



RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF RESOURCE ALLOCATION AND ETHNIC BALANCING IN KOGI STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study critically examines the political economy of resource allocation and ethnic balancing in Kogi State, Nigeria, a state marked by its complex ethno-regional diversity and intense contestation over access to political power and public resources. Drawing on elite theory and the framework of distributive politics, the research explores how successive administrations in Kogi State have navigated the competing interests of the three major ethnic groups namely Igala, Ebira, and Okun in the distribution of appointments, infrastructural projects, and social investments. Through analyses of budget documents, official records, and key informant interviews, the study uncovers patterns of selective favoritism, regional disparities in capital allocation, and the strategic use of ethnicity for political consolidation. It also identifies how these practices affect governance, inter-group relations, and perceptions of equity within the state. The findings reveal that although efforts at ethnic balancing are often rhetorically acknowledged, actual resource distribution tends to reflect prevailing political alignments rather than equitable need-based considerations. The research underscores the role of institutional reforms, inclusive budgeting, and transparent governance in mitigating the zero-sum nature of ethno-political competition. By illuminating the intersection between identity politics and economic decision-making, the study contributes to broader debates on federalism, equity, and democratic development in multiethnic societies. Recommendations are made for policy frameworks that promote merit-based appointments, proportional representation, and development planning that bridge ethnic divides for sustainable peace and inclusive growth in Kogi State.

Keywords: Resource allocation, ethnic balancing, political economy, distributive politics

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INTRODUCTION

Kogi State occupies a unique geopolitical and socio-cultural position in Nigeria. Created in 1991, it is often referred to as the “Confluence State” due to the convergence of the Rivers Niger and Benue at Lokoja, the state capital. Its strategic location connects Nigeria's northern and southern regions, while its ethnic composition reflects a microcosm of Nigeria's broader diversity. The state is home to three major ethnic groups: the Igala (predominantly in the eastern flank), the Ebira (central zone), and the Okun-Yoruba (western part). This ethnic distribution has historically influenced political competition, power sharing, and resource allocation in the state (Olorunmola, 2018).

In political economy terms, resource allocation in Kogi State cannot be divorced from the underlying ethnic dynamics that define the structure of political power. The intersection of ethnicity and politics creates a situation where government appointments, development projects, and public investments are often perceived as ethnic entitlements rather than needs-based decisions. Scholars argue that this ethnicization of politics entrenches inequality and deepens socio-economic imbalances across different regions of the state (Ojo, 2019). For instance, when a governor emerges from a particular ethnic group, communities from that group often enjoy disproportionate access to infrastructural projects, employment opportunities, and social investments. This practice has led to increased agitations for power rotation, ethnic balancing, and fair representation.

The political economy of Kogi State reveals a clientelist system of governance, where state resources are used to reward political loyalty rather than promote equitable development. This has not only hindered growth but has also bred resentment and political instability. Resource allocation becomes a zero-sum game, as ethnic elites and political actors compete fiercely for limited resources, often at the expense of inclusive governance (Yahaya & Salisu, 2020). Electoral contests, therefore, are rarely about policy ideas or developmental vision; they are often battles for ethnic supremacy and access to state resources.

Efforts at ethnic balancing such as zoning of political offices, ethnic-based appointments, and region-specific development initiatives have been adopted by successive administrations as mechanisms to address perceived marginalization. However, such measures have sometimes failed to satisfy all stakeholders, as they often lack transparency and are implemented without strong legal or institutional frameworks (Abubakar & Ibrahim, 2021). Moreover, ethnic balancing can reinforce ethnic consciousness, thereby weakening meritocracy and reducing the efficiency of the state's administrative machinery.

Furthermore, political actors in Kogi have occasionally manipulated ethnic sentiments to consolidate power and maintain dominance, thereby creating divisions among citizens. This manipulation affects the distribution of social amenities, where regions not aligned with the ruling political elite are systematically excluded from the dividends of governance. The



outcome is a vicious cycle of political marginalization, underdevelopment, and inter-ethnic mistrust that undermines state-building efforts.

Understanding the political economy of Kogi State's resource allocation and ethnic balancing requires a critical analysis of both formal policies and informal practices that guide governance in the state. It also necessitates the examination of historical grievances, elite bargains, electoral patterns, and the role of institutions in mediating conflicts. This study adopts a political economy lens to explore these complexities, offering insights into how political decisions shape economic outcomes and inter-group relations in a multi-ethnic state.

By investigating how ethnic identities influence who gets what, when, and how in Kogi State, the study contributes to ongoing debates on governance, decentralization, and federalism in Nigeria. It further highlights the need for reforming resource distribution mechanisms to promote equity, social cohesion, and inclusive development in Nigeria's ethnically diverse sub-national units. In the light of the foregoing this study critically examine the political economy of resource allocation and ethnic balancing in Kogi State, with a focus on understanding how ethnic dynamics influence the distribution of public resources, political appointments, and development outcomes across the state's major ethnic groups.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The political economy of resource allocation and ethnic balancing has gained scholarly attention in multi-ethnic states, particularly in Nigeria where ethnicity, politics, and development intersect in complex ways. Scholars such as Ayoade (1988) and Suberu (2001) have argued that the distribution of state resources in Nigeria often reflects ethnic power relations and political bargaining, rather than objective developmental needs. In the context of Kogi State, which comprises the three major ethnic groups such as Igala, Ebira, and Okun. Today, ethnic identity has been shown to shape political representation and access to state resources.

Studies on Nigeria's federalism highlight that the struggle for control over political power is deeply rooted in the competition among ethnic groups to influence state resource allocation (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005). In Kogi State, this is evident in the rotation of the governorship and the distribution of appointments to reflect ethnic zones. Research by Adewale and Yusuf (2017) found that in spite of formal frameworks for equality, ethnic favoritism continues to influence development policies and project siting. The lopsided allocation of infrastructure and social amenities has exacerbated inter-ethnic tensions and perceptions of marginalization among minority groups within the state.

The concept of "ethnic balancing" emerged as a governance tool to promote inclusion, yet it has also been criticized for institutionalizing ethnic cleavages and encouraging patronage politics (Mustapha, 2006). Ethnic balancing in Kogi often manifests through deliberate



zoning policies and equitable representation in state executive councils, local government chairmanships, and civil service positions. However, critics argue that these strategies are sometimes symbolic, lacking substantive equality in fiscal and developmental terms (Mohammed & Akinyemi, 2020).

The political economy lens also draws attention to the role of elites and political actors in shaping allocation outcomes. According to Nnoli (1995), political elites often mobilize ethnic identity not for the benefit of their ethnic groups per se, but to secure access to public funds and maintain political dominance. In Kogi, this elite manipulation is evident in the concentration of state resources in regions aligned with the ruling political party or dominant ethnic bloc at any given time.

Methodologically, few empirical studies have comprehensively examined resource allocation data in Kogi State using ethnic variables, creating a significant gap in the literature. While anecdotal evidence suggests imbalance, systematic assessments of budgetary allocations, project implementation, and access to opportunities across the three senatorial zones remain limited. Furthermore, much of the existing literature focuses on federal-level resource politics, leaving a gap in state-level analyses such as that of Kogi.

In conclusion, the literature suggests that the political economy of Kogi State is heavily influenced by ethnic considerations in resource allocation and governance. While ethnic balancing mechanisms exist, their effectiveness remains contested. More empirical, data-driven research is needed to assess the depth of these issues and to propose equitable solutions.

Elite Theory and the Political Economy of Resource Allocation and Ethnic Balancing in Kogi State

Elite theory, as developed by classical thinkers like Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, and later expanded by C. Wright Mills, argues that power in society is concentrated in the hands of a small group of elites who dominate decision-making, regardless of formal democratic arrangements (Mosca, 1939; Pareto, 1968; Mills, 1956). In Nigeria, this framework has been applied to show that political elites—rather than the masses—determine patterns of governance and resource allocation, often to preserve their positions and influence (Ayoade, 1998; Omotola, 2009).

In Kogi State, elite theory offers a compelling lens to explain the institutionalised practice of ethnic balancing. Since its creation in 1991, political power in the state has been mediated by elites from the three major ethnic blocs—the Igala (East), the Ebira (Central), and the Okun-Yoruba (West). Although ethnic balancing is officially justified as a mechanism for equitable inclusion, it is, in practice, the outcome of elite bargains designed to maintain stability, consolidate coalitions, and secure electoral advantage (Suberu, 2001).



During the Igala-dominated governorship era (1991–2015), elites from the Eastern senatorial district maintained dominance by strategically sharing some high-level offices—such as the deputy governorship or sensitive ministries—with Ebira or Okun elites to foster inter-ethnic elite consensus (Yagboyaju & Akinola, 2019). Following the rise of Ebira leadership in 2016, similar pacts emerged, with strategic positions allocated to Igala and Okun politicians to prevent political isolation and maintain legitimacy (Adegbami & Uche, 2016).

Patterns of resource allocation further illustrate elite theory's emphasis on the primacy of political survival over equitable development. Large-scale infrastructural projects—such as road networks, tertiary institutions, and healthcare facilities—have often been sited in elite strongholds to reward loyal constituencies. For example, the prioritisation of road rehabilitation and industrial projects in the Central senatorial district post-2016 reflects both developmental needs and the Ebira bloc's political consolidation, echoing the earlier prioritisation of the Eastern district under Igala administrations (Olorunmola, 2018).

Budgetary practices in Kogi State also align with elite theory predictions. While budget appropriations often appear balanced on paper to meet public expectations and legislative scrutiny, actual execution tends to be skewed toward elite-favoured constituencies. This has led to grievances, such as disputes over the underfunding of Kogi State University in Anyigba and the relocation of certain state projects away from opposition-dominated areas (Adigun, 2020).

In essence, elite theory reveals that ethnic balancing in Kogi State, while stabilising the polity by preventing total exclusion of any ethnic group, also entrenches elite dominance. This makes resource allocation part of a distributive politics framework, where resources are not purely allocated for developmental equity but for maintaining ruling coalitions, managing ethnic competition, and sustaining elite legitimacy—often at the expense of efficiency and long-term socio-economic transformation (Omotola, 2009; Suberu, 2001).

Historical and Institutional Foundations of Ethnic Balancing in Kogi State

The geographical territory now known as Kogi State is historically home to three dominant ethno-political blocs: the Igala in the east, the Ebira in the central highlands, and the Okun (Yoruba) in the west, alongside smaller minority groups such as the Nupe, Bassa Nge, Bassa Komo, Ogori-Magongo, Oworo, and Gwari (Mustapha, 2006; Suberu, 2001). Pre-colonial governance was defined by autonomous political systems—most notably the Igala Kingdom under the Attah, the Ebira's decentralized clan-based leadership, and the Okun's integration into Yoruba political culture.

During colonial rule, the British established indirect administration, incorporating the Igala into the Benue Province under the Igala Native Authority and grouping the Ebira and Okun under the Kabba Province (Suberu, 2001). This bifurcation entrenched separate



administrative and political spheres, fostering elite competition rather than integration. Differential access to missionary education and public service jobs more advanced in the Okun and parts of the Igala areas than in Ebira territory shaped early disparities in bureaucratic representation and economic development (Mustapha, 2006).

Kogi State was created on 27 August 1991 by the military government of General Ibrahim Babangida through the merger of eastern Kwara State (Okun Yoruba, Lokoja-Koton Karfe areas) and western Benue State (Igala-dominated areas), with the Ebira at the geographic centre (Kogi State Government, n.d.). The capital, Lokoja, was strategically chosen for its historical role as the first capital of the Northern Protectorate and its location at the confluence of the Niger and Benue rivers symbolically neutral and geographically central (Britannica, n.d.). This formation institutionalized the so-called “tripod” arrangement, Kogi East (Igala), Kogi Central (Ebira), and Kogi West (Okun) which has since become the basic framework for political competition, power-sharing, and resource distribution in the state (Suberu, 2001).

The Federal Character Principle enshrined in Section 14(3) and (4) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria mandates equitable representation of all groups in public appointments and distribution of resources to prevent dominance by any group. At the state level, Kogi has informally adopted a “state character” principle, applying similar logic within its internal ethno-political divisions (Chinanuife, Jooji, & Momoh, 2023).

In practice, this means that appointments to the state executive council, civil service leadership, and boards of agencies are distributed to reflect the three senatorial districts. The approach is intended to maintain political stability in a multi-ethnic setting but often results in the prioritization of geographic spread over meritocratic or technocratic considerations (Omotola, 2010).

Role of Senatorial Districts, LGAs, and Traditional Institutions in Institutionalizing Balancing

Kogi State is divided into three senatorial districts namely East (9 LGAs), Central (5 LGAs), and West (7 LGAs)—which correspond almost perfectly to the Igala, Ebira, and Okun ethnic blocs (Vanguard, 2015). This alignment facilitates political bargaining, as party primaries and appointments are often structured to ensure a spread across these districts. The distribution of 21 LGAs also influences fiscal allocation formulas and delegate counts during intra-party elections.

Traditional rulers such as the Attah Igala, Ohinoyi of Ebiraland, and Obaro of Kabba play non-constitutional but significant roles in mediating inter-ethnic tensions, endorsing candidates, and legitimizing political arrangements (Suberu, 2001). These institutions serve as informal guarantors of balance, particularly during electoral disputes or cabinet formation.



From 1991 to 2015, the governorship was dominated by the Igala ethnic group, producing sustained calls from the Ebira and Okun blocs for a “power shift” (ThisDay, 2021). The election of Yahaya Bello from Kogi Central in 2015—following the death of Governor Abubakar Audu—was celebrated by the Ebira as a breakthrough in the informal rotation principle.

Political parties in Kogi often balance gubernatorial tickets by pairing candidates from different blocs—for instance, an Igala governorship candidate with an Okun or Ebira deputy, and vice versa. This pattern is evident in the 2019 and 2023 gubernatorial elections, where ethnic balancing was a visible strategic factor. Appointments of permanent secretaries and heads of ministries are routinely distributed across senatorial districts. Even when technical qualifications exist in one bloc, the “spread” principle ensures other blocs are represented, reinforcing the state’s adaptation of the federal character framework (Chinanuife et al., 2023). The historical and institutional foundations of ethnic balancing in Kogi State are deeply rooted in pre-colonial political identities, colonial administrative legacies, and post-1991 political engineering. While the Federal Character principle provides the constitutional template, its localized “state character” adaptation—reinforced by senatorial district demarcations, LGA distribution, and the influence of traditional rulers—has institutionalized a rotational and distributive logic that shapes the state’s governance. These arrangements have helped manage diversity but also generate debates over merit, efficiency, and fairness.

Fiscal and Sectoral Patterns of Resource Allocation in Kogi State

Kogi State’s fiscal structure is heavily dependent on federally collected revenue allocations. Data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and the Kogi State Budget Office indicate that statutory transfers from the Federation Account Allocation Committee (FAAC) constitute between 80–85% of total annual revenue (NBS, 2023). These allocations are primarily derived from oil revenue, VAT, and other shared national taxes.

Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) is comparatively low, averaging between ₦12–₦20 billion annually over the last five years, representing about 10–15% of total receipts (BudgIT, 2023). The IGR base relies on road taxes, market levies, mining and quarrying fees, business premises charges, and motor vehicle licensing. Capital receipts from domestic and foreign loans, grants, and donor-funded projects—provide an additional, though unstable, revenue stream. For instance, World Bank-funded projects under the State Fiscal Transparency, Accountability, and Sustainability (SFTAS) program have contributed significantly to capital investment in infrastructure and social sectors since 2019 (World Bank, 2022).

The state’s expenditure profile is skewed towards recurrent spending, particularly personnel costs. Between 2015 and 2023, recurrent expenditure averaged 65–70% of the total budget, while capital expenditure accounted for 30–35% (Kogi State Budget Office, 2023). The recurrent dominance reflects the large wage bill of the civil service and political office



holders, as well as overhead costs for ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs). This imbalance constrains long-term capital formation, limiting the scale and speed of infrastructure development. Although capital budgets are often ambitious, actual implementation rates tend to lag, with completion times for major projects extending beyond electoral cycles.

However, infrastructure commands one of the largest shares of the capital budget, averaging 25–30% over recent years. Road construction and rehabilitation are politically sensitive and often spread across senatorial districts to reflect ethnic balancing. Major road corridors such as the Lokoja–Okene, Lokoja–Ankpa, and Kabba–Egbe highways have been prioritized (Guardian Nigeria, 2024). Education receives approximately 15–20% of capital allocations. The sector covers basic education (via the State Universal Basic Education Board, SUBEB), secondary schools, and tertiary institutions. Investments include classroom rehabilitation, teacher recruitment, and the expansion of institutions like Prince Abubakar Audu University (Anyigba), Kogi State Polytechnic (Lokoja), and the College of Education (Kabba) (Vanguard, 2019), Confluence University of Science and Technology Osara and Kogi State University Kabba.

Health sector spending averages 5–8% of the total budget, funding general hospitals, primary health centres, and specialist facilities. While every LGA has some health infrastructure, better-equipped facilities are concentrated in urban centres such as Lokoja, Okene, and Ankpa, reflecting both population density and political considerations.

Agriculture receives around 4–7% of annual allocations, focusing on rural roads, input subsidies, farm mechanization, and extension services. However, actual releases to the sector are often below budgeted figures, limiting impact despite agriculture’s importance to the state’s economy (World Bank, 2022). Water and rural development projects such as boreholes, small town water schemes, and rural electrification—are often funded through constituency projects. The spread of these projects is strongly influenced by the geographic origins of legislators and political bargaining.

The Kogi three senatorial districts—East (Igala), Central (Ebira), and West (Okun/Yoruba)—serve as the primary template for project distribution. Governors typically ensure that each district receives flagship projects to avoid perceptions of marginalization. For example, the Bello administration launched major road works in the East (Itobe–Anyigba), Central (Okene township roads), and West (Kabba township roads) between 2016 and 2022 (Kogi State Ministry of Works, 2022).

In 2018, the state awarded contracts for over 200 km of roadworks, with each senatorial district receiving at least one major trunk road upgrade. This avoided the backlash experienced during earlier administrations when project concentration was perceived to favour a single bloc (Vanguard, 2019). The siting of Kogi State Polytechnic in Lokoja



(Central) and the College of Education in Kabba (West) alongside the state university in Anyigba (East) demonstrates a clear application of ethnic balancing in education investment.

While general hospitals are present in all LGAs, major specialist investments—such as the Reference Hospital in Okene—have generated grievances from other districts, prompting subsequent allocations for similar facilities elsewhere to restore political equilibrium (Guardian Nigeria, 2024). Kogi State's fiscal and sectoral resource allocation patterns reflect a blend of fiscal dependence on federal transfers, limited internally generated revenue, and political imperatives to spread development projects across its three dominant ethnic blocs. While this approach promotes political stability, it also dilutes economies of scale and often prioritises equity of distribution over cost-efficiency or developmental impact.

Distributive Outcomes and Grievances in Kogi State

The distributive politics of Kogi State reflects the deep entanglement between ethnic balancing, fiscal allocation patterns, and regional grievances. The state's Local Government Area (LGA) configuration nine LGAs in Kogi East (Igala), five in Kogi Central (Ebira), and seven in Kogi West (Okun/ Yoruba) has had a significant impact on both representation and the perception of equitable resource allocation (Audu, 2019). Because political representation in Nigeria often correlates with access to public resources, this disproportionate LGA distribution has fueled persistent claims of dominance and marginalization across the three blocks.

Since each LGA serves as an administrative and fiscal unit for state and federal transfers, the Igala-dominated Kogi East enjoys a numerical advantage in terms of political influence at both the state legislature and the federal level. This numerical superiority has historically translated into greater representation in key decision-making processes, often interpreted by other groups as structural bias in state resource distribution (Ochonu, 2018). For instance, allocations for constituency projects often favor LGAs with larger legislative presence, reinforcing disparities in infrastructural development.

From the creation of Kogi State in 1991 until 2015, the Igala ethnic group held the governorship for approximately 19 out of 24 years, controlling not only the executive but also exerting strong influence over legislative leadership (Ojo, 2020). This era is remembered in political discourse as the "Igala dominance" phase. Conversely, the ascension of Yahaya Bello from Kogi Central in 2015 marked an Ebira political resurgence, which shifted the resource allocation patterns toward the Central Senatorial District (Ibrahim, 2021). This shift has generated accusations from Kogi East and West that development projects have become disproportionately concentrated in Central areas, particularly in Lokoja and Okene.

Disputes over the siting of higher institutions, hospitals, and road **projects** have been recurrent. A notable example is the controversy surrounding Prince Abubakar Audu



University (formerly Kogi State University) in Anyigba, located in Kogi East. Under subsequent administrations, allegations emerged that budgetary allocations to the institution were reduced in favor of newer projects in Central District, such as the Reference Hospital in Okene and the Ganaja–Lokoja road expansion (Baba & Musa, 2022). Similarly, Okun leaders in Kogi West have complained about the slow progress on the Kabba–Ilorin road, citing discriminatory project prioritization.

Another grievance stems from the gap between approved budget allocations and actual project execution. Budget performance reports from 2016–2022 indicate that while road construction and healthcare often receive high allocations on paper, disbursement and completion rates vary sharply across districts (Kogi State Budget Office, 2022). Analysts have argued that politically connected areas see faster project execution, while others suffer from stalled or abandoned works (Ocheni, 2020, Audu, 2019).

These distributive grievances, rooted in the interplay between LGA configuration, ethnic dominance cycles, and fiscal decision-making, have shaped the political economy of the state, reinforcing a zero-sum perception of governance where gains for one ethnic bloc are often seen as losses for others.

Political Economy Implications of Ethnic Balancing in Kogi State

The political economy of Kogi State is deeply shaped by the interplay between ethnic balancing, fiscal allocation, and governance outcomes. While the adoption of ethnic balancing has been instrumental in ensuring a measure of political stability and inclusion across the three dominant ethnic blocs—Igala (East), Ebira (Central), and Okun (West)—it has also created a governance environment in which policy priorities are often fragmented along ethno-regional lines rather than unified developmental visions (Omotola, 2010).

At its core, ethnic balancing reduces the risk of inter-group political exclusion, thereby promoting elite consensus and relative stability in a state with historical rivalries (Mustapha, 2006). By informally rotating the governorship and distributing key appointments, the state has managed to avoid the outright dominance of a single ethnic group in perpetuity, even if some periods—such as the 1991–2015 Igala dominance—were more lopsided (Olorunmola, 2017). This stability has helped avert large-scale political crises and allowed for smoother budgetary approvals, intergovernmental negotiations, and conflict mitigation.

However, the same balancing logic often leads to governance decisions that prioritize symbolic distribution over strategic efficiency. Projects are sometimes selected to satisfy political constituencies rather than based on objective developmental needs (Suberu, 2001). For example, the location of tertiary institutions such as Kogi State University in Anyigba (Igala East) or the Federal University in Lokoja (Central) has been partly shaped by ethno-political considerations. Similarly, budgetary allocations for road construction often seek



geographical spread rather than focusing on critical economic corridors, diluting the developmental impact (Adeyemi, 2020).

Ethnic balancing also has significant fiscal implications. Rotation-driven allocation often results in a “thin-spread” budgeting style, where limited fiscal resources are divided across multiple regions to maintain political legitimacy. This approach can increase recurrent expenditure, as new appointments and political patronage systems expand the wage bill (Abdullahi, 2018). Furthermore, project duplication and underfunding are common, as funds are split to satisfy all regions rather than consolidated into a few high-impact projects. This weakens long-term capital formation and can exacerbate the state’s dependence on federal allocations from the Federation Account Allocation Committee (FAAC).

In the long run, while ethnic balancing contributes to short-term stability, it can slow structural transformation and institutional capacity-building. The politicization of fiscal allocation reduces incentives for merit-based civil service recruitment, undermines bureaucratic efficiency, and fosters a “turn-by-turn” governance mentality that delays reforms (Omotola, 2010). Moreover, the emphasis on equitable spread over competitive advantage means that resource allocation may neglect economic sectors or geographic zones with higher productivity potential. This has implications for Kogi’s economic diversification, poverty reduction efforts, and infrastructural modernization.

The political economy implications of ethnic balancing in Kogi State reveal a classic governance trade-off. On one hand, it is a pragmatic tool for maintaining peace in a heterogeneous polity. On the other, it risks entrenching distributive politics at the expense of coherent, merit-based development planning. Without reforms that combine inclusivity with efficiency, Kogi may continue to face a cycle in which political stability is achieved, but sustainable development remains elusive.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Concluding Remarks

The practice of ethnic balancing in Kogi State emerges from a complex interplay of historical legacies, institutional arrangements, and pragmatic political bargaining. Rooted in the state’s heterogeneous ethno-regional composition, it has evolved as both a political stabilizer and a distributive mechanism aimed at managing inter-group rivalries and preventing the monopolization of power. This system, informed by Nigeria’s broader federal character principle, has helped sustain a degree of elite consensus, reduce the risks of violent conflict, and provide symbolic recognition to all major ethnic constituencies. However, the institutionalization of ethnic balancing also embeds structural weaknesses into the governance process.



By prioritizing equitable geographic spread over efficiency, policy formulation and fiscal allocation often become fragmented, with resources diluted across multiple political constituencies rather than being strategically concentrated for maximum developmental impact. This has fiscal consequences—ranging from inflated recurrent expenditure to underfunded infrastructure projects—and fosters a “turn-by-turn” mentality that can erode bureaucratic professionalism and slow institutional reforms. The political economy of this arrangement reveals a fundamental trade-off. While short-term peace and stability are achieved through rotation-driven governance and distributive politics, the long-term developmental trajectory of Kogi State risks stagnation unless inclusivity is paired with merit-based planning, prudent fiscal management, and targeted investment in high-impact sectors. Balancing representation with efficiency remains the central governance challenge for the state’s future.

Recommendations

1. Institutionalize a Transparent Resource Allocation Framework

Kogi State should adopt a clearly defined, publicly accessible resource allocation formula that integrates both equity and efficiency principles. This framework should be anchored in measurable developmental indicators—such as poverty rates, infrastructure deficits, and service coverage—rather than relying solely on ethnic or senatorial balancing.

2. Strengthen Fiscal Accountability and Budget Implementation

Given the recurrent gaps between approved allocations and actual budget execution, there should be enhanced monitoring mechanisms, including citizen-led budget tracking and independent audits. This would reduce leakages, ensure that constituency projects are implemented as approved, and curb the politicization of capital expenditure.

3. Balance Meritocracy with Inclusivity in Appointments

While ethnic representation is important for political stability, recruitment into the civil service and appointment into key positions should place greater emphasis on competence and performance metrics. A hybrid system—combining equitable spread with merit-based selection—can enhance institutional efficiency without alienating any group.

4. Invest in Cross-Ethnic Developmental Projects

The state should prioritize large-scale infrastructure and social projects that cut across ethnic boundaries, such as inter-district road networks, regional water supply schemes, and multi-campus universities. Such initiatives can foster interdependence among communities and reduce zero-sum competition over the location of state projects.



5. Reform Governorship Rotation Practices to Encourage Policy Continuity

While rotation of political offices can promote inclusion, mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that long-term development plans are not abandoned with every change in leadership. A legally backed State Development Plan with bipartisan and multi-ethnic support can safeguard continuity in governance priorities.

Competing Interest

The author declares that no conflicting interest exist in this manuscript

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