

Review

Leadership Crisis and Political Instability in Nigeria, 1964-1966: The Personalities, the Parties and the Policies

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1964-1966 would go down the annals of Nigerian history as turbulent and politically explosive years. The federal elections of 1964, which, for all intents and purposes, was an electoral battle between the Nigerian National Alliance and the United Progressive Grand Alliance, subjected the Nigerian democratic process to unprecedented stress. The electoral battle between the alliances produced a political stalemate which, for the first time since the 1914 amalgamation, left the country without a legally constituted central government for about two days. Although, the deadlock was eventually resolved through a wretched compromise which did not address the fundamental causes of the crisis; the relief was transient. Thus, in 1965, pre and post election violence in the defunct Western Region created unprecedented political instability in Nigeria. Unfortunately, the ethnic and other interests of some of the leaders of the Structural Frame made a quick resolution of the crisis impossible and on 15 January 1966, the military intervened in the Nigeria democratic process to restore law and order. However, the military intervention did not immediately produce the magic wand needed for an immediate resolution of the large scale political crisis. Indeed, the composition of the coup planners on the one hand and the victims of the coup on the other subjected Nigeria to further political instability and turmoil. Furthermore, the Hausa-Fulani felt that some of the policies of Nigeria's first military regime were designed to 'rob' them of whatever benefits they still derived from the Nigerian Federation. The result was further instability and violence. This paper examines the personalities, the political parties as well as the policies that created unprecedented political instability and crisis in Nigeria between 1964 and 1966. The method of data analysis employed in this study is the historical approach - simple descriptive collation and analysis of historical data. This method involves subjecting data to rigorous criticism with a view to determining their accuracy and authenticity.

Keywords: Leadership, crisis, political instability and Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Full party politics began in Nigeria in 1951. Party politics, within the context of this paper, refers to the scheming and manoeuvring of political parties to gain control of the Structural Frame. Although, the elective principle was introduced into the country in 1922 under the Clifford Constitution, the territorial limitation of the area of operation of the constitution makes it difficult to argue that full party politics began in the country in 1922. It would be recalled that under the 1922 constitution, four elective seats were allocated to Nigerians: three to the

municipality of Lagos and one to coastal town of Calabar. There were three levels of restrictions under the 1922 constitution. One, only adult males could vote. Two, the enfranchised must possess a residential qualification of 12 months and three, an annual income of £100. This is what Duverger termed 'timocracy' that is, democracy based on limited franchise (Maurice Duverger, *The Idea of Politics. The Uses of Power in Society*). As a result of these restrictions, eligible voters in both municipalities were not more than four thousand i.e. three thousand in Lagos and one thousand in Calabar (See Martin Kilson Jr.

"The Rise of Nationalist Organisations and Parties in British West Africa" in *Africa from the Point of View of American Negro Scholars* (New York: The American Society of African Culture, 1963), p.58.). Indeed, it is interesting to note that the controversy that arose from the debate over whether to accept or reject the Clifford Constitution inspired the formation of the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) on 24 June 1923 with the motto *salus populi suprema lex* (*Ibid.* The original planners of the NNDP were Thomas Horatio Jackson, Bangan Benjamin and Herbert Macaulay. The first president of the Party was Egerton Shyngle. Macaulay however became the most popular leader of the NNDP. Herbert Samuel Heelas Macaulay, a civil engineer by training, surveyor by occupation, journalist and politician by inclination, was born in Lagos in 1864 to Reverend Thomas Babington Macaulay, founder of the CMS Grammar School, Lagos and maternal grandson of the Right Rev. Samuel Ajayi Crowder, first African Bishop of the Niger Territory. It must be stated however that even though Macaulay's NNDP bestrode Lagos politics like a colossus between 1923 and 1933, Macaulay himself did not contest election either into the Legislative Council or Lagos Town Council because of a legal disability. He was not eligible for public office because of what *West Africa* referred to as 'two criminal convictions' - first, for an alleged misappropriation of trust funds and second, for a criminal libel alleging a plan to assassinate the exiled Oba of Lagos, Eshugbayi Eleko. See *West Africa*, 28 August and 22 September 1928 and Richard Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties. Power in an Emergent African Nation* (New York and Enugu: Nok Publishers, 1963), p. 46.).

In August 1944, the National Congress of Nigeria and the Cameroons (later National Council of Nigeria Citizens, NCNC) was launched. Furthermore, In April 1951, the Action Group Party was launched by Chief Obafemi Awolowo and other Yoruba leaders. The party was launched to pursue and protect the interest of the Yoruba of Western Nigeria. The regional tendencies of the Action Group had profound impact on the Nigerian democratic process. On 1 October 1950, the Northern People's Congress (NPC) was launched in Kaduna. The party was formed by northerners, for northerners to pursue northern goals. Thus, with the NCNC virtually becoming an Igbo party, the AG claiming to champion Yoruba political aspirations and the NPC pursuing northern goals, ethnicity became the hallmark of Nigerian politics.

The 1964 federal election was the third in Nigeria, coming after those of 1954 and 1959. At the conclusion of the two earlier federal elections, the NPC and the NCNC had formed the federal government. However, because the alliance between the two parties was not anchored on ideological compatibility; the post 1959 NPC-NCNC coalition government was particularly outstandingly acrimonious. Among other things, the

NPC and NCNC held opposing views on pan-Africanism and the policy of alignment or non-alignment. While the former was opposed to the creation of a supranational continental government and wanted a policy of alignment with the Western capitalist bloc; the latter canvassed the creation of a United States of Africa, the formation of a continental government and a policy of non-alignment (For a detailed analysis of the NPC/NCNC contradiction, see Ojo Emmanuel Oladipo, "The Nigerian Democratic Process: Ethnicity and Alliances of Political Parties, 1951-1983". Ph.D thesis, Department of History and International Studies, Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria, 2011, pp. 162-177.).

The last straw that broke the back of the camel of the NPC/NCNC alliance was the row over the 1963 census figures. The census, officially titled 1963, was held in May 1962. Because of ethnic considerations, the figures provoked widespread accusations and counter-accusations. The official figures were: Northern Region 22.5m; Eastern Region 12.3m; Western Region 10.5m and Lagos 0.8m (Remi Anifowose, *Violence and Politics in Nigeria. The Tiv and Yoruba Experience* (New York and Enugu: Nok Publishers International, 1982), p. 60, fn. 105.). Because of the pervasive controversy that followed the exercise, the 1962 census figures were cancelled on 9 February 1963 (See *West African Pilot*, *Daily Service* and *Morning Post*, 10 February 1963).

The census dispute intensified inter-regional rivalry and was followed by virulent inter-tribal recriminations which in turn resulted in the breakdown of the NPC/NCNC federal government and precipitated new political alignments in Nigeria. By 1 December, 1964 when the NCNC dismissed the NPC/NCNC coalition government as "a daft government without a sense of purpose", it was obvious that the alliance between the two parties had hit the rocks. Under Nigeria's independence constitution, members of the federal legislature were elected for a four-year term and could seek re-election for another term. Thus, another federal election was due in 1964. It must be emphasised from the onset that ethnicity was the hallmark of Nigerian politics between 1951 and 1966.

The formation of the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) and the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA)

The NPC/NCNC alliance having broken down, the NCNC turned to the third major political party in Nigeria – the Western Region based Action Group – for an alliance. This alliance, formed on 3 June 1964 was christened the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA). The UPGA, interpreted by S.L. Akintola (Samuel Ladoke Akintola was the Deputy Leader of the Chief Obafemi Awolowo-led AG. He was the Premier of

the Western Region on the platform of the AG between 1959 and 1962. Following a devastating schism in the AG in 1962, Akintola and his followers left the AG and formed the United People's Party (UPP) and later the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP). He was premier of Western Nigeria till January 14, 1966.) as 'Useless People's Godless Alliance' was made up of the NCNC, AG, and Northern Progressive Front (NPF, which comprised the radical Northern Elements Progressive Union and United Middle Belt Congress), Kano People's Party (KPP) and Zamfara Commons Party (ZCP). (See <http://africanelections.tripod.com/ng/>) On 20 August 1964, the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA), interpreted by Samuel Aluko (Samuel Aluko was an AG leader. A renowned professor of Economics at the University of Ife (later Obafemi Awolowo University), Ile-Ife, Nigeria. Aluko was what could be described as the leader of the academic wing of the AG.) as "Non-Nationalists Adventurers" (*Nigerian Tribune*, 23

December 1964. See also <http://africanelections.tripod.com/ng/>) was formed. This alliance comprised the NPC, NNDP, Dynamic Party, Mid-West Democratic Front (MDF), Niger Delta Congress (NDC), Lagos State United Front (LSUF) and Republican Party (RP). Candidates who contested for parliamentary seats in the 1964 federal elections did so under these alliance groups.

A brief comment on the reasons for the formation of these alliances may be necessary. Obviously, the immediate reason for the formation of the UPGA was political expediency. By 1964, politically speaking, the NCNC had its back against the wall. Having been a junior partner in a rancorous and acrimonious alliance with the NPC and having lost the census battle, the only alternative opened to the NCNC was the formation of an alliance with the AG (Interview with Mbazulike Amechi (c. 80), No. 17^A. Umuagbai/Okoloma Road, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria, 22 February 2010. Amechi was one of the frontline leaders of the NCNC in the defunct Eastern Region. Known in some quarters as 'basket mouth', his utterances and verbal attacks on the NPC were largely responsible for the collapse of the NPC/NCNC alliance in 1964.). Thus, the NCNC engaged in an unprincipled search for a short term ally with which to bolster its dwindling political fortunes. On the other hand, the situation with the AG was grave and extremely desperate. By 1964, the AG was a sinking party. With at least thirteen of its seventy-five members elected to the Federal House of Representatives in 1959 now in other political parties; its high-ranking leaders behind bars; the defection of many of its members to other political parties and a devastating exclusion from the systems of rewards since 1962, the AG was a political beggar with little or no choice (Interview with Chief Wunmi Adegbonmire, (75), No. 16, Wunmi Adegbonmire Street, off Ala Estate, Akure, Ondo State, Nigeria, 30 November 2010. Adegbonmire represented

the students' wing of the Action Group of Nigeria in the Supreme Council of the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) between 1964 and 1966.). There was therefore a double coincidence of political want in the formation of this alliance of last resort.

It must be stressed that because the alliance was not a product of ideological compatibility or common programme, its hallmark was political treachery (For example, as will be pointed out later, the NCNC found it convenient to participate in the so-called 'Broad Based Government' despite the exclusion of its alliance partner from it. Whereas, in June 1964, the NCNC said it made a mistake by coalescing with the NPC to run the Federal Government after the 1959 election and said that the mistake would not be repeated. *Nigerian Citizen*, 21 June 1964.) and could hardly be said to be meaningful except in so far as necessity kept the Action Group and the NCNC together. Alhaji Balewa made this point very clearly when he dismissed the UPGA as a collection of one-time bitter opponents who became friends overnight for reasons of 'greed, ambition and selfishness'. Since Alhaji Balewa knew too well that there was no modicum of ideology in the formation of the UPGA; he predicted that the alliance would break up as soon as the 1964 election results were known (*Daily Times*, 21 December 1964.). It should be added however that the same 'reasons of greed, ambition and selfishness' informed the formation of Balewa's NNA.

The Alliances and Electoral Debacle

UPGA/NNA rivalry was the most striking aspect of the 1964 elections. Among other things, both alliances utilized the power of incumbency to the fullest. For example, apart from arresting, detaining and jailing some members of the UPGA, the NNA deliberately prevented some candidates of the former from filing nomination papers and declared several of its candidates unopposed even when they were not (To cite an instance, in Bauchi South West, the Prime Minister's constituency, Azi Nyanko, the UPGA candidate and Balewa's opponent, filed a suit in which he claimed that he was prevented from filing his nomination papers. In a ruling delivered by Justice Nigel Reel on 3 April 1965, Nyako's case was dismissed because, according to Reel, it was 'inspired by malice'. See *Nigerian Daily Times*, *Nigerian Citizen* and *Daily Express* 4 April 1965.). In addition, the alliances engaged in election rigging, state-sponsored thuggery, violence and arson. Alhaji Aminu Kano (the leader of NEPU and a member of the UPGA) summarised the above in the following fairly lengthy quotation

The merciless beating up of supporters of opposition parties and compelling them to join the party in power or else face series of brutality and prosecution is beyond commonsense. At present

(26 August 1964), there are over 200 members of the NEPU jailed on various pretexts in Sokoto Province. Thousands of UMBC supporters are languishing in prison in Tiv Division while over 100 people have lost their lives. Thousands upon thousands of our party supporters were dumped into jails like bundles of wood or animals; some were brutally killed...wickedness in its highest magnitude was let loose and the ordinary mass of men were terrorized, stunned to silence and fear...law and order were raped...It was the most wicked and devilish doctrine which could not be conceived in hell itself...it was an example of sadism from which even a barbarian can shrink. To give the full account of this barbaric invasion of justice and democracy will need a volume of over five one-thousand pages (Quoted from *Nigerian Citizen*, 26 August 1964 and 24 March 1965.)

While Aminu Kano's allegations may have contained some elements of truth; his UPGA spared no effort, fair or foul, in brutalising members of the NNA and using state machinery to strengthen its electoral position particularly in Eastern and Mid-Western Nigeria where UPGA's senior partner, the NCNC, held the reins of government. Even in the Western Region where the NNDP formed the government, the AG demonstrated that it had its own apparatus of violence. For example, in 1964, two prominent local leaders of the NNDP - Prince Adepoju Odufanade and Fakunmoju- were killed by political thugs (See *West African Pilot*, 9 October 1964.).

In the circumstances discussed above, the UPGA felt that it would be difficult, indeed impossible, to conduct an election favourable to it. Consequently, it called on the president (Dr. Azikiwe) to dismiss the Federal Government and appoint an equal number of leaders of the two alliances to administer the Federation until the country's political climate favoured the conduct of election (*Daily Express*, 20 December 1964.). In a speech he prepared and never gave but which was published by the *Daily Express* of 3 January 1965, the president claimed that he held a meeting with the prime minister on 28 December 1964 where he suggested to the latter that the election be postponed by six months and that the United Nations Organisation be called to supervise it. According to Azikiwe, the prime minister insisted that elections should be held as scheduled. On the other hand, the prime minister dismissed Azikiwe's account as outright falsehood claiming that "in all our discussions, the president did not mention to me the question of holding or postponing of the general elections" (*Daily Express* of 3 January 1965.). Be that as it may, one obvious fact from the above is that there was a great gulf between the holders of the two highest offices of the Nigerian Structural Frame. On 30 December, the contentious election was held but it was boycotted by the UPGA in Western Nigeria thereby committing one of the costliest mistakes in the political

history of Nigeria.

Boycott of election is not a wise strategy in party politics because opposing political parties go to the polls and candidates who normally would have lost elections win by default. It is however instructive to note that the UPGA did not boycott the elections in Eastern and Mid-Western Nigeria, where it held the reins of government. This may have been because the NCNC was absolutely sure of victory in any region-wide election in the Eastern and Mid-Western Regions. The possibility of the NNA winning by default in the two regions should the NCNC boycott the election may have also made the NCNC to participate in the election. Furthermore, given the Akintola and the NNDP factor in Western Nigeria, the possibility of AG victory in that region was almost exactly nil. Be that as it may, the NNA 'won' more parliamentary seats than the UPGA and the incumbent Prime Minister, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, expected the President to invite him to form a government.

However, because of large scale pre and post election violence and alleged irregularities, the president rejected the results of the election and insisted that since the rigging that characterised the election was obvious to most Nigerians, if the results of the elections were accepted, they would reopen wounds, exacerbate feelings, prolong bitterness and hasten the exit of unity and democracy from Nigeria (*Daily Express* 1 January 1965.). Consequently, Dr. Azikiwe said he would rather resign than call on anybody to form a government. Thus, the United Progressive Grand Alliance and the Nigerian National Alliance created an unprecedented electoral and constitutional crisis which left the country without a legally-constituted government for more than three days.

However, following a truce brokered by some prominent legal experts and political leaders, a six-point plan was agreed upon. Item two of the six-point agenda recommended the formation of a broad-based government to be led by Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa as prime minister (Interview with Chief Anthony Enahoro, House 25, Dolphin Estate, Ikoyi, Lagos, 16 May 2009. Chief Enahoro moved the famous 'self-government motion in 1956' on the floor of the Nigerian House of Representatives on Tuesday, 31 March, 1953.). Consequently, in a nationwide broadcast in the evening of 4 January 1965, the president called on Alhaji Balewa to form a government and gave assurance that Balewa would form a 'broad-based government'. About one and a half decades later, Dr. Azikiwe gave the reason for his capitulation. According to him, as at the time he invited Balewa, all the military installations in the country were in the defunct Northern Region.

This was probably not the primary reason for his capitulation. His pen and paper militancy on the pages of his newspapers, particularly the *West African Pilot* notwithstanding, Dr. Azikiwe was not known for staying long in the hottest spot of political battle. The ambiguous

phrase, 'broad-based government' provoked immediate reactions. To many NNA leaders, it simply meant a government made up of NNA members only since the parties that formed the alliance traversed the length and breadth of the Federation. Thus, the NNA's interpretation of a broad-based government was only in geographical terms; it is therefore not surprising that the seventeen-member broad-based government did not include any UPGA members. A brief commentary on the above assertion may be necessary.

While it is true that Festus Okotie-Eboh and K.O. Mbadiwe (two prominent 'NCNC leaders' in Eastern Nigeria), the supposed representatives of the UPGA, were members of the cabinet, as far as the present author is concerned, neither Okotie-Eboh nor Mbadiwe was a member of the UPGA. Okotie-Eboh, at least at that time, was more NPC than NCNC and was closer to NPC leaders than the leader of his own party. Indeed, he and Omo Osagie (a local political leader in the Benin area of the Mid-Western Region) opposed the formation of the UPGA and advised the Premier of the Mid-West, Chief Dennis Osadebay, not to have anything to do with it (Dennis Osadebay, *Building a Nation*, op. cit., p. 164.). How tenable then is the conventional reference to Okotie-Eboh as a representative of the UPGA in the so-called broad-based government since there is no evidence to show that he ever did or said anything that could be interpreted as loyalty or support for the alliance?

It would be recalled that Dr. Nnadiwe was the leader of the rebel group which christened itself the 'NCNC Reform Committee' which sought to remove Dr. Azikiwe from the presidency of the NCNC on 14 June 1958 during a meeting of the party's National Executive Committee in Lagos. At the meeting, Mbadiwe and his group called upon Dr. Azikiwe to resign both his presidency of the NCNC and premiership of the Eastern Region. The 'Reform Group' said it had lost confidence in the leadership of Azikiwe. Consequently, the National Executive Committee of the NCNC expelled Nnadiwe and his supporters. Shortly after their expulsion the 'Reform Committee' launched the *Daily Telegraph* (in July) and formed a new party - the Democratic Party of Nigeria and the Cameroons - (in August) with Nnadiwe as National Chairman. Although, following a *reapproachment* between Drs. Azikiwe and Mbadiwe in December 1960, the latter was readmitted into the NCNC and was subsequently appointed Adviser on African Affairs to the Prime Minister; elected to the Federal House of Representatives and restored to a position of cabinet rank in the federal government.

The above *reapproachment* notwithstanding, it is the conviction of this author that up till the time he became a member of Balewa's broad-based government, Dr. Nnadiwe did and said nothing outstanding to protect and promote the interest of the NCNC. As far as this author is concerned therefore, there were no UPGA members

in the post 1964 election federal government. At any rate, appointing people who were members of the NCNC only in name and who were not likely to risk anything in an attempt to advance the interest of the NCNC was a very good political strategy on the part of the NPC.

Nonetheless, many younger and well-educated Northerners criticised Alhaji Balewa for finding a place for what they called "the NCNC old guard" in the Council of Ministers. In a critical and sarcastic article, the *Nigerian Citizen* faulted Alhaji Balewa for giving Chief Okotie-Eboh and Dr. Mbadiwe ministerial positions. It posited that no room should have been found for members of the UPGA in the Federal Executive Council and warned that should Alhaji Abubakar continue to 'transgress', he should be removed from office. The paper's interpretation and definition of 'broad-based government' was a government formed by the NPC, NNDP, the Dynamic Party and other members of the NNA (*Nigerian Citizen*, 27 January 1965.).

Moreover, the paper insisted that Alhaji Balewa should not appoint any member of the UPGA into any post either as a minister or ambassador or even as chairman of a corporation and urged the UPGA to accept its opposition role 'which has become its destiny' (*Ibid*, 10 February 1965.). Less than a month later however, the paper reversed the above position and suggested another formula for the composition of the Federal Executive Council that would foster peaceful co-existence in the country: 50% NPC; 20% NNDP; 10% for other NNA allies; 10% for Independents and the final 10% for the UPGA. The reason for this change of stance, according to Alhaji Shagari, was the realization that Nigerian unity must be preserved (Interview with Alhaji Usman Sheu Shagari, (c. 77), No. 16^A, Area III, Abuja, FCT, Nigeria, 18 June 2008. Shagari was a member of the NPC since inception. One of the five political parties that contested the 1979 general elections in Nigeria was the National Party of Nigeria, which, as far as many scholars are concerned, was the reincarnation of the NPC. Alhaji Shagari was the NPN presidential candidate in the 1979 elections and the president of Nigeria between 1 October 1979 and 30 December, 1983.).

Although, the Prime Minister did not accept the above suggestion, it however appeared that anytime reference was made to the inclusion of members of the UPGA in the Council of Ministers, such references applied only to the NCNC while the AG was altogether neglected and left in the lurch. The 'broad-based' cabinet was made up of 54 ministers, double the number in the previous government. The NPC had 22 (15 cabinet ranks) while the NCNC and NNDP had 16 and 14 with 11 and 7 cabinet ranks respectively. The participation of the NCNC in the federal government was ironic in at least two respects. One, the AG, its alliance member, was excluded from it. Two, the NCNC had in November 1964

described the number of ministers in the previous government as 'scandalous' and an 'unpardonable drain upon the nation's slender resources' (*Morning Post*, 11 November 1964.).

It must be conceded however that the NCNC's participation in the post-1964 election federal government might have at least served the useful purpose of dousing the unprecedented electoral tension that had built up throughout the country thereby retrieving the country from chaos. But since the compromise did not remove the fundamental causes of the crisis, the reprieve was transient as events in Western Nigeria in the last quarter of 1965 brought back the electoral debacle on a scale earlier unattained in the country's democratic process.

Instability and violence in Western Nigeria: The personalities and the parties

It would be recalled that following the Awolowo-Akintola clash popularly known as the Action Group Crisis of 1962, the NPC-dominated federal government had declared a state of emergency in Western Nigeria, sacked the AG-controlled regional government (under the premiership of Chief S.L. Akintola) there and appointed the Prime Minister's personal physician, Dr. Majekodunmi, as the Region's Sole Administrator. The state of emergency ended on 31 December 1962. The people of Western Nigeria had expected that a fresh election would be held at the end of the emergency, but the federal government merely reinstated Chief Akintola as the premier on the grounds that the political atmosphere in that Region was not conducive for holding fresh elections (Remi Anifowose, p. 190.). Thus, up till 1965, Chief Akintola never properly faced the electorate. He was appointed as premier of the Western Region by the AG leadership in 1959 to succeed Chief Awolowo following the latter's resignation to contest for the position of prime minister.). Another regional election was however due on 11 October 1965.

Generally, African politics is conceived in 'zero-sum' terms, that is, the notion that the winner takes all. This often makes the ruling party to mobilise every available state apparatus to entrench itself in power to the detriment of the opposition. In African post-colonial states, there are only very few instances where ruling parties had been removed by means of the ballot box or in truly competitive elections. It was therefore not surprising that with the aid of all sorts of electoral irregularities, the NNDP 'won' the election. There were however conflicting reports of election results: while the National Broadcasting Corporation and the *Daily Sketch* declared the NNDP as the winner, (While the National Broadcasting Corporation was controlled by the federal government, the *Daily Sketch* was owed by the NNDP.) on the other hand, UPGA's private radio station at Chief

Awolowo's residence in Ibadan and the NCNC's controlled *West African Pilot* announced that UPGA won 68 out of 94 seats. The UPGA thereafter announced the formation of an interim government headed by Alhaji Adegbenro (Adegbenro became the acting leader of the Action Group following the incarceration of Chief Awolowo in 1963.) who was subsequently arrested (with nine others) and charged with 'illegally forming an executive council and false assumption of office' (The others were: Chief Jonathan Odebiyi, Chief Samuel Lanlehin, Chief Julius Okedu, Chief Joel Babatola, Chief Samuel Sogbein, Chief Mejeed Agbaje, Joshua Awopetu, Bola Shadipe and Adeoye Adisa, *West African Pilot*, 13 October and *Daily Times*, 22 October 1965. Akintola announced his fifty-member cabinet on 22 October 1965. *West African Pilot*, 23 October 1965.). The final results announced by the Western Region Electoral Commission was NNDP 73 seats, AG 15 seats and NCNC 2 seats while results from Ondo Central, Egba South and two from Mushin (Lagos) were stood down because of violence.

In Nigeria, as in other African countries, 'the-winner-takes-all' approach to politics implies that the loss of an election is synonymous with the loss of patronage and access to socio-economic benefits. In extreme cases, the loss of election by an ethnic group could mean the loss of access to qualitative education and health care, portable water, good road network, credit or loan facilities, etc. Although, this is an anomaly, it has remained a means of 'punishing' those groups who did not vote for or support the government of the day. The AG had been excluded from government patronage since 1962 and an NNDP victory would mean the continuation of the exclusion of the members and sympathisers of the former party from the system of rewards for another four or five years. (Interview with Chief Ebenezer Abayomi Babatope, 67, No.1, Fehintola Babatope Close, off Ijebu-Jesa Road, Ilesa, Osun State, 20 November 2010. Babatope was an AG leader and the Director of Organization of the Unity Party of Nigeria, UPN, between 1978 and 1983.) It is therefore not surprising that when it became clear that the NNDP had 'won' the election, violence broke out. UPGA supporters trooped out in large numbers to protest against what they described as notorious irregularities that characterised election (For illustrations on the relationship between frustration and violence, see Aubrey Yates, *Frustration and Conflict* (London: Methuen, 1962); Victor LeVine "The Course of Political Violence", in H. Lewis (ed.), *French Speaking Africa* (New York: Walker, 1965) and T.R. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).).

In an open letter to Sir Odeleye Fadahunsi, the Governor of Western Nigeria, the Electoral Commission Chairman, Esua, confirmed that irregularity was the hallmark of the 1965 election (Eyo Esua served as the Chairman of the Western Region Electoral Commission.

Other members of the Commission were Chief N.D. Oyerinde, Dr. J.A. Adegbite, Dr. J.A. Akintola, Rev. S.T. Ola Akande, A.O. Fadugba, Alhaji Jimoh Bamgbola, Ayo Ojerinola (a senior Civil Servant) served as Secretary. See *Daily Times*, 20 and 22 November and 16 December 1965.). According to him, the loyalty of the region's commissioners was to the NNDP and that his Commission was 'utterly helpless'. He noted that some electoral officers refused to accept nomination papers of certain candidates and that there was genuine cause for misgivings about the authenticity of the results and that because of the foregoing, the elections should be nullified (*Daily Express* and *Daily Times*, 23 November 1965.). The question then is: what factors informed Esua's criticism of an election that was conducted by a commission headed by him?

The result of a research conducted by Remi Anifowose (a Nigerian political scientist) showed that seventy-six percent of western Nigerians believed that the 1965 election results did not reflect the legitimate aspirations of the people of the Western Region (Remi Anifowose, p. 257. See Table 9-1 'The 1965 Regional Election and Public Opinion', p. 258.). Assuming the exact percentage of Western Nigerians who were displeased with the outcome of the election is not known, it is doubtful the NNDP won the election with the wide margin declared in the official result. Result of the Lagos Town Council election validates this argument. The election was held barely a month after the parliamentary election in the region (on 13 November 1965). Out of the 44 seats at stake, the AG obtained 37; the NCNC got 7 while the NNDP did not win any seats (*West African Pilot*, 15 November 1965.). How could a party which won a landslide in a regional election held a month previously fail to win even a single seat in the Lagos Town Council election? The result of the Lagos Council election made many people to discredit the Esua-led Electoral Commission. Indeed, Esua himself confirmed that he was subjected to "butt of scurrilous and libellous nationwide criticism" (*Ibid*, 20 November 1965.). Esua probably made the above revelations to ward off public outcry and indignation against his Commission.

Another probable reason for Esua's revelation may have been that he was subjected to unbearable pressure by the UPGA to discredit the election. This argument becomes tenable when it is realised that Esua made the above revelations about forty days after the conclusion of the election and submission of official results to the Governor (although, Esua insisted that he did not submit election results to anyone) (*Daily Times*, 24 November 1965.). Assuming it was even true that Esua did not submit the election's official result to the Governor, to be silent for as long as forty days before he made up his mind did not portray his Commission in good light. It can therefore be argued that Esua either had sympathy for or was bought over by the UPGA. Be that as it may, his belated revelations and resignation

(on 15 December 1965) did not serve any useful purpose; in fact, rather than smoothening the rough edges of the electoral conflict, Esua added to the confusion as his revelations strengthened the position of the UPGA and its rejection of the results of the elections which in turn aggravated political instability and violence in Western Nigeria.

A politically deprived and frustrated people would almost always want to use the bullet to achieve what the ballot cannot. It was therefore not surprising that what UPGA members and sympathisers saw as deprivation resulted into violence and since no singular person or group has the monopoly of violence, NNDP members and supporters felt they reserved the right to defend themselves. The outcome was a breakdown of law and order, killing and burning of properties of political opponents, etc. The resultant violence claimed the lives of several hundreds of people on both sides of the conflict. There were widespread drenching of houses and people with petrol before setting them alight. This notorious act became known as *operation wet e*. Among the causalities of the violence was the governor of Western Nigeria, Chief Odeleye Fadahunsi, whose house was burnt in the Mushin area of Lagos on 3 November 1965 (*Ibid*, 16 November 1965. The *Tribune* press was burnt on 7 November. *Ibid*, 8 November.). For all intents and purposes, the 1965 election represented the ultimate debasement of the democratic process through chicanery and thuggery.

The exact number of the victims and value of properties lost to the 1965 post-election crisis in Western Nigeria may never be known. According to a Federal Government estimate, the violence had claimed the lives of over 160 persons by 13 January 1966 – these were 64 civilians killed by the police, 91 killed by other civilians and seven policemen among others (*Daily Sketch*, *Daily Times* and *Daily Express*, 14 January 1966. *Daily Express* and *Daily Times*, 23 November 1965.).

The UPGA however estimated that casualties of the 1965 crisis ran into hundreds (*Daily Express* and *Daily Times*, 23 November 1965.). In its own estimate, the *Nigerian Tribune* - whose press was in 1965 burnt down and its publications banned by the government of Western Nigeria but which continued to publish its titles clandestinely - claimed that about 567 people lost their lives during the crisis while about 1,000 others were wounded (*Nigerian Tribune*, 3 January 1966.). Unofficial estimates given in the British press put the total number of the dead at over 700 (*Daily Express* and *Daily Times*, 23 November 1965. *220 Ibid*, 12 January 1966.). Whatever might have been the number of the dead and the maimed before, during and after the 1965 election, one incontrovertible conclusion is that the crisis robbed Western Nigeria of the contributions many of the people who were killed or permanently disabled would have made to the educational, social, economic and political advancement of that region.

As a result of the large scale violence and the atmosphere of insecurity that enveloped the Western Region, S.A. Shitta-Bey (MP, Lagos Centre), moved a motion in the Federal House of Representatives calling for the declaration of a state of emergency in Western Nigeria since "law and order have broken down in the Region" but the Prime Minister declined (*Daily Express* and *Daily Times*, 23 November 1965. *Ibid*, 12 January 1966.). The UPGA and the *West African Pilot* subsequently mounted a sustained press attack against the Prime Minister for "failure to grasp the nettle of the Western Region and of permitting a policy of drift" (D.J.M. Muffett, *Let the Truth Be Told. The Coups D'Etat of 1966* (Zaria: Hudahuda Publishing Company, 1982), p. 11.). On his part, the Prime Minister insisted that the 1965 anarchy in Western Nigeria was incomparable with the 1962 situation in the Region and that the Federal Government could not declare a state of emergency in a region with a legally constituted government (*Daily Times* and *Morning Post*, 17 November 1965.).

It would be recalled that while the Chief Awolowo-led faction purportedly removed Chief Akintola from the office of premier and replaced him with Alhaji Adegbenro in May 1962, Akintola insisted that he remained the premier of the Western Region. In other words, there were two claimants to the office of premier. Therefore, Alhaji Balewa's argument that there was 'a legally constituted government' in Western Nigeria during the 1962 AG crisis was not completely correct. However, in geographical terms, the 1965 crisis far overshadowed that of 1962.

Many scholars had described the crisis in the defunct Western House of Assembly as a crisis that occurred within the four walls of the Assembly. For example, corroborating the view expressed by Ben Ghulie and Alexander Madiebo, Oyeweso contends that there was hardly any justification for the declaration of the state of emergency in Western Nigeria since only the mace was broken and the "confusion did not extend beyond the precincts of the Regional House" (Siyan Oyeweso, "Causal Factors in the Nigerian Civil War: A Critical and Comparative Analysis of Some Nigerian Accounts", M.A. thesis, Department of History, University of Ife, Ile Ife, 1986, p. 55.). It could be argued however that since the membership of the Assembly was region-wide, the crisis, by implication, was also region-wide. Moreover, it was not just the mace that was broken, limbs were also broken. In fact, a minister, Kessington Momoh, was so badly injured that he was taken to hospital (See *The First 10 Years: Independent Nigeria* (Lagos: Daily Times of Nigeria Limited, 1970), p. 33.). However, in terms of magnitude and impact, the 1962 crisis was completely insignificant when compared with that of 1965. In 1965, law and order broke down in many parts of the Western Region to the point that the Nigeria Police virtually admitted that the task of maintaining law and order was beyond it (Remi Anifowose, *op. cit*, p. 65.)

However, on 14 January, the Prime Minister said he was already mediating in the crisis and that the AG had already accepted his mediation while the NNDP asked for more time. He said he did not want to use 'real force' because it could not bring peace to people's heart and that in any case, he had no power to impose a solution on the Western Region (*Nigerian Citizen* and *Nigerian Tribune*, 15 January 1966.). The refusal of the Prime Minister to declare a state of Emergency as he did in the Region in 1962 may have been because of his party's alliance with the NNDP. Those who share this view may therefore argue that the NPC/NCNC government declared a state of emergency in the Western Region in 1962 so as to cripple the Action Group and liquidate Chief Awolowo politically. It should be noted however that the declaration of a state of emergency is an important constitutional provision (with profound consequences) which should not be invoked too frequently. Alhaji Balewa may have felt that since 1962 to 1965 was just a space of about three years, the declaration of another state of emergency in Western Nigeria would not have been in the interest of the people of the West. However, the outcome of the Western Nigeria crisis in terms of the loss of lives and properties far exceeded what would have been the consequences of the declaration of a state of emergency in the region.

Whatever reasons were responsible for the non declaration of a state of emergency in the Western Region in 1965/66 were also responsible for the non resolution of the crisis quickly. With the declaration of the police that the restoration of law and order was virtually beyond it; the endless killings and burnings of people and properties and the atmosphere of insecurity that pervaded the length and breadth of the defunct Western Region, it was clear that the political class had no solution to the crisis. Consequently, what the *West Africa* of 23 April 1966 referred to as the 'rump Nigerian cabinet' authorised the acting President, Dr. Orizu Nwafor, (The President, Dr. Azikiwe, had earlier left for the United Kingdom where he was receiving treatment for infection of the lungs. He left the country on 16 October 1965 and the Senate President, Nwafor, was sworn in same day as acting President. See *West African Pilot*, 18 October and 27 November 1965.) to hand over the administration of the country to the military (From 1963 onwards, following military coups in four African countries - Togo, Dahomey (now Republic of Benin), Burundi and Congo-Brazzaville - military coups became rampant in Africa so that by 1975, twenty-one African countries were under military rule. As Falola has estimated, between 1960 and 1992, Africa recorded seventy cases of successful military coups in thirty-one countries. See Toyin Falola, *Key Events in African History. A Reference Guide* (London: Greenwood Press, 2002), p. 246.). This terminated the Nigerian First Republic.

Leadership Crisis and Political Instability in Nigeria, January-July 1966: The Policies

The political circumstances that led to the intervention of the military in the Nigerian democratic process have been highlighted above. However, the military intervention did not immediately put an end to the large scale political crisis. This was largely because of the ethnic nature of the coup. It would be re-called that Major C.K. Nzeogwu, the arrow-head and the other planners of the January coup, were Igbo. On the other hand, those who lost their lives in the coup included the two top-most religious and political leaders of Northern Nigeria, Sir Ahmadu Bello and Alhaji Tafawa Balewa.

Furthermore, of the senior officers of the ranks of Lt.-Colonel and above, the Northern Region lost four out of its five officers. The Western Region lost two out of its six officers; the Mid West lost one out of its four while the Eastern Region lost none out of its seven. The *West Africa* of 22 January, 1966 described the January coup as 'Ibo versus Hausa affair'. This is however a wrong classification because the Yoruba had its own share of the dead. Apart from Chief Akintola, Western Nigeria lost Brigadier Samuel Adesiyi, Colonel Adetunji Shodeinde and Major Samuel Adegoke, among others.

The composition of the coup planners on the one hand and the victims of the coup on the other subjected Nigeria to further political instability and turmoil. Moreover, the Hausa-Fulani felt that some of the policies of the Ironsi regime (which we shall discuss presently) were designed to 'rob' them of whatever benefits they still derived from the Nigerian Federation. The result was further instability and violence which terminated the Ironsi regime within one hundred and ninety-four days.

It would be recalled that ethnicity was one of the factors that led to the collapse of the Nigerian First Republic. In a deliberate attempt to perpetuate colonial rule, the British, through the so-called 'divide and rule' tactics, promoted ethnic interests and consciousness above national interests. On the other hand, the leaders of the three main ethnic groups (and later, political parties) engaged in a cut-throat competition for the control of the Structural Frame and the system of rewards. Thus, both on the part of the British colonial administration and the Nigerian political leaders, no conscious or coordinated attempts were made at building a politically united Nigeria. Thus, the problems of disunity and ethnic chauvinism are as old as the country itself. Competition among the three major ethnic groups for the control of the system of rewards and the Structural Frame subjected the Nigerian democratic process to several stains and stress particularly between 1963 and 1965.

Oyeweso has downplayed the role of ethnicity and regional differences in the fall of the First Republic and the outbreak of the Civil War. Adopting the political economy approach in his analysis of the Nigerian crises,

particularly the collapse of the First Republic and outbreak of the Civil War, Oyeweso contends that the commitment to ethnic, regional and other superstructural explanation and rationalizations does not fully explain the complex character of the Nigerian crises (Siyan Oyeweso, p. ii.). Oyeweso argues that the major cause of the Nigerian crises was "the cut-throat competition among the various factions of the ruling class for limited opportunities in business and politics" (*Ibid*). It is however the view of the present researcher that the cut throat competition Oyeweso spoke about was always inter-ethnic and rarely intra-ethnic except, perhaps, in the Western Region between 1962 and 1965. Even here, the contest for political ascendancy was for a regional and not centre government. Oyeweso himself admits that "each faction (or fraction) of the ruling class wanted to control the centre because it would thereby be able to monopolise the national wealth for the purpose of private accumulation" (*Ibid*. p. iii.). However, more often than not, the contest for the control of the structural frame was done on the basis of ethnic affiliations and rarely on the basis of sub-ethnic affiliations. The point being stressed here is that the role of ethnicity cannot be downplayed in the chain of events that rocked the boat of the Nigerian First Republic and prepared the stage for the Civil War.

A brief commentary on the vantage position of the Igbo in the Nigerian Army from the mid fifties may be necessary at this juncture. As Oyeweso has pointed out, it was natural for the Igbo to assume a commanding position in the 1966 January coup since they constituted the bulk of middle-ranked officers commissioned between 1954 and 1960. For example, during the period cited above, 60% of the majors in the Nigerian Army were Easterners; 22% were Westerners while the Northern and Mid-Western Regions each had 6%. However, as pointed out above, the pattern of killings during the coup validates what has been referred to as 'Igbo-plot-theory' (Oyeweso, *op. cit.*, p. 92.). However, speaking from ethnic standpoint, the Eastern Nigeria Government offered two reasons as to why Igbo politicians were not killed by the officers who executed the January coup: one, miscarriage of plans and two, the quick suppression of the revolt by the bulk of the Army which was still loyal to the Government (NAI: CWC2/1/1: Nigerian Crisis, 1966, p. 3.).

Advertently or otherwise, Ironsi's appointments tilted too much in favour of the Igbo. For example, apart from surrounding himself with scores of advisers who were almost exclusively of Igbo extraction, Ironsi appointed his friend, Gabriel Onyiuke, as Attorney General of the Federation while another Igbo, Dr. Pius Okadiibo, was appointed Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Finance while also serving as Economic Adviser to the Federal Military Government. Indeed, Ironsi attempted to appoint Professor J.C. Edozien of the University of Lagos as the Vice Chancellor of the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

but was fiercely opposed by the Governor of Northern Nigeria, Lt.-Col. Hassan Katsina who preferred Professor Ishaya Audu. Thus, the lopsided nature of Ironsi's appointments aggravated ethnic suspicions. A well thought-out and fairly balanced appointment policy would have most probably doused ethnic tension and widened the support-base of the Ironsi regime.

Moreover, out of the twenty-one officers promoted from Majors to Lt.-Colonels in April 1966, eighteen were Igbo (*Ibid*, pp. 50 and 55.). Although, it is not unusual for leaders to be swamped by a number of unsolicited advisers from their ethnic groups, Ironsi should have been more sensitive in some of his appointments. To make matters worse, the arrow-head of the January coup, Major Nzeogwu and his colleagues, who were probably seen as villains by many northerners were not dealt with in the way and manner that would have assuaged the anger of many northerners. That the coup planners, who decimated the ranks of the civil and military leadership of the North, still drew their salaries and were seen as heroes by many Igbo as well as the 'royal' treatment Nzeogwu was accorded in prison, exacerbated northern anger.

Azikiwe has argued that Ironsi precipitated the downfall of his regime by refusing to court-martial the 'January Majors' (Nnamdi Azikiwe, *Origins of the Nigerian Civil War* (Lagos: Government Printer, 1969), p. 6.). Since they were described as mutineers, they were liable for trials. However, Ironsi's dilemma should also be appreciated. The two halves of the country perceived Nzeogwu and his colleagues differently: while many southerners (at least members of the UPGA and their sympathizers) saw Nzeogwu and his colleagues as 'saviours'; they were 'villains' to the generality of northerners. Thus, while court-martialing the 'saviours' was tantamount to southern displeasure; sparing the 'murderers and mutineers' was an invitation to northern anger. The latter was what eventually happened.

It was in the rather unfavourable situation described above that the Ironsi regime promulgated Decree 34 on 24 May 1966. The Decree abolished federalism and replaced it with unitarism. According to Ironsi, since the federal system encouraged ethnic chauvinism, Decree 34 was intended "to remove the last vestiges of the intense regionalism of the recent past, and to produce that cohesion in the governmental structure which is so necessary in achieving, and maintaining...national unity" (Quoted from *Daily Times*, 25 May 1966.). On the other hand however, many northerners saw the Decree as an attempt by the Igbo to 'rob' the Hausa/Fulani of whatever benefits they still derived from the Nigerian Federation. It would be recalled that among other things, Decree 34 provided for a national (unified) Civil Service and the abolition of regional civil services. Thus, one important implication of the Decree was that the educationally backward North would have to compete with the better-educated South for appointments into the

Civil Service.

Yet the North was very conscious of its educational shortcomings *viz-a-viz* the South. Indeed, this formed the basis of northern fear of southern domination. In one of such expressions of fear, Alhaji Balewa said

...man at times...is by nature suspicious and it is therefore natural for people of the North...to fear domination...There are 46,000 men and women in the Federal Civil Services (1958), I have not been able to obtain the figures of the number of Northerners in the service but I very much doubt if they even amount to one percent...This will continue to be a cause of disaffection and friction (House of Representatives Debates, Vol. II, 1957-1958 Session, pp. 728ff.)

It should be remembered that as at the time of the expression of the fear quoted above, the Northern Civil Service was the exclusive preserve of Northerners even though professionals were recruited from other regions as necessary. One could then imagine what the reaction of the North was likely to be to any arrangement or policy that could further put Northerners in a disadvantaged position as far as Civil Service appointments were concerned. This coupled with the announcement in May 1966 that Ironsi was going to be in power for three years (See *West Africa*, 28 May 1966.), may have led some Northern leaders to the conclusion that the continued existence and survival of Northern Nigeria depended on an immediate termination of the Ironsi regime.

A number of factors may have influenced Ironsi's preference for unitarism. Obviously, ethnicity was the hallmark of Nigerian politics up till the time Ironsi assumed office. Ironsi may have abolished federalism because of its centrifugal tendencies in the confident expectation that unitarism would provide some centripetal pulls. However, Ironsi and his advisers probably failed to appreciate the fact that the problem was not with federalism as a concept but the fact that unity, an important prerequisite for the survival and sustenance of federalism, was lacking. Unitarism cannot produce centripetal pulls in a nation where the civil populace and the army promote their regions above the nation. It is therefore not surprising that rather than producing centripetal pulls, Decree 34 produced unprecedented East-North centrifugal pulls. It is indeed interesting to note that Ironsi was one of the earliest victims of these centrifugal pulls.

Economic considerations may have also influenced Ironsi's preference for unitarism. Obviously, unification would have been economically cheaper than multiple layers of administration in the country. Indeed, in several newspaper articles, Samuel Aluko, a notable economist, emphasized the cost effectiveness of unification (See, among others, *Nigerian Daily Times* 11 and 13 June, 1966. Professor Aluko (c. 80) re-stated and re-emphasized this position in one of the interview

sessions this author had with him at his residence, No. 30, Owo Avenue, Ijapo Estate, Akure, Ondo State, Nigeria, 15 January 2010.). Finally, another reason for the promulgation of Decree 34 may have been to 'open up' every inch of Nigeria to Nigerians. Apart from the fact that this would enable more Southerners to get employment opportunities in the 'northern frontier', it would promote the economic interests of the ubiquitous Igbo traders.

To worsen the situation, complaints about 'Igbo provocations' were widespread. Northerners filed reports about parties being called by the Igbo to celebrate what they called the 'January Victory'. Photographs showing Major Nzeogwu standing on the late Sardauna of Sokoto were said to be distributed in the open including market places. It was even said that stickers were distributed showing Nzeogwu and saying '*Shi ne maganin ku*' meaning 'he [Nzeogwu] is the one who can knock sense into you [Northerners]' (*Nigerian Tribune* and *Nigerian Citizen*, 23 May 1966.). Furthermore, gramophone records with machine gun sounds were released to remind Northerners of the bullets that felled their leaders in January while derogatory remarks about Northerners were reportedly commonplace, even in Army Barracks.

The crisis that trailed the Unification Decree and Igbo-Hausa/Fulani hostilities climaxed on Saturday May 28 with the arrival of copies of the June edition of *Drum Magazine* in the North. The Magazine contained two provocative articles. The first, written by Nelson Ottah and entitled "*Why Nigeria Exploded*" thoroughly derided northern leaders. The second article entitled "*Sir Ahmadu rose in his shrouds and spoke from the dead*" was written by Coz Idapo. The article featured a cartoon in which the late Premier was asking for forgiveness from Idapo (*Drum Magazine*, June 1966). Ironsi made some feeble attempts at arresting the above situation. For example, on 1 June his regime promulgated Decree 40 which banned the display of provocative pictures or singing of offensive songs. The Decree prescribed three months imprisonment or 50 pounds fine or both for offenders (*West African Pilot*, 2 June 1966. See also *West Africa*, 15 June 1966.). The Decree could however not salvage the situation and on 29 July 1966, the Ironsi regime was overthrown in a coup executed by soldiers of northern Nigeria extraction. Ironsi's successor, Lt.-Col. Yakubu Gowon held the reins of government for nine years thirty months of which was devoted to prosecuting a civil war – another round of instability and violence.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, attempts were made at analyzing the roles of personalities, political parties and policies in the pervasive leadership crisis and political instability that traversed the length and breadth of Nigeria between

1964 and 1966. The paper argued that in most multi-ethnic states, competition for the control of the Structural Frame and the 'system of rewards' is always keen. In the case of Nigeria between 1964 and 1866, two reasons were responsible. One, each of the major ethnic groups felt that the acquisition of instruments of state powers was the best form of insurance against domination by other ethnic groups. Two, in Africa generally and Nigeria in particular, being in government was (and is still) seen as being at the fountain head of wealth. This was the situation in Nigeria between 1964 and 1966. Almost without exception, Nigerian political leaders (and their parties) got locked in a chain of events that subjected the Nigerian democratic process to unprecedented instability and violence. Unfortunately, rather than smoothening some of the rough edges of the pervasive political crises, the military intervention of 15 January, 1966 exacerbated leadership crisis in Nigeria. This was because of the ethnic nature of the January coup. Moreover, the Hausa-Fulani abhorred some of the policies of the Ironsi regime. This led to another military coup on 29 July 1966. However, neither the success of the counter-coup nor the emergence of Lt.-Col. Yakubu Gowon as Head of State could redeem the situation. The challenge of the leadership of Gowon by Lt.-Col. Ojukwu (the Eastern Region military governor), the anti-Igbo pogroms of mid to late 1966 and the eventual secession of the defunct Eastern Region from the Federation of Nigeria set in motion a gruesome 30-month civil war.

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