

4. Major Political Crises in Nigeria

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The political history of Nigeria has been characterized by crises and compromises. This has been related to the nature of its political development, cultural diversity and economic underdevelopment. Most often, such crises took national dimensions such as to shake the very foundation of the country. At times, the solutions to the problems made them appear localized but in actual fact, such problems go down the root of the national politics and may determine the trend of events in subsequent years. Most notable among such crises were the Kano. Riot of 1953, the Action-Group crises of 1962, the National Census controversy of 1962/1963, the Electoral crises in Nigeria — the 1964 Federal Election crisis, the Western Nigeria Election crisis of 1965, the crisis which greeted the 1983 elections. The Nigeria civil war is another major crisis which determined the political direction of this country.

4.2 THE KANO RIOT (1953)

The Macpherson Constitution came into effect in 1951. One of the provisions of the Constitution was that members of the Federal legislature were elected from and by the Regional House of Assembly. Thus the members from each Region belonged to the political party in power in that region. In the North, they were members of the NPC, in the East, they were in the NCNC and they were members of the Action Group in the Western Region. In the circumstances, the members were loyal to their political parties which thereby influenced or controlled their activities in the central legislature. This was the political climate that made the Kano riot possible.

Added to this was the self-government motion. sponsored by Chief Anthony Enahoro in March, 1953. He (Anthony) requested the House of Representatives to endorse "as a primary political objective the attainment of self-government for Nigeria in 1956. This motion was an Action Group policy which the political party had adopted in 1952 The Northern Nigerian members were not opposed to the "self-government" motion but they wanted it at a later date. Furthermore, the Northern members wanted to secure the support of their traditional authorities as well as their own people. In addition, the NPC had not made the issue of "self-government" a policy.

The matter was discussed by the National Council of Ministers. The Council by a majority vote then passed a resolution that no minister should speak or vote on the self-government motion. The four Action Group National Ministers resigned from the Council of Ministers to enable them debate and vote in support of the motion. Their resignations paralysed the operation of the Council of Ministers.

During the debate on the motion in the House of Representatives, the NPC leaders led by Alhaji Ahmadu Bello moved the adoption of an amendment changing the words “in 1956” to “as soon as practicable.” Alhaji Ahmadu Bello argued that it was unnecessary to seek the mandate of the Nigerian people. The debate on the motion was very bitter and explosive. The debate ended when the NCNC and AG members walked out of the House in protest against the stand of the NPC members. After the adjournment of the House of Representatives, the Northern members were ridiculed, insulted and jeered at by the Lagos crowds. The Southern Press strongly criticised and ridiculed them. As a reaction to the indignities suffered, the Northern leaders published their Eight-point programme which if implemented, would have meant the secession of the North from Nigeria. The Southerners were very critical of the Northerners. The leaders of the Action Group and the NCNC decided to send delegations to Northern cities to campaign for self-government in 1956. It was one of such delegations to Kano at the height of the North/South tension that finally led to the Kano riot.

The Kano riot took the form of attacks on the persons and properties of the southerners living in the Sabon Gari areas of Kano. The immediate cause of the riot was the meeting of Action Group members in Kano. The Igbos living in Sabon Gari suffered most because they were more. The riot was not directed against the Yoruba or Igbo as such but it was against the Southerners who had ridiculed the Northern leaders in the South. There were 277 casualties including 36 deaths. They were Hausa — Fulani and Igbo. Properties of Southerners were destroyed.

Although the riot took a tribal outlook, it also had a political outlook. The victims of the riot were largely Igbo who were supporters of the NCNC. Some of the victims were assisted by the members of NEPU, which was an ally of the NCNC. Even the British government attributed the causes of the riot to politics hence the result was another constitutional review.

A Commission of Enquiry was established to probe the riot. The tribunal attributed the causes of the riot to tribalism, which it traced to the unitary posture of the Macpherson Constitution. The riot threatened the unity of Nigeria, hence the 1951 Constitution was amended to provide for a true federal system of government. This was the beginning of deliberate Federalism which made the centre weak while the regions grew in strength. This was embodied in the Lyttelton Constitution of 1954. The Constitution regionalized the Nigerian Civil Service and the Judiciary and gave more powers to the regions to develop according to their whims i.e. greater autonomy.

4.3 THE CENSUS CRISIS (1962–1963)

In 1952/53, Nigeria population was estimated at 30.4 million. By that estimation, the North had 16.8 million while the South had 13.6 million. Although the Southerners protested, the population gave the North the right to claim 50% representation in the Federal House of Representatives while the East and West had 50%. The advantages which the census gave the North made population census in Nigeria a very touchy political issue.

In 1962, the census was to be reviewed. Thus, in May 1962 a nationwide headcount was held. This was the first census conducted by Nigerians. After the national count, the Minister of Economic Development, Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim of the NPC, on 5 December, 1963 in the Federal Parliament read out portions of a report made by the then Federal Census Officer, Mr. J.J Warren, an expatriate, that the figures recorded throughout the greater part of Eastern Region were false and inflated. The Federal Government cancelled the census results and

ordered for a fresh count. This was not acceptable to the Eastern Nigeria Government. Alhaji Ibrahim's statement was strongly criticised by the NCNC members of Parliament. So on December 7, 1963 a Census motion was tabled by the NCNC Federal Parliamentarians. This was disallowed by the Speaker, Mallam Ibrahim Jalo Waziri, of the NPC. Consequently the NCNC members including some ministers walked out of the House with the Action Group members. The NPC/NCNC coalition was seriously threatened. The NCNC members subsequently passed a resolution in which they expressed no confidence in the Minister of Economic Development, Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim, and demanded his dismissal and an immediate expulsion of the Federal Census Officer. This was endorsed by the Action Group.

On September 6, 1963, it was announced in Lagos that a new national census would be held from November 5–8, 1963. There was great national tension. There were mutual suspicion, wide-spread allegations and accusations among political leaders. There was a planned general strike which was designed to sabotage the head-count. But this was averted at the last minute. The fresh count was conducted without disorder. The preliminary results of the November 1963 census as announced by the Census Board on February 24, 1964 were as follows:

Northern Region.....	29,777,986
Eastern Region.....	12,388,646
Western Region.....	10,278,500
Mid-Western Region.....	2,533,337
Lagos (Federal Capital Territory)	675,352
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	55,653,821



Map of Nigeria showing the four regions

These results showed that Northern Nigeria with 29.8 out of the total of 55.7 for the whole country, had more than half the Federation's population. This entitled Northern Nigeria to

have more Federal Electoral Constituencies than the three other Regions and Lagos combined. The result was not acceptable to the Eastern Nigeria Government led by Dr. M.I. Okpara. Consequently Dr. M.I. Okpara, the Premier of Eastern Nigeria announced that his government completely rejected the census figures which he alleged were inflated to astronomical proportions in the North. He asserted that the figures were worse than useless. He then called for a new census in which the UN enumerators would assist Nigerians. The criticisms of Dr. Okpara were supported by the Premier of the Mid-West, Chief Dennis Osadebay and by the Action Group. However the results were supported by Northern Nigerian Premier, Sir Ahmadu Bello and his ally Chief Samuel Akintola, the Premier of Western Nigeria.

Students of the University of Nigeria sent a very strong petition of protest to the Prime Minister of Nigeria, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, in which they asked him to reject the Census figures. Finally, the Eastern Nigerian Government took the Federal Government to the Supreme Court challenging the census figures describing the conduct of the Census as unconstitutional, *ultra vires* and illegal, and therefore null and void. However, the Supreme Court upheld the action of the Federal Government over the conduct of the Census and thus gave its blessing to the figures. On August 29, 1964 the Federal Government published the final figures for the census which gave Eastern and Mid-Western Regions increases of 5,816 and 2,502 respectively, and Northern and Western Regions decreases of 19,111 and 12,654 respectively. The final figures were: Northern Nigeria 29,758,875, Eastern Nigeria - 12,394,462, Western Nigeria 10,265,846, Mid-Western Nigeria — 2533,337, and Lagos - 675,352 These final figures were later used as basis for the delimitation of constituencies for the Federal Parliamentary elections of 1964.

Eastern Nigeria was most aggrieved against the inflated census figures and the government was most vocal against it. The Region took the Federal Government to court on the census issue. Students of the University of Nigeria Nsukka sent a petition of protest to the Prime Minister of Nigeria. The Action Group supported the NCNC Government of Eastern Region.

Up till now the effects of the dispute about the 1963 census continues to affect the country. The population of Nigeria is often the subject of controversy. It has not been possible to have a successful headcount since then. The 1973 attempt by General Yakubu Gowon also did not receive the approval of the Nigerian population hence the result was cancelled. Thus the 1963 census continues to be the basis of planning for political, social and economic activities in the country. It continues to be the base of projections of population. Rather than have accurate figures the country continues to rely on estimates.

Another effect of the Census crisis is that it undermined the legitimacy of the Balewa regime. Rather than reduce the tension which the Action Group crisis had unleashed on the country, the census crisis further deepened it. And when the military struck in January, 1966, the issue of census was part of its allegations against the Balewa government. The third effect of the census crisis is that it strained relations between the NCNC and the NPC which were in coalition at the Federal level. Moreover, the NPC/NCNC coalition was seriously threatened and was in a state of break-down. It gave effect to the formation of the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) by the NCNC, the Action Group and the NEPU, on one hand, and the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) by the NPC, Chief Akintola's NNDP, and the NIP. The inter-party conflicts created by this crisis was carried over to the 1964 Federal Elections and the 1965 Western Nigerian Elections, and thus contributed to the crisis of those elections.

4.4 THE ACTION GROUP CRISIS (1962)

The Action Group was one of the three main political parties when Nigeria attained Independence in 1960. The others were the NCNC and the NPC. The AG was led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo who became Leader of the Opposition following the 1959 General Elections. The Action Group had its major followership among the Yorubas.

The crisis came to the open as a result of the disagreement between two leaders of the party. The leaders were Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola. The conflict was both personal and political. First, Chief Awolowo had been the first Premier of the Western Region which position he left to become Leader of Opposition at the centre. Chief Akintola, his Deputy succeeded him as Premier. Chief Awolowo had wanted to make the Action Group a national party but Chief Akintola preferred that the party should remain a Yoruba party. That disagreement set the stage for crisis. The Second issue that precipitated the crisis was ideological. First, the leader of the Party wanted to maintain its position as opposition to the Federal Government while making the ideology of the party democratic socialism. Chief S.L. Akintola was opposed to this and wanted the Action Group participation in the Federal Government with the NPC. The conflict within the Action Group turned to be a struggle between the young radicals led by Chief Awolowo and the conservative businessmen and traditional rulers led by Chief S.L. Akintola. The conflict which had been in the party for some time came to light at the National Congress of the Party at Jos in January 1962. The Convention was marked by violent disagreements between the leader of the Action Group and his followers on one side, and the Premier of Western Region and Deputy Leader of the Action Group, Chief S.L. Akintola and the General-Secretary of the Action Group Chief Ayo Rosiji on the other side. At the height of this violent and strong disagreement, Chiefs Akintola and Rosiji accompanied by Chief Adeyi and Chief Adegun walked out of the congress and returned to Ibadan.

The Convention adopted Awolowo's report which included the proposals that the Action Group should not join a national coalition government, that the Action Group should work towards being a national party, and later adopted changes in the Party's Constitution. Mr. Sam Ikoku was voted as the Secretary-General to replace Chief Ayo Rosiji. Events in the Party's crisis continued to unfold and on 19 May, 1962 the Action Group removed Chief S.L. Akintola from the Party and also from the office of Premier of Western Nigeria for anti-party activities and gross indiscipline. However Chief Akintola refused to quit. Consequently, a majority of the Action Group members of the Regional Legislature signed a memorandum to the Regional Governor demanding the dismissal of Chief Akintola as Premier of Western Nigeria. On May 21, 1962 Sir Adesoji Aderemi, the Governor of Western Nigeria removed Chief Akintola from office as Premier of the Region as he no longer commanded the support of the majority of the members of the House of Assembly. Alhaji Dawodu Soroye Adegbenro was appointed to succeed Chief Akintola as Premier. But Chief Akintola sat tight in office. On Friday, 25 May, 1962 when the Western House met to debate and pass a motion of no confidence in the new Regional Executive, an open fight ensued on the floor of the House. Consequently, police had to be brought into the House to dismiss members from the House with teargas.

As a result of the crisis and the resultant stalemate and inability of the government to function, the Federal Prime Minister summoned a special session of the Federal Parliament on 25 May, 1962 which declared a State of Emergency on Western Nigeria in accordance with the 1960 Constitution in order to restore law and order which had broken down in the

Region. The Federal Government appointed Dr M.A. Majekodunmi the Federal Minister of Health as the Sole Administrator of the Region for a period of 6 months during which the Emergency lasted. The Houses of Chiefs and Assembly of Western Nigeria were suspended. The Administrator appointed Commissioners with whom he ruled Western Nigeria under the supervision of the Federal Government. During the Emergency, the following actions were taken:

- (i) The Prime Minister of the Federation, Sir Abubakar appointed a Commission headed by Justice G.B. Coker to inquire into the operations of six statutory corporations in Western Nigeria since 1 October, 1954.
- (ii) The Police searched the homes of Action Group leaders and discovered large quantities of stores of arms and amunitions.
- (iii) Chief Obafemi Awolowo was charged with 26 others with conspiring to over-throw the Federal Government by force. Awolowo and others were therefore tried for treasonable felony. Justice G.S. Sowemimo of the Lagos High Court found Chief Awolowo and 18 others guilty of treasonable felony and sentenced them to terms of imprisonment. Chief Awolowo was sentenced to 10 years.

Chief S.L. Akintola

The State of Emergency which was declared in May 1962 ended on 31 December, 1962. Already Chief S.L. Akintola and his faction of the Action Group formed a new party, United People's Party (UPP). After the Emergency, Chief S.L. Akintola was re-instated as Premier of Western Nigeria. His new party formed a coalition government with the NCNC. The coalition was short-lived as Chief Akintola soon edged out the NCNC from the coalition when he got some NCNC members in the Region to join a new political party known as the Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP). Another very important effect of the Action Group crisis was that it resulted in total destruction of the Action Group. The Action Group ceased to be a major party in Nigeria. The Crisis also contributed immensely to the 1965 Western Nigerian Election Crisis.

4.5 THE FEDERAL ELECTION CRISIS (1964)

The Action Group Crisis in the Western Region had led to a new alignment and realignment between the NCNC and the UPP. The relationship between the two parties had also led to the creation of a new party by the name NNDP. The NNDP had also sought alliance with the NPC, thereby threatening the alliance between the NCNC and the NPC. The presence of NNDP and the circumstances of its birth had led the NCNC to see the need to seek alliance with the Action Group. The relationship between the NCNC and the NPC had also become strained as a result of the Census crisis. Consequently two major political alliances emerged. The first consisted of the Northern Peoples' Congress, the Nigeria National Democratic Party, the Midwest Democratic Front and other minor political groups from the Eastern Region. It took the name, the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA). The second took the name, United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) and its members were the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), the Action Group (AG), the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) and the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC). This was the situation on the eve of the Federal Elections of 1964.

The Federal elections was to take place on 30 December, 1964. Before the elections, there had been allegations and counter-allegations of election malpractices. Such election malpractices included inaccessibility of electoral officers which prevented many aspirants, from filing their nomination papers, arrest and imprisonment of opponents using government machinery, and persecution and threats of different shades. These allegations were brought to the notice of the chairman of the Electoral Commission, Mr. E. Esua. He did nothing. For that reason the UPGA threatened a boycott of the elections.

In spite of the fact that the UPGA boycotted the election, the Electoral Commission proceeded to conduct the election as scheduled. There was no boycott in the Northern Region where the NPC was in control. The boycott in the West was half-spirited because, although, there was an NNDP government, it did not enjoy absolute support of the people. The boycott in the East was total. At the end of the election, the NNA had obvious majority in the elections conducted but the results were disputed especially in the West where voting was not thorough. The NNA requested the President, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, to call Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa to form the new government. The President hesitated and there was a stalemate. After some negotiations, it was agreed that a broad-based government should be formed. The Prime Minister then formed a new government. It was agreed that a fresh election should be conducted in the Eastern Region where the boycott of the election was total.

4.6 WESTERN NIGERIA ELECTION CRISIS (1965)

The Action Group crisis which ultimately resulted in its major split, the emergency in the West, the imprisonment of the Action Group leader, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and the other leaders of the party, the 1962/63 census crisis, and the 1964 Federal Elections crisis, created a political climate of suspicion, distrust and hatred among the people. Moreover, it created a very tense socio-political climate. The Action Group crisis had led to a new political order in the Western Region. The break-up of the Action Group resulted in the birth of the NNDP which struggled for a firm hold of the Region. The legitimacy of the NNDP's hold on the Region was seriously questioned and challenged. The Action Group supporters felt that they were cheated in the treatment of all the events since the party's crisis. They therefore waited for the October 1965 Regional elections for a re-match.

When the Regional House of Assembly was dissolved on 18 September, 1965, the date for an election of a new House was fixed on 11 October, 1965. A day before the dissolution, the NNDP government amended the electoral regulations to its advantage. This was strongly criticized by the UPGA. The election was a straight battle between the NNA and the UPGA. This was the first time the leader of the NPC and Premier of Northern Region Sir Ahmadu Bello campaigned in Western Region. While the NPC campaigned for the NNDP with which it was in alliance, the NCNC led by Dr M.I. Okpara, the Premier of Eastern Region, campaigned for the Action Group. During the election campaign great tension was generated. The election campaigns were marked by thuggery, intimidation, provocative statements, heated war of statements, press controversy and hooliganism. During nomination of candidates, it was physically impossible for UPGA candidates to file their nomination papers as electoral officers always disappeared. They, in collusion with the NNDP government, refused to accept nomination papers of the UPGA candidates. There was also arbitrary arrest and imprisonment of the opponents. Many people were killed and huge property destroyed.

The atmosphere was more tense in the Region on the day of the election. There were reports from several parts of the Region of violence and disorder in which some electoral officers were killed while others were kidnapped. In some parts of the Region there were violent demonstrations. The elections were massively rigged. At the end of the election, there were conflicting claims of victory. The state of parties according to the NNDP government was — NNDP — 65 seats, UPGA — 10 seats. However, Alhaji Adegbenro, leader of the UPGA in Western Nigeria, announced that UPGA had 68 seats and NNDP had 25 seats. These were carried by the Pilot, Tribune and Eastern Outlook newspapers. The Governor of Western Nigeria Chief Fadahunsi called on Chief S.L. Akintola to form the government. Chief Adegbenro formed a rival ten-man “interim government” arguing that UPGA won the elections. Consequently, Chief Adegbenro with a number of UPGA leaders were arrested and detained for forming an unlawful government. This sparked off civil unrest in Western Nigeria. There were demonstrations by Ibadan University Students, market women and others. There were wide-spread rioting, killing, arson and destruction of property. The Federal Government could not do anything to restore law and order. The rioting continued till 15 January, 1966 when the Military seized power in Nigeria.

4.7 THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR (1967–1970)

Remote and Immediate Causes

The chains of problems that called for military intervention in Nigerian politics made the civil war inevitable. Furthermore the peculiar type of Federalism practised in Nigeria ensured that the war was a logical conclusion of an abnormal political structure. The civilian political attitudes to opponents which featured intolerance and corruption were factors that made the civil war almost foregone. Finally, the ethnic complexity of Nigeria in all its ramification which created suspicion was potent source of the civil war.

- (i) Nigeria Federalism of 1954 had generated great problem that the Southern Regions were one against the North. It had also generated controversies especially in sharing of power and it had influenced the constitutional development whereby the regions were given more power than the centre. Instances of threats of secession were many in the political development of Nigeria. The 1953 Kano riot, the Eight-point programme declared by the Northern leaders in 1953, the 1964 election crisis were instances of this suspicion. These problems invited military intervention in politics.
- (ii) The presence of the military in politics did not improve the ethnic complications which was dominant in pre-military politics. First, the *coup d'état* that brought the military into power was misunderstood. To the Northerners, it was an Igbo conspiracy to dominate the others. Major-General Aguiyi Ironsi seemed to have given credence to this by relying heavily on Igbo advisers.
- (iii) Before the coup of July 1966, there had been riots in various parts of the North leading to the massacre of thousands of people, mostly of the Igbo ethnic group. The change of government under General Gowon did not put a stop to the wide-spread killings.
- (iv) The circumstance under which Colonel (later General) Yakubu Gowon came to power also tilted the balance of power in the army. Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu, the Governor of Eastern Nigeria, disputed the legitimacy of Gowon's ascendancy. Ojukwu thought

Brigadier Babafemi Ogundipe, as the most senior military Officer, should succeed General Ironsi; but Ogundipe could not control the revolting army. This dispute within the officer cadre of the army further made the civil war inevitable.

- (v) The power tussle within the army, the continued killings of the Igbos in all parts of the North, the general threat to peace and order forced the military government of the Eastern Region to order the repatriation of Easterners to base. Governor Ojukwu declared that he could not guarantee the safety of the people of the other regions in the Eastern Region as a result of the pogrom in the North.

Secession

The Igbos, having converged on the Eastern Region, could not but have problems. These problems included that of adjustment, health, food, employment, and accommodation. The sufferings of the returnees were of such magnitude that the powers and resources of the Eastern Regional Government could not cope. These led to demands and requests for concessions which the Federal Military Government considered as either unreasonable or impossible. For instance, the Eastern government demanded that the salaries of all those displaced should continue to be paid by the Federal Government. It also pressed that the Federal Military government should come to its aid in the relief efforts. While anticipating a return to normalcy, it was also suggested that troops of other regions be repatriated back to their regions. All these demands were not met to the satisfaction of the Eastern Region government.

In the bid to resolve the crisis a meeting of Nigerian leaders was held at Aburi in Ghana under the auspices of the Ghanaian Head of State, Gen. Joe Ankrah. At the end of the Aburi Accord there was a sigh of relief as most Nigerians including the military rulers thought that the issues at stake were resolved. But the two factions had different interpretations of the Accord since there was no record of it.

The Easterners felt that Aburi Accord was in their favour and pressed for its implementation. The Federal military Government claimed that Aburi did not alter the Federal structure and that the old Federal Constitution would operate. Then came the creation of the 12-State structure in May 1967 in which Eastern Region was split into three states. Gowon's failure to honour the Aburi Accord and his creation of 12 states in Nigeria without reference to the Regions led Ojukwu to summon the Consultative Assembly of Elders of the East to examine the situation and advise him on his proposal for secession. Immediately after the meeting, Ojukwu declared the former Eastern Region as an independent sovereign state called "Biafra". This was the immediate cause of the 30-month civil war. At first, it was "police action" to suppress the rebellion; later it was total war. The war efforts encouraged massive recruitment into the Nigerian Army. The war which started on 30 July, 1967 ended on 12 January, 1970, barely thirty months. At the end of the war, Nigeria re-emerged as a united country.

Negotiations and Conferences

Before the civil war started, there had been efforts to resolve the issues at stake. First, the Constitutional Conference which was initiated by Colonel (later General) Yakubu Gowon failed to conclude its work because the killings were still on. The next move was at Aburi, which also did not resolve the issues. And when the war started, there were several attempts

to resolve the crisis at round-table Conferences which were organized in Kampala, Niamey and Addis Ababa under the auspices of the Organization of African Unity.

The two sides to the conflict took different postures. Biafra insisted on discontinuation of hostility before any negotiation. It also sought to revert to the pre-hostility Federal structure thereby discountenancing the twelve-state structure. The Federal Government insisted on renunciation of secession, recognition of the twelve-State structure and unconditional surrender. These Conferences were deadlocked but helped to slow down the pace of prosecuting the war. Ultimately the war ended on the battle field with the surrender of the Biafran forces.

Consequences of the War

It is hard to say categorically what the consequences of the civil war were. However, one can itemize these viz:

- (i) Nigeria re-emerged as a united country. Both the South and North started to have true desire for union.
- (ii) The Federal Military Government embarked on a policy of reconciliation, reconstruction and rehabilitation.
- (iii) The Federal System of government became more realistic because there was no longer a dominant region because more states had been created.
- (iv) The central government had become more effective than its pre-military government era. The Federal Government acquired more powers and functions and tended to dominate the states. There was an emergence of the element of "Federal Might".

4.8 KADUNA STATE GOVERNMENT CRISIS (1981)

Nigeria adopted a Presidential Constitution in 1979. The implication of this was that the Executive and legislature were to have independent existence. The Executive at both the Federal and State levels had its mandate from the people different from the mandate of the legislators. In other words the Executive and the Legislature were separately and directly elected by the people.

Alhaji Balarabe Musa

The 1979 election in Kaduna State produced a situation whereby the Governor and the majority in the state legislature belonged to different parties. Alhaji Balarabe Musa became the Governor of Kaduna State on a PRP ticket in October 1979 after his victory in the gubernatorial elections. On the other hand the NPN secured a majority in the state legislature. Out of a total of 99 seats of the Kaduna State legislature, the NPN had 64 members while the PRP had 16 members. This situation whereby the Executive was backed by a minority in the legislature became a test case for the Nigerian Presidential experiment. The NPN-dominated state legislature was opposed to the PRP Governor's style and revolutionary stance. What emerged was utter absence of understanding and co-operation between the Executive and the legislature. The State legislature refused the confirmation of the list of Commissioners presented to it on several occasions by the Governor. The Governor ruled the State for eleven months without. Commissioners. It was until after 11 months that a list of Commissioners

resubmitted by the Governor was confirmed by the State Assembly. Moreover the Governor found it difficult to secure the approval of his major policies by the legislature.

The struggle for power between the State Executive and legislature was compounded by the PRP crisis in which Alhaji Musa and his supporters within the party were expelled from the party. The climax in the “Executive/legislature confrontation” scenario was reached when the NPN dominated state legislature decided to impeach the PRP Governor. Musa’s impeachment machinery was set in motion on 7 May 1981 when 69 legislators endorsed a document containing ten charges of alleged serious violation of the Constitution against the Governor. Thereafter the notice of the allegations was served on him. A seven-man panel headed by Rev. Canon H.O. Muhammed was appointed by the Speaker of the State Assembly, Alhaji Mamman Dan Musa. The Governor refused to defend himself before the impeachment panel. The impeachment panel found the Governor guilty of 8 charges. It submitted its report to the State Assembly. The State Assembly impeached the Governor by a vote of 68 out of 99 members of the House on 22 June, 1981, just under four hours of the submission of the panel report.

Governor Musa went to Court to challenge his impeachment and sought his re-instatement. But this failed. Following his impeachment, his Deputy, Alhaji Abba Rimi succeeded him as Governor in accordance with the Constitution. The most important consequence of the impeachment of the PRP Governor was that it seriously weakened the PRP in Kaduna State with the result that during the 1983 elections, the state was completely lost to the NPN. Furthermore, the Kaduna State Government crisis was one of the causes of the PRP crisis which ultimately created two major factions in the PRP.

4.9 THE GENERAL ELECTION CRISIS OF 1983

The 1983 elections were the second to the 1979 elections. The elections were contested by six registered political parties — the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), the Nigeria People’s Party (NPP), the Great Nigeria People’s Party (GNPP), the People’s Redemption Party (PRP) and the Nigeria Advance Party (NAP). Five elections were also involved — the Presidential, the Senatorial, the House of Representatives, the Gubernatorial and the House of Assembly elections. The political experience of the period 1979 to 1983 resulted in the re-alignment of the political parties aimed at forming a formidable force to challenge the NPN dominant position. Thus all other political parties, except NPN, formed an alliance of the progressives. This was viewed as a gang-up against the dominant party — the NPN. Thus, the 1983 elections were reminiscent of the 1964/65 political experience in Nigeria.

Two of the five elections, Presidential and Gubernatorial were very controversial. The Presidential election, though involving six candidates — Alhaji Shehu Shagari, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim, Malam Aminu Kano and Mr. Tunji Braithwaite, was a straight fight between Alhaji Shehu Shagari and Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the NPN and UPN candidates respectively. The crisis following the Presidential elections was not as tense as the one resulting from the Gubernatorial elections in some States.

The Gubernatorial elections were the most rigged and most violent in some states of the federation. The states mostly affected were Oyo, Imo, Anambra, Gongola, Kano and Ondo. The elections were widely characterized by wholesome electoral malpractices. The most serious and pronounced among these electoral malpractices was the criminal manipulation of

election result figures by electoral officials. The election malpractices were of great magnitude that it made the whole election an insult to democracy. There was wide-spread dissatisfaction among the people. Thus the results of the elections were greeted, in some States, with violent demonstrations, arson and destruction of lives and property. There were also wide-spread court actions by defeated candidates. These were followed by nullifications, reinstatements and counter-reinstatements of candidates by lower Courts and superior Courts. The degree of rigging and violence varied from State to State. It was in Ondo State that the contest took the most violent dimensions.

The Ondo State Gubernatorial election crisis was an extension of the crisis within the Unity Party of Nigeria of Ondo State branch. Before the 1983 elections, the party had a serious split, which resulted in two factions, one led by the incumbent Governor Chief Ajasin, and the other led by the Deputy Governor, Mr. Akin Omoboriowo. This intra-party crisis had divided the state into two — the Ekiti and the non-Ekiti. Omoboriowo had claimed to be championing the cause of the Ekiti and therefore claimed to have had substantial following since the Ekiti were in the majority in the State. When the UPN Governorship nominations were conducted, Chief Omoboriowo claimed to have won but was rigged out of success. For that reason he withdrew from the UPN and joined the NPN where he secured for himself that party's gubernatorial ticket for the elections.

At the elections, Chief Akin Omoboriowo was declared the winner. Immediately after the announcement there were massive protests, public demonstrations, murder, arson and destruction of valuables. Many NPN supporters were harassed into hiding while many lost their lives. Security forces were invited to restore normalcy. The matter went to the High Court and finally to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court finally ruled in favour of Chief Michael Ajasin of the UPN. It was under this state of unsettled political climate that the military intervened on 31, December 1983.

KEY POINTS

1. Kano Riot

Cause: A delegation of the Action Group and NCNC went to Northern Nigeria to campaign for independence for 1956 at the height of the North/South tension arising from disagreement on self-government for 1956 motion in the House of Representatives.

Effects

- (i) The riot resulted in 277 casualties including 36 deaths.
- (ii) Properties of Southerners were destroyed in Kano.
- (iii) A Commission of Inquiry was established to probe the riot.
- (iv) It resulted in the 1953 London Constitutional Conference to review the 1951 Constitution.

2. The Census Crisis 1962/1963

Cause: The census figures of 1962 was rejected by NPC Federal Government on the argument that they were inflated in the East. Another census was conducted in 1963 the results of which were rejected by the NCNC Eastern Nigerian Government on the argument that the figures of the North were inflated. However, the Federal Government accepted the

result. The Eastern Nigerian Government took the matter to the Supreme Court. But the case was struck off by the Supreme Court in favour of the Federal Government.

Effects

- (i) Nigeria started to have inaccurate census figures.
- (ii) The census crisis deepened the crisis which the Action Group crisis left on the country.
- (iii) The crisis strained the relations between the NCNC and the NPC.
- (iv) The NCNC/NPC Coalition was seriously threatened.

3. The Action Group Crisis 1962

Cause: The Action Group leader, Chief Obafemi Awolowo wanted the Action Group to maintain its position as opposition and not join in the Federal Government with the NPC, but the Deputy leader of the Action Group and Premier of Western Nigeria, Chief S.L. Akintola was opposed to this idea. He was also against Chief Awolowo's ideology of democratic socialism. Consequently, there was struggle for power between the two leaders which resulted in the break-up of the party.

Effects

- (i) A state of Emergency was declared in Western Nigeria.
- (ii) A Sole Administrator was appointed to rule Western Nigeria under the supervision of the Federal Government.
- (iii) Chief Obafemi Awolowo was charged with 26 others with conspiracy to overthrow the Federal Government by force.
- (iv) Chief Awolowo was imprisoned for ten years for treasonable felony.
- (v) Chief S.L. Akintola broke away from the Action Group and formed the UPP which later became NNDP.

4. The 1964 Federal Elections Crisis

Causes

- (i) Both the NPC and the NCNC were each determined to win the elections at all costs. To this end two Alliances, the NNA on one side and UPGA on the other side, were formed. It was operation "do or die" for the two Alliances.
- (ii) Elections were flagrantly rigged.
- (iii) Elections were boycotted in Eastern Nigeria.

Effects

- (i) There was massive destruction of lives and property.
- (ii) A broad-based government was formed by Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa.

5. Western Nigeria Election Crisis 1965

Causes

- (i) The Action Group crisis created two major divisions in Western Nigeria — Awolowo group and Akintola group.
- (ii) There was a struggle for power between the Action Group and the new party UPP led by Chief S.L. Akintola over the control of Western Region.
- (iii) The elections were massively and openly rigged.

Effects

- (i) There was wanton destruction of lives and property.
- (ii) It gave effect to the military intervention of 15 January, 1966.

6. The Nigerian Civil War

Causes

- (i) Major General Aguiyi-Ironsi was killed in the counter-coup of July 1966.
- (ii) There was wide-spread massacre of the Igbos in all parts of Northern Nigeria.
- (iii) The terms of agreement of the Aburi Accord were not implemented by the Federal Military Government.
- (iv) Eastern Nigeria was declared an independent state of Biafra by Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu, the Governor of the Region.

Effects

- (i) There was destruction of lives and property.
- (ii) Nigeria became more united.
- (iii) The Federal Government grew in power and functions and tended to dominate the states.

7. Kaduna State Government Crisis 1981

Causes

- (i) The NPN dominated-state legislature was opposed to the PRP governor's revolutionary style.
- (ii) There were continuous conflicts between the Legislature which was controlled by the NPN and the Executive Governor controlled by the PRP.

Effects

- (i) Governor Alhaji Balarabe Musa was impeached by the Legislature.
- (ii) The crisis seriously weakened the PRP in Kaduna State.
- (iii) It was one of the causes of the PRP internal crisis.

8. The General Election Crisis of 1983

Causes

- (i) The NPN on one side, and the Progressive Alliance (UPN, NPP, GNPP and PRP) on the other, were determined to win the Presidential election at all costs.

- (ii) Each of the five parties — NPN, UPN, NPP, GNPP and PRP were determined to retain the states which they controlled as a result of the 1979 election, and in addition make some gains of more states.
- (iii) The elections were widely rigged.

Effects

- (i) There were violent demonstrations.
- (ii) There was destruction of lives and property particularly in Ondo State.
- (iii) There were wide-spread court actions for nullification of results.
- (iv) The election crisis contributed to the military intervention of 31 December, 1983.

SAMPLE EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

Essay Questions

1. What were the causes of the Kano riot of 1953? Examine the consequences of the riot?
2. What were the main causes and consequences of the 1962/63 census crisis in Nigeria?
3. Examine the consequences of the Action Group crisis for the political development of Nigeria.
4. What are the similarities and dissimilarities in the 1964 and 1983 elections crises in Nigeria?
5. Examine the causes and course of the Nigerian civil war.

Objective Questions

1. A major effect of the Kano riot of 1953 was
 - A. the 1953 "Self-Government for 1956" motion crisis
 - B. the Eight-point programme of the North
 - C. the 1953 London Constitutional Conference
 - D. an attempted secession
 - E. the 1953 Eastern Nigeria crisis.
2. An effect of the 1962/63 census crisis was
 - A. the Action Group crisis started
 - B. the NPC/NCNC coalition which was seriously threatened
 - C. the census figure for the West was greater than that of the East
 - D. a state of emergency declared in Western Region
 - E. that Chief Obafemi Awolowo was imprisoned for ten years.
3. A new political party which formed a coalition government with the NCNC at the end of the state of emergency in Western Region was

- A.** NNDP
 - B.** NPC
 - C.** UMBC
 - D.** UPP
 - E.** MDF.
- 4. A factor in the Kaduna State government crisis of 1981 was that while the Executive belonged to the PRP, the majority of the Legislature belonged to
 - A.** UPN
 - B.** GNPP
 - C.** NPN
 - D.** NAP
 - E.** NPP.
- 5. The leader of the secessionist Biafra was
 - A.** Sir Locuis Mbanefo
 - B.** Lt. Col. Philip Effiong
 - C.** General Maduebo
 - D.** Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu
 - E.** Col. Joe Achuzie.

Answers

- 1. C
- 2. B
- 3. D
- 4. C
- 5. D