

INTROSPECTION INTO THE CONCEPT OF POWER-SHARING VIS-À-VIS THE MARGINALIZATION OF UZO-UWANI IN THE UZO-UWANI/IGBO-ETITI FEDERAL CONSTITUENCY

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Abstract

Uzo-Uwani and Igbo-Etiti share a federal constituency. Representatives from both local governments in February 1998 entered into a power-sharing agreement to ensure fair representation and participation of both Uzo-Uwani and Igbo-Etiti communities in political processes. This paper seeks to critically examine the power dynamics in the Uzo-Uwani/Igbo-Etiti Federal Constituency to determine the presence or absence of power equilibrium and the extent of adherence to the power sharing agreement. The research endeavours to address crucial questions about Uzo-Uwani's position within the political landscape and the reasons behind its limited representation in the House of Representatives. The study involves an analysis of the power-sharing agreement established in 1998, exploring the rotation of power between the two regions. It also delves into challenges faced by Uzo-Uwani candidates during candidacy and campaigning, along with strategies employed to overcome these obstacles. The paper sheds light on the dynamics of power distribution within the constituency, revealing how Uzo-Uwani's position has evolved and identifying factors contributing to its marginalisation. In resonance with the findings, the study urges action and change, emphasizing the moral imperative of power sharing and collective efforts in overcoming the challenges and achieving a more equitable political landscape.

Keywords:Uzo-Uwani, Igbo-Etiti, Power-Sharing, Marginalization, Uzo-Uwani

Introduction

In 1999, Nigeria underwent a momentous transition to democracy, signalling the end of a dictatorial military regime. This transformative shift towards democratic governance, characterised by Abraham Lincoln as "government of the people, by the people, and for the people" (1863), held out the promise of overcoming social, religious, and ethnic divisions and barriers for the collective welfare of the nation. Integral to this democratic framework was the delineation of federal constituencies, as outlined in the 1999 constitution to ensure equitable representation and prevent the concentration of power in specific people and communities. This constitutional framework was a welcome development which many joint owners of constituencies, including the partners of Igbo-Etiti/Uzo-Uwani federal constituency, embraced with joy and formalised through power-sharing agreements.

As Nigeria celebrates twenty-four years of uninterrupted democracy in its fourth Republic, it becomes important to assess the progress so far made in those constituencies. This study seeks to contribute to the discourse by evaluating the application of power-sharing mechanisms specifically within the context of the Igbo-Etiti/Uzo-Uwani federal constituency. In particular,

the paper aims to evaluate the current state of affairs in the Igbo-Etiti/Uzo-Uwani federal constituency in order to find out the factors behind the perceived ineffective implementation of the rotation principle in the constituency.

While past research has illuminated both the shortcomings and benefits of power sharing, this study addresses a critical gap in understanding its applicability across different scenarios, shedding light on the unique dynamics of power-sharing systems and their potential consequences for the quality of democracy in heterogeneous societies. Through this enquiry, the study endeavours to enrich our understanding of power sharing, its relevance, and its impact on the Nigerian political landscape. This introspective examination aims to provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities presented by the concept of power sharing, especially in the context of potential marginalisation within federal constituencies like Igbo-Etiti/Uzo-Uwani.

The Concept of Power Sharing: Uzo-Uwani/Igbo-Etiti in Focus

Power sharing is the practice of distributing or allocating authority, influence, or decision-making capabilities to different individuals, groups, or institutions within a given political system. Power sharing is crucial for the equitable distribution of authority, ensuring equal representation and participation in governance (Reynal-Querol, 2002). Acknowledged as a mechanism for conflict resolution and peace-building, power sharing involves politically interested groups dividing authority based on mutually agreed-upon rules (Reynal-Querol, 2002). This practice serves to establish a stable political environment by providing a platform for the collective expression of sentiments within a heterogeneous society.

Within contemporary discourse, power sharing has emerged as a subject of substantial attention in academic and policy circles. Regarded as a fundamental strategy to prevent conflicts, counteract majority tyranny, and maintain political stability, power sharing accommodates demands for proportional representation. It operates as a framework, whether formal or informal, regulating power distribution among divided communities (Hartzell&Hoddie, 2020; Lijphart, 2012).

Despite its well-intentioned purpose, the power-sharing agreement between Uzo-Uwani and Igbo-Etiti has encountered significant obstacles in its implementation. The commitment to rotate the House of Representatives seat on a 50/50 basis aimed at ensuring fairness, equity, and inclusiveness has, in practice, skewed in favour of Igbo-Etiti and this imbalance has sidelined the interests of Uzo-Uwani.

For instance, in recent election cycles, instances have been observed where the rotation principle outlined in the power-sharing agreement was not adhered to, resulting in continued dominance by Igbo-Etiti representatives. Such deviations from the agreed-upon terms have intensified resentment among Uzo-Uwani people, highlighting the challenges in maintaining a truly balanced power-sharing arrangement.

Efforts made by political stakeholders to uphold the spirit of cooperation and unity have fallen short in ensuring the effective implementation of the power-sharing pact. The discrepancy between intentions and outcomes emphasizes the need to address the factors inhibiting the genuine application of power-sharing principles within the constituency.

In summary, the concept of power sharing serves as a critical component of democratic governance, promoting unity and equity within diverse societies. Power sharing enhances citizens' reliance and accountability by fostering a sense of involvement and inclusiveness in the political process and contributing to the shaping of public policies through the inclusion of

diverse opinions.

Uzo-Uwani and the Burden of Marginalisation

Uzo-Uwani grapples with the weight of marginalization, a condition rooted in a historical power imbalance and manifested through unequal political representation, limited economic access, and escalating social tensions within the Igbo-Etiti/Uzo-Uwani federal constituency.

Political Marginalization: The political landscape in Uzo-Uwani reveals a stark contrast in representation, with Igbo-Etiti consistently dominating the House of Representatives seat throughout the constituency's history. Uzo-Uwani Professionals Association has a graphical representation of the disparate number of representatives from each local government. This was used by Obidike Esq to support his campaigns in the last elections but it continues to serve as a visual testament to the disparities between the two local government areas. This stark political power imbalance has left Uzo-Uwani with limited influence and a marginalized voice in critical political matters.

Economic Implications: Economically, the marginalization translates into tangible consequences for Uzo-Uwani. The community faces restricted access to resources and opportunities compared to its counterpart, Igbo-Etiti. This economic disadvantage hampers Uzo-Uwani's socio-economic development and undermines its potential contribution to the broader economy.

Social Ramifications: Socially, the repercussions of marginalization extend to heightened tensions and conflicts between the two local government areas. Unequal representation and resource distribution breed resentment and a pervasive sense of injustice among the Uzo-Uwani populace, which do not augur well for unity and cooperation between the sister local government areas.

Uzo-Uwani is burdened with the problem of a historical power differential, which manifests in political, economic, and social contexts, impacting relationships, decision-making, and resource allocation. The historical power imbalance and the sustained dominance of Igbo-Etiti perpetuate this status quo, leaving Uzo-Uwani in an ongoing struggle for equal representation and a fair share of opportunities.

Balancing the Inequalities

It is more than stating the obvious that Igbo-Etiti has the lion's share of the opportunities, overshadowing Uzo-Uwani, its partner. To address the inequality and promote fairness between Uzo-Uwani and Igbo-Etiti, here are some key strategies to consider:

1. **Effective Political Participation:** Encourage eligible adults from Uzo-Uwani to actively engage in the political process, emphasizing the importance of voting in elections. This effort should involve sensitization campaigns, town hall meetings, and establishing communication channels like WhatsApp groups for stakeholders and community leaders to foster unity and cooperation.
2. **Equitable Power Sharing:** Activate the power-sharing agreement previously entered into by the two local governments, involving state government assistance to facilitate a bipartisan arrangement. Invite party stalwarts from all registered political parties to participate in discussions aimed at signing onto a pact for rotational representation of the constituency. This approach ensures representation for both Uzo-Uwani and Igbo-Etiti, fostering peace and development.

3. Mutual Support and Community Spirit: Recognize the importance of competence alongside power shift. Focus on electing competent leaders who can drive progress and quality governance. Promote a consensus candidate from Uzo-Uwani, uniting against external threats and enhancing the collective voice of the minority political group.

4. Organizing and Mobilizing: Build a strong, unified movement within Uzo-Uwani by mobilizing like-minded individuals who share the goal of achieving fair representation. By forming a cohesive group, marginalized communities can gain visibility and influence in the political arena.

5. Building Alliances: Forge alliances with other political groups, community organizations, and civil society to amplify the bargaining power of Uzo-Uwani. By collaborating with various stakeholders, marginalized groups can increase their chances of achieving their political goals.

6. Participating in Elections: Participating actively in elections and supporting candidates who represent the interests of Uzo-Uwani will increase the political representation and power of Uzo-Uwani people, ensuring that their concerns are heard and addressed.

7. Advocating Policy Change: Advocating policy changes that address the specific concerns of Uzo-Uwani will most likely increase the group's influence within the political landscape. By championing policy changes, marginalized communities can contribute to a more inclusive and equitable society.

8. Increasing Voter Turnout: Encourage high voter turnout among Uzo-Uwani residents to strengthen the political power of the minority group. Higher voter participation can lead to increased representation and a stronger collective voice.

9. Promote Unity among the Elites of Uzo-Uwani: Unity among the people of Uzo-Uwani can contribute to overcoming elite conspiracy, victimhood, and the "Emilokan syndrome". On their part, the elites of Uzo-Uwani need to foster collaboration and shared objectives among themselves and prioritize collective welfare over personal interests. A united Uzo-Uwani is certainly better equipped to address challenges, promote equitable representation, and discourage self-sabotaging behaviours, thus mitigating the impact of elite conspiracy and fostering a sense of empowerment among the broader population.

By implementing these strategies, Uzo-Uwani can work toward achieving a fair balance of power, promoting inclusivity, and fostering development and peace within the region. It's crucial for all stakeholders to play a role in transforming the existing dynamics and creating a more just and equal society, ultimately contributing to the overall growth of the community.

General Conclusion

In conclusion, this discourse underscores the moral imperative of embracing power-sharing to uphold democratic principles and foster active citizen engagement in governance. Power-sharing is identified not only as a practical solution to mitigate conflicts but also as a pathway to enhance representation and cultivate political peace. Aligned with the findings of the study, the discussion earnestly calls for actionable change, emphasizing the pivotal role of collective efforts in shaping a more equitable and just political landscape.

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