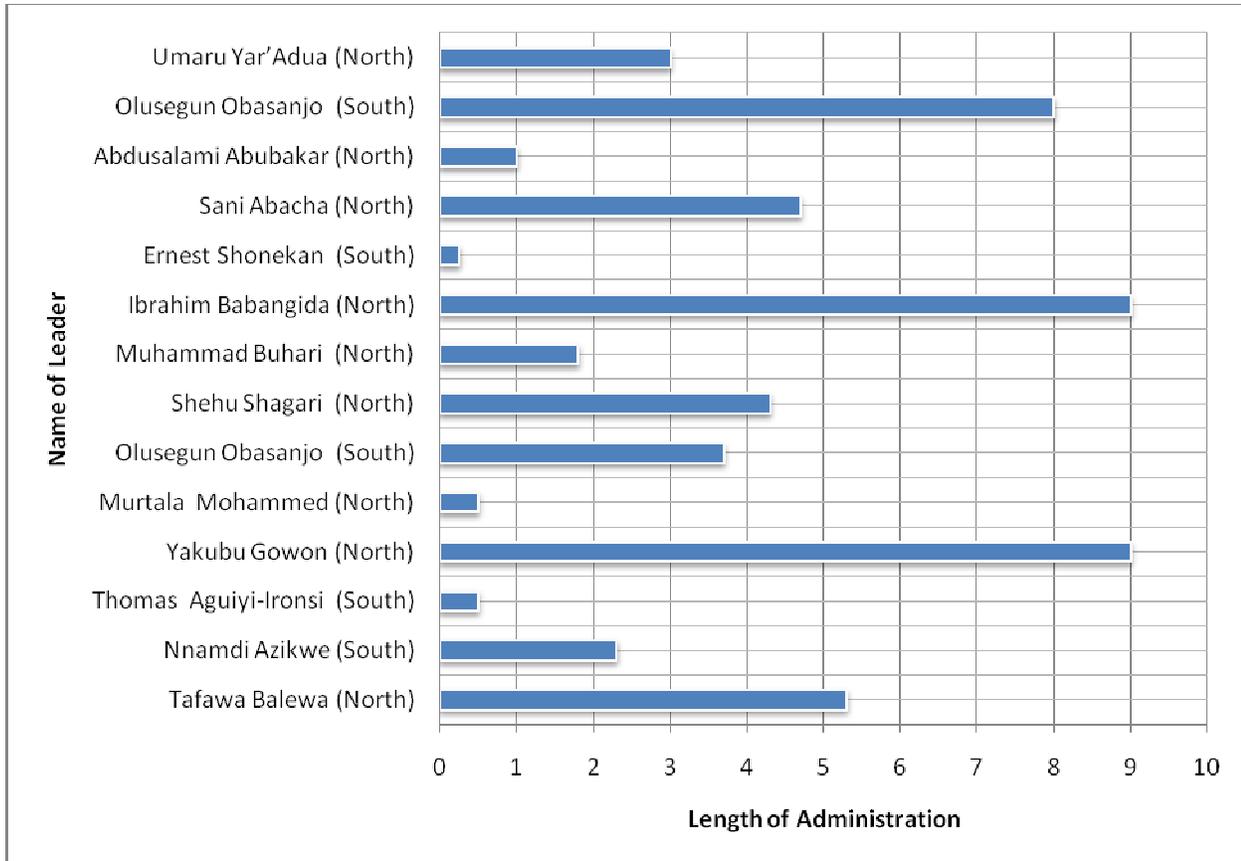
Once it is the turn of a zone to assume power, what follows is an overriding obligation to find a visionless individual, to occupy the carved out post. The focus is on the rulers, not the ruled, the elite, and not the masses. No one brought attention to this issue more than Obasanjo, who famously said winning was a “do or die” affair in 2007. The PDP had to stay in power by all means at various political levels because it staged unqualified and unaccepted leaders in various places in enforcement of its zoning arrangement. The result was the glorification of political savagery that brought mere thugs into national recognition.

## **MEDIOCRACY IN GOVERING AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT**

I have decided to be analytical in this portion so that we can all see clearly how long each “zone” has ruled Nigeria and the measure of benefit on the people of the zone and Nigerians in general

<b>Name of President/Head of State</b>	<b>Tenure</b>	<b>Total Time</b>
Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa,	October 1, 1960- January 15, 1966	5yrs. 3 months
General Yakubu Gowon	August 1, 1966 – July 29, 1975	9 yrs
General Murtala Mohammed	July 29, 1975 – February 13, 1976	6months
Alhaji Shehu Shagari	October 1, 1979 – December 31, 1983	4years 3 months
General Muhammad Buhari	December 31, 1983 – August 27, 1985	1yr. 8months
General Ibrahim Babangida	August 27, 1985 – August 27, 1993	9yrs.
General Sani Abacha	November 17, 1993 – June 8, 1998	4yrs. 7months
General Abdusalami Abubakar	June 9, 1998 – May 29, 1999	11 months
Alhaji Umaru Yar’Adua	May 29, 2007 – present	3yrs.
<b>TOTAL YEARS IN THE NORTH</b>		<b>38 years, 2 months</b>
Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe	October 1, 1963 – January 16, 1966	2yrs. 3 months
Major-General Thomas Aguiyi-Ironsi	January 16, 1966 – July 29, 1966	6 months
General Olusegun Obasanjo	13 February 1976 – 1 October 1979	3yrs. 7 months
Chief Ernest Shonekan	August 26, 1993 -November 17, 1993	2months 18 days
General Olusegun Obasanjo	May 29, 1999 - May 29, 2007	8yrs
<b>TOTAL YEARS INTHE SOUTH</b>		<b>14years, 6 months</b>

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It is tragic that while the North has occupied the presidential office for 38 years, there is little gain to my fellow northerners. With all sense of modesty and decorum, I contend that the northern Nigeria has been worse than the south. Power did not automatically translate into development. What power did was to enrich a few in the elite group, who have, in turn, used the power to further enrich themselves and their offspring. Examined from all angles - security, education, economy, public utilities, health, and transportation, among others- we can hardly claim that the north has made any substantial progress over the other parts of the country. This, my friends, is the sad story of zoning. With over 38 years in power, General Babangida had to take his wife to a hospital in California, where she died. With over 38 years in power, an Air Ambulance has to transport Ya'Adua back from Saudi Arabia after he sought wellness around the globe for years. When President Yar'Adua appointed his closest confidants and their cohorts to occupy the Central Bank, Ministry of Finance, NNPC, Defense, agriculture and other important public offices, some Southerners kicked against the trend. In parenthesis, the Southerners who complained forgot that there were Southerners in the National Assembly who approved the appointment, and instead of pointing to Nigerians, they pointed to the North because we did not see ourselves as one.

We have to realize that the appointment of mediocre persons to fill these positions is a main problem of zoning. The sense among the Yar'Adua clan is that this is their time, and they must make the most of every opportunity. They feel if they fail to "eat" now, the prospect will soon pass. Zoning places a burden on the beneficiary to use his allocated time to place his/her own people in strategic positions because the wait will be long for another opportunity to come.

Nations all over the world look to bring out the best among its people to hold office so that the fullness of its potentials can be released to address problems and opportunities that politicians have to resolve

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or ripen. Mature democracies ensure that while universal representation is achieved through geographic delimitation, leadership opportunities are not restricted to carved-out zones that are not spelled out in the constitution. Their political parties never attempt to stifle the law by introducing zoning of political offices that stop people from seeking elective offices at a particular time. Zoning limits the choice of qualified persons for political offices to a limited area; thereby sacrificing merit and quality. A geographic limit our rulers impose is a limit on our potential for development and change. This, I vehemently oppose! When a leader sees a problem he thinks he can resolve, and offers his service to his people, it is a great disservice to block that vision on the platform of arranged deals which are not sanctioned by the law or the citizens.

## DISUNITY IT FOSTERS

Currently, a political quagmire has resulted from the unconstitutional zoning of the presidency by the ruling PDP to the North. When the PDP created what it regarded as a “patriotic” zoning idea, it was myopic in that it did not anticipate incapacitation, infirmity or, even, death of a president from a particular zone, which could compel the vice president to assume the duty of the president. With the Acting President Goodluck Jonathan looking good to extend his assumption of presidential powers, the Yar’Adua camp and the north are already claiming rights to eight years of ruling, irrespective of the peaceful transition and the constitutional role of the acting president. In fact, some reports indicate that a few northerners believe that if a non-northerner with good programs contests on the platform of other political party he should not receive the support of the north as a block. If Nigerians appreciate the programs of such a Southerner contesting on the platform of another political party and overwhelmingly vote for him, the only way to stop such a person will be by rigging. This again would deepen disunity. The result will no longer qualify to be called democracy. If this scenario becomes real, we can expect that assassination will intensify. It will further embed in our political consciousness dichotomy between the zones and the problem of a political party will become the problem of a nation.

Man proposes and God disposes. General Obasanjo recently said that it would not have augured well for him as a Southerner to hand over to another Southerner, even if Nigerians elected another Southerner (*emphasis mine*). Today, divine intervention has altered that arrangement. The good luck of the Acting President Jonathan has handed over presidential powers to the first Southern minority occupier of the seat, even if temporary, who is the commander in chief of the armed forces as of today. Thus, God, in His infinite wisdom, has registered his protest against the zoning system that only benefits the powerful, the rich and divides His people - Nigerians.

As it is in the nation, so it is in Ogun State and other parts of the country. I am bold to say that there are absolutely no developmental challenges faced by my brethrens from Yewa that Egun, Ijebus, Aworis or Egbas are not equally experiencing. This is despite the fact a Yewa is now the deputy governor and Yewas are at the State House of Assembly, and are all colluding to oppress the masses. As a matter of fact, even as the current governor claimed to be from Remo, the great majority of political assassinations and threats of assassination during his tenure affected the Ijebus, more than any other intra-ethnic grouping. Although Gbenga Daniel claims to be an indigene of Sagamu to secure the PDP gubernatorial ticket, it is now the headquarters of cultism. It is clear then that zoning is about the interest of those in power and not the interest of the people. Today, the Egbas have no access to pipe-borne water, electricity, sound healthcare system, good education system, just like other sections of the state, despite the fact we have had my people from Egba in government.

Our system of government in Nigeria today is representative democracy with separation of powers that allow citizens to delegate power to their supposedly elected officials. Every ward is represented in a constituency, every constituency is represented in the local government, every local government is represented in the state government and every state is represented at the federal level. This is the

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constitutional guarantee for representation. It is not by zoning. If zoning were beneficial, it would have been injected in the Constitution. The Chairman of Odeda Local Government for example, is not from Sagamu. If he performs well, he would have established records to use as a leverage to contest for a higher office. This is what democracy is designed to achieve.

Representation starts from the grassroots to the top, and decision making is not just at the top. If Ogun State will have the best government, our people will help themselves to pick the best candidates from the ward level, all the way to the federal level without reference to ethnics and religion. Each political office should be reserved for the best, including the governorship. Meaningful change will come only when we entrust power to those we can vouch for, not only as president or governor, but also as lawmakers and local government helmsmen. This is how it has worked in the ancient democracies and this is how it should work for us Nigerians. The governor of Ogun State has the whole state as his constituency. The governor's allegiance and interest in the development of the whole state cannot be zoned, so why should his election be zoned?

It is my belief that the zoning question needs to be addressed sufficiently because of the way selfish politicians have been programming Nigerians to see it as the way out of equitable representation. Genuine democracy does not limit contestants to area of birth within a local, state, nation or region. My belief in fair play, equity and justice revolves around allowing any indigene of any part of Nigeria, as long as that person is constitutionally qualified, to contest and let the people decide. If we claim that someone from a geographic area has already benefited from illegal means of acquiring power, and therefore, no one from that area should contest again for the next eight years, the basic tenet of democracy is inherently and irreparably damaged. In short, that is insanity, unfairness, inequity and corrosive injustice - not democracy but an adulteration of it.

## CONCLUSION

I am about the unity and an indivisible state under one nation. If someone from Sagamu is in a state of coma, and someone from Abeokuta has tried before and he could not bring that person back to life, and yet another person from Abeokuta has the magic wand to help resuscitate the dying Sagamu person, it would be plain stupidity to say "no" to the person with ability. That sick person will just suffer untimely death rather than get the needed lifeline help. Elections should be based on ability to deliver service and democracy is about letting the people decide. Further, only hungry and visionless leaders who are out for selfish political ambition campaign on the basis of ethnicity, division or tribal sentiments. Many of our political elite now send their offspring to study and live in the advanced nations such as United States, Canada, England and Germany. They fail to realize that these nations were not built on political zoning. The leaders in those countries follow their constitutions, not parochial party formulas that serve the few. They seek the best to lead. Nigerian rulers enjoy what they would not offer to their own people in these civilized countries. We should stop them. The dream of people everywhere, whether it is in the United States or Nigeria, is the same - to live a good life, exercise freedom and get justice. We need leaders with good vision, who can make this dream a reality. When a governor or president is elected, his activities affect all his or her constituents. Should I become governor of Ogun State, the entire 20 local governments and 236 wards become my constituency. I will be required to swear an oath of office to care for Ogun State and not my so-called zone, because one day, after leaving power, I will have cause to travel to other parts of the State for functions. I also do not have control over where my children travel to within the state which makes it a must for me to treat the entire state as my constituents.

Zoning has always been used by the ruling parties in Nigeria as a way of holding the loyalty of minorities and the less-satisfied - a bait for the fish that otherwise would have sought deeper waters for its survival. The dangers of this practice at all levels of political administration are many. This is why, I

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have decided to bring the issue of zoning to the fore and address it sufficiently, not only for my constituents but for the nation in general. It is an important matter that could affect the health of our budding democracy, the overall development of our nation, and the sanity of our society. With the experience we are going through from once an “offshore” president, there is no better time for people of goodwill and patriots to carefully and intelligently weigh the problems with this practice

I strongly believe that zoning enhances division rather than foster unity. It divides Nigeria into regions and tribes, and focuses on our differences. In a nation, zoning focuses on the regions; in a state it brings out the units; old affiliations and dialectic problems; in a city, deep-seething and unresolved disagreements. If we want to build unity, we will wisely do away with cutting our nation up into fragments that bring division and enhance our differences.

If those destroying Nigeria want to bend on North/South dichotomy, then let them issue me a Southern Nigerian passport so that I know that I am not totally a Nigerian.

**Lanre Banjo**

*Ogun State Governorship Candidate of the NCP in 2003 and 2007*