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Government by incompatibles: A case study of the 1960 - 1964 Nigerian federal government

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In the Western world, governments are put in place for the benefit of the masses. Thus, in the formation of government and the initiation and implementation of policies and programmes, the interests of the masses are paramount and sacrosanct and are consequently safeguarded and protected. One cardinal factor that has made this possible is the fact that governments, in that part of the world, are formed by the compatibles - that is by people and parties that are united in thought, principle and ideology and are unwavering in their commitment to adding value to human life. Conversely, in the third world, particularly in Africa, governments are formed, in most cases, for reasons other than altruistic. Across Africa and particularly in Nigeria, governments are formed, first and foremost, to benefit individuals, ethnic and social groups. Since being in government is generally seen as being at the fountain-head of wealth as well as the best form of insurance against domination by other ethnic or social groups, ethnic groups (and by implication, political parties which, more often than not, are ethnically or regionally based) do everything possible to control or partly control the federal government. Since Nigeria is a multi-ethnic state with no nationally acknowledged political leader; with the exception of the present People's Democratic Party government, Nigeria's federal governments had always been in the form of alliance between political parties. In the formation of these alliances however, principle and ideology have no place whatsoever and since ideological compatibility is what keeps alliance-governments together, virtually all Nigeria's alliance-governments turned out to be governments by incompatibles. This article examines the reasons for and the consequences of the formation of one of such governments by incompatibles in Nigeria.

Key words: Governments by incompatibles, alliance-governments, masses, political parties, Africa, Western World.

INTRODUCTION

On 30 August 1957 an all-party national government was formed in Nigeria with ministers from the Hausa-Fulani Northern People's Congress (NPC); the Igbo-dominated National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons later National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC); the Yoruba Action Group (AG); and the Kamerun National Congress (KNC). On 28 October, 1959, the Governor-General, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, announced the dissolution of the National Government and the 184-member Federal House of Representatives.

The dissolution paved way for the independence election of Saturday, 12 December, 1959. It would be recalled that at the conclusion of that election, the NPC

obtained 148 parliamentary seats in the Federal Parliament against the NCNC's 89 and the AG's 75. Thus, none of the parties had enough parliamentary seats to form the federal government alone.

Although, the success or failure of democracy is not determined by the number of ethnic groups in a country; a stable and viable democratic process requires a situation in which the major political parties recruit supporters from many segments of the population. Where and when the supporters of different political parties correspond too closely to basic social, tribal, linguistic or ethnic divisions, sustaining the democratic process becomes a Herculean task and the formation of alliances

(which are often rootless and devoid of ideological convictions) become inevitable. The most cursory glance at the history of Nigeria reveals that from about 1951 (the year full party politics began in Nigeria), ethnicity became the hallmark of Nigerian politics. This prevented the emergence of nationally acknowledged political leaders. According to Awolowo (1960: 299) "our struggles for independence have produced no single national hero who is held in reference and affection by the vast majority of the people of Nigeria". The consequence of the above was the formation of exclusive alliances or governments by incompatibles.

GOVERNMENT BY INCOMPATIBLES: THE CASE OF THE NIGERIAN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, 1960-1964

After a nation-wide voters registration exercise conducted by the Mr. R. M. Wraith-led Electoral Commission and electioneering campaigns marked by unprecedented violence, thuggery and ethnic chauvinism, on 12 December, 1959, about 7,185,555 Nigerian voters went to the polls to elect their independence leaders (West Africa: 19 December, 1959). The election was keenly contested: there were about 954 candidates for the 312 seats in the Federal House of Representatives. The election was conducted on the basis of universal adult suffrage from single-member constituencies in both the Eastern and Western Regions and the Federal Capital of Lagos, but on the basis of adult male suffrage in the Northern Region.

The 1959 election, as Okadigbo (1983: 529) has rightly observed, was "an engagement in tribalism bordering on ethnic chauvinism". While the NPC was bent on ensuring that a Northern became the first Prime Minister of a free Nigeria; the NCNC wanted an Igbo man installed as Prime Minister at the conclusion of the election while the AG felt that for the newly independent country to justify its independence, make rapid economic and social-political progress and earn the respect of other nations, a Yoruba man should head the government that would obtain independence for the country on 1 October, 1960. About sixteen political parties contested the election, but the major parties and their symbols are the Action Group (palm tree); the NCNC (cook); the NPC (hoe); the DPNC (Democratic Party of Nigeria and the Cameroons, elephant) and the NEPU (Northern Elements Progressive Union, star) (West Africa: 21 November, 1959).

All the parties, particularly the big three were unabashed in expressing their determination and resolve to win the election. In a presidential address presented at the fourth Annual Congress of the Action Group in Calabar, Chief Awolowo said:

"I want it to be understood that we in the Action Group and our allies have every good reason to be confident in the providence of God and that we shall

emerge triumphant over all other political parties from the 1959 federal election, and that by the grace of God, we shall be installed in power at the center ...on the attainment of independence by the Federation of Nigeria in 1960 (Nigerian Daily Times: 1 May 1958)".

While the NPC leader, Sir. Ahmadu Bello declared that his party was going to win the election, the National President of the NCNC, Dr. Azikiwe said he was "very optimistic" that his party would win. It was with this strong and unshaken confidence in their electoral victory that the parties approached Election Day.

In all, the AG fielded the largest number of candidates: it fielded candidates for the 3 seats in the federal capital of Lagos and all the 62 seats in the Western Region as well as for all the 174 seats in the Northern Region. It fielded 43 candidates in the Eastern Region. In all, the party fielded 282 candidates (Ibid: 11 December, 1959). The NPC fielded 172 candidates: 1 in Lagos, 1 in the West, none in the East and 170 in the North. The NCNC fielded 143 candidates: 3 in Lagos, 62 in the West, 73 in the East and 5 in the North. The NEPU fielded 160 candidates in the North and none in the other regions while the DPNC fielded 24 candidates in the East and none in the other regions. Other small parties like UMBC (United Middle Belt Congress, an ally of the AG); the Niger Delta Congress (NDC), an ally of the NPC and the National Emancipation League (NEL) also fielded candidates (ibid). Both Chief Awolowo and Dr. Azikiwe gave up their positions as regional premiers and stood for election to the Federal Parliament, but the NPC leader, Ahmadu Bello, who was often accused, rightly or wrongly, of giving priority to and emphasising the Northern Region over the Nigerian nation, decided to stay on as the Premier of the Northern Region and allowed his deputy, Alhaji Tafawa Balawa, to continue to lead the NPC at the federal level.

This election was crucial to the existence and survival of the parties, particularly the AG and the NPC, after independence. The hostilities and the hatred both parties exhibited towards each other were deadly. The AG knew that it would be practically impossible for it to exist as an independent, effective and coercive party in an independent Nigeria ruled by the NPC (ibid: 2 May, 1958). On the other hand, the NPC knew too well that the North would be the first recipient of any political sledge hammer falling from an AG-controlled federal government. The NCNC also had its own fear: while the NCNC was "a good friend" (Schwarz. 1965: 109) of the NPC, it was a mortal foe of the AG. This was probably why the NCNC insisted that the AG must be prevented from winning the election, charging that if it did, it would systematically "destroy all political opposition" (Nigerian Daily Service: 6 June, 1959). From the foregoing, it is obvious that each of the major parties hinged its survival or extinction in an independent Nigeria on the outcome of the 1959

elections.

Elections were held for 312 seats in the Federal House of Representatives. The following results were announced on 14 December, 1959: 'NCNC 78; AG 53; NPC 67; NEPU 5; Independents 10 with 99 to be declared (Daily Times: 14 December, 1959). On 16 December, Alhaji Balewa was re-appointed Prime Minister his party having won 135 seats; AG 66 seats and NCNC 89 seats (ibid). In all, the NPC won 148 seats. It won 134 of these by itself in the Northern Region; to these were added 14 allies and independents who declared for the NPC after the elections. The NCNC-NEPU alliance emerged with 89 seats - 56 came from the East; 21 from the West; 2 from the Lagos and 8 from the North. The AG and its allies obtained 75 seats: 35 from the West; 1 from Lagos; 25 from the North and 14 from the East.

It must be noted that even though the NPC obtained the largest number of parliamentary seats, the NCNC-NEPU alliance received the largest number of votes cast: it received 2,592,629 votes representing 36.1% of votes cast; the NPC obtained 2,027,194 votes, about 28.2% of total votes cast while the AG got 1, 98,839 votes representing about 27.6% of the total votes cast (Sklar, 1963: 36).

The most cursory glance at the above results reveals the ethnic nature of Nigerian politics, particularly the region nature of the NPC. Of all the 134 seats and 2,027,194 votes it won by itself, all the seats and all but 33,159 of the votes came from the North (Schwarz: op. cit). In the Northern Region, in an 89.2% polling, the NPC won 60.8% of the votes cast and 77% of the seats. The AG obtained 17.3% of the total votes cast and 11.3% of the seats while the NCNC-NEPU alliance received 16.1% and 4.6% of votes and parliamentary seats respectively (Mackintosh, 1966: 205). In the East, the trend was the same. The NCNC won all the 51 of the predominantly Igbo seats. In a 74.4% polling, the NCNC got 64.6% of the votes and 79.4% of the seats. The AG obtained 23.0% and 19.1% of the votes and seats respectively (ibid). In the West, in a 71.3% polling, the AG won 49.6% of the votes and 53.2 of the seats; the NCNC got 40.3 and 33.8% of the votes and the seats respectively. Of all the parties, only the AG obtained a majority of its seats (39 out of 75) outside the region of its traditional strength (that is the Western Region), and the reason for this is not far-fetched: the AG got sizable support in the North and East from minority groups who expressed strong fear and resentment of the dominant parties in their regions. The AG promised these ethnic groups their own region/state if voted into power. Thus, it was from these aggrieved ethnic minorities that the AG got the bulk of its votes in the other regions and not from the dominant ethnic groups in these regions. All these considerations probably informed Okadigbo's (op. cit: 529) conclusion that the 1959 election was an engagement in tribalism (Tables 1 and 2).

The NPC having demonstrated its electoral superiority over the other political parties, the last colonial Governor-General, Sir James Robertson, called on the incumbent Prime Minister and NPC Deputy Leader, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, to form the independence government. But the NPC alone could not form the government because it did not have what Dr. Okpara called "the magical fifty-one percent"; that is, the NPC did not have enough parliamentary seats to form the government alone (Offodile, 1980: 33). This outcome was generally expected. For example, months before the elections were held, the Drum Magazine wrote "indication are that none of Nigeria's three major political parties will, on its own, form the 1960 government of the federation" (Dyson, 1988: 116). Indeed long before the elections were conducted, the NPC and the NCNC appeared to have formed an informal alliance to the effect that both parties would form a coalition government at the conclusion of the elections (Daily Times: 2 May 1958; 4 June 1958 and 20 August 1959). This was perhaps why, four days to the elections, Chief Awolowo said "any vote cast for the NEPU was a vote for the NCNC, and a vote for the NCNC was a vote for the NPC" (ibid: 8 December, 1959).

On 16 December, Sir Ahmadu Bello and Alhaji Abubakar Balewa held talks at Kaduna with Dr. Azikiwe and Okpara on the possibility and terms of a coalition between the NPC and the NCNC. Consequently, on 20 December, they informed Governor-General Robertson that they had agreed to form a coalition government. Thereafter, Robertson approved a sixteen-member cabinet proposed by Balewa. The NPC being the senior partner of the coalition, Alhaji Abubakar became Prime Minister while the NCNC National President, Dr. Azikiwe, became the President of the 44-member Senate where he waited in the wings to succeed Sir Robertson as the first indigenous Governor-General of Nigeria (West African Pilot: 12 January, 1960; Offodile: 35

This alliance-government was widely expected. As pointed out above, long before the elections were held, an informal alliance already existed between the NPC and the NCNC. It was therefore widely expected that these parties would form a coalition government at the conclusion of the elections. To cite one instance: on 2 June, 1958, Dr. Azikiwe paid an official visit to Sir Ahmadu Bello in Kaduna. The two men held talks on a number of issues. At the Kaduna airport where Dr. Azikiwe was to board to Enugu-bound aircraft, reporters asked him (Azikiwe) if he had an NCNC-NPC alliance pact parked in his brief case, Dr. Azikiwe replied "the brief case is with my orderly and I do not know if it is packed in it or not" (Daily Times: 4 June, 1959). Indeed, about three months to the 1959 elections, Dr. Azikiwe declared that the NPC and NCNC "would form a coalition government as they did in 1954" (ibid: 20 August 1959). Even though the NPC-NCNC alliance was generally expected, it was a strange one: it brought together two political parties with diametrically opposed ideology, worldview, structure and

Table 1. Results of the 1959 federal elections.

Region	Political party	Total vote received	Percentage of total vote (%)	Number of seats won
East	NCNC-NEPU	1,246,984	64.6	58
	AG	445,114	23.1	14
	NDC (Niger Delta Congress, NPC ally)	237,626	12.3	1
West	AG	933,680	49.5	33
	NCNC-NEPU	758,462	40.2	21
	NPC	32,960	1.7	-
	Small parties and Independents, <i>Mabolaje</i> of Ibadan Independents	162,107	8.6	7
North	NPC	1,994,045	61.2	134
	AG	559,875	17.2	25
	NCNC-NEPU	525,575	16.5	8
	Small parties and Independents	179,022	5.5	
	Igbira Tribal Union (NPC ally)			1
	Independents (declared for N)			6
Lagos	NCNC-NEPU	61,608	55.9	2
	AG	48,137	43.8	1
	NPC and small parties	189	0.2	-
	Independents	138	0.1	-

Table 2. Grand totals.

Party	Votes	Percentage	Seats
NPC	2,027,194	28.2	134
NCNC-NEPU	2,592,629	36.1	89
AG	1,986,839	27.6	73
Others	578,893	8.1	
		Total	312

Sklar, 36-37. See also West Africa, 26 December 1959; Phillips, 1964: 23 and Mackintosh 194-200.

programme; consequently, its hallmark was acrimony and intrigue. A brief examination of some of the issues and policies on which the alliance partners clashed is apposite.

Before and after the 1959 federal elections, the NPC and the NCNC expressed opposing views on the possibility and desirability of welding (West) African states into a single political entity. The leadership of the NPC opposed the creation of a West African States Union and/or a United States of Africa. The party argued that the creation of a West African States Union was “yet too premature” (ibid: 19 January, 1960) and that Nigeria’s internal problems could neither be solved by “a West African Union nor by pan-Africanism” (ibid: 31 January, 1960). At a press conference in Lome, (Togo), the Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar, described the creation of a United States of Africa as “impracticable” (ibid: 11 July, 1960). On the other hand, the NCNC argued that the creation of

a United States of Africa was feasible, imperative, and non-negotiable. The party argued that the welding of all African states into a single political entity would solve many of the problems being encountered by many African states. Hence, Dr. Okpara, who succeeded Dr. Azikiwe as the Premier of Eastern Region and National President of the NCNC, advocated the creation of a United States of Africa because “in such a union lies the future of Africa” (ibid: 5 July, 1960). In an address he delivered as Governor-General in London in August 1961, Dr. Azikiwe insisted that:

“An African federation or confederation, either on a regional or continental basis, has many blessings for the continent of Africa and its inhabitants. Politically, it will raise the prestige of African States in the councils of the world; it will make Africa a bastion of democracy, and it will revive the stature of man by

guaranteeing to African citizens the fundamental rights of man. From a military point of view, such a concert of States will protect the people of Africa not only from external aggression and internal commotion, but also it would safeguard the whole of Africa by a system of collective security. Economically, by abrogating discriminatory tariffs, we create a free trade area, over the entire continent and thereby expand the economies of all African countries involved, thereby raising living standards and ensuring economic security for African workers. Socially, it will restore the dignity of the human being in Africa (Minogue and Molloy, 1974: 218)".

Indeed, in a New Year Message, Dr. Azikiwe called for the "integration of African countries culturally, technically, economically and politically" (Daily Times: 1 January, 1962). The NCNC was however not unaware of the fact that pan-Africanism was to the NPC what the red rag is to a bull. This obviously made Dr. Okpara to later mellow towards the view of its alliance partner. At a press conference, Dr. Okpara declared that "the voyage to African union will be made at the pace of the slowest boat" (ibid: 1 January, 1962). Comparing the NPC's attitude to the 1953 self-government motion with its position on the creation of a United States of Africa, Dr. Okpara said "if we had not waited patiently for the North to be ready, we could not have achieved freedom as a united Nigeria". Probably to once again allow the North 'to be ready', Dr. Okpara suggested a three-stage plan for the creation of a United States of Africa. One, the division of the continent into five regions viz: Northern, Eastern, Central, Southern and Western Africa; two, the formation of these regions into a political federation; and three, the building of the regional federations into an African Federation. It must be stressed however, that the NCNC may have mellowed towards the NPC's view, but the party did not abandon its strong belief in and support for the formation of a United States of Africa. If anything, the party emphasised the importance of such a supra-national union without wavering. The party argued that if the obnoxious divisions forced on the peoples of Africa by the imperial powers were to be abolished without bloodshed; if Africa's enormous natural and human resources were to be exploited for the benefit of her peoples; if colonialism and racial intolerance were to end in Africa and if Africa's standard of living must match that of other continents, then "African union is imperative" (ibid). Another crucial issue on which the alliance partners disagreed was the policy of alignment and non-alignment. While the NPC favoured the former, the NCNC advocated the latter. The NPC rejected non-alignment and urged the country not to join the Non-Aligned Movement. The party argued that the non-aligned group was entangled in a contradiction because "where a neutral country joins a neutral bloc, it ceases to be neutral" (Asobie, 1986: 123). Thus, the NPC-dominated

federal government boycotted both the preparatory conference of the Non-Aligned Movement held in Cairo in June, 1961 and the Non-Aligned Conference in Belgrade in September of the same year. The NPC favoured and advocated outright alignment with the Western bloc, particularly Britain. On the other hand, the NCNC favoured a dynamic non-aligned policy. The party said that any alliance with the western bloc after 1 October, 1960 was unrealistic and a betrayal of thousands of Nigerians who expected Nigeria to give the lead in African affairs (West African Pilot: 31 March, 1961). When it became obvious that the NPC was bent on aligning the country with the Western bloc, its alliance partner chided it and called on it to provide scholarship facilities for Nigerian students studying in the Soviet Union (Daily Times: 9 October, 1961).

From the above, it is clear that the policies of the NPC-NCNC federal government were not implemented with any reasonable degree of agreement and unanimity. Even though the NPC dominated the government because it had the largest number of parliamentary seats in the Federal Parliament, the NCNC did not fail to voice its opposition to some of the policies of the federal government that were unacceptable to it. This is not surprising given the fact that the ideology and orientation of the alliance partners were diametrically opposed to each other – the most important reason that brought them together was their common hostility to the AG. Indeed, the alliance was nothing more than a personification of strain and stress.

In 1962, the Federal Minister of Finance, Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh (NCNC) asked for financial aid from Israel. The NPC leader, Sir Ahmadu Bello, denounced Chief Okotie-Eboh and distanced himself and his party from any form of aid from Israel. In a public statement, Ahmadu Bello said

"The announcement on the N.B.C. [Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation] this morning that the Nigerian Economic Mission led by Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh has concluded some financial agreements with the Israeli Government has come to us as a surprise".

Though, the agreements reached are subject to Government's ratification, the Government of Northern Nigeria wishes to disassociate itself from any acceptance of aid in any way from the Israeli Government ...We do not want, in any way, the Israeli Government to participate in any of our development programme (Nigerian Citizen: 20 October, 1962).

However, the Finance Minister mustered all the courage and influence at his disposal to ensure that the federal government took the loan despite the adoption of a resolution against it in the NPC-controlled Northern House of Assembly. It must be added however, that the Federal Government took the loan because the position

of Sir Ahmadu Bello on Israel conflicted with that of the Prime Minister: While the former insisted on keeping Israel at an arm's length diplomatically, the latter felt that there was no harm in Nigeria's diplomatic and bilateral relationship with Israel. Indeed, Sir Ahmadu Bello declared that his party and government did not recognize Israel while Alhaji Balewa insisted that "Israel does exist and we recognize it" (Sklar, op cit: 510-511).

Furthermore, after the Lagos Town Council elections in 1963, the NPC accused the NCNC of being responsible for its (NPC's) poor showing in the election. Of the 42 seats at stake in the election, the AG won 27; the NCNC 15 while the NPC did not win any seats. The NPC accused the NCNC of "playing butter and bread politics" (Daily Times: 17 October, 1962). The party charged that even though its alliance partner claimed to be a national party, it still "indulged in tribal politics.

The alliance partners fought over yet another by election. Following the appointment of Chief Oweh (NCNC) as Nigerian Ambassador to Guinea, the Urhobo West seat in the Federal House of Representatives became vacant. In 1959, Oweh polled 37,310 votes to defeat the AG's candidate with 18,468 votes (Ojiako, 1981: 165). The NCNC campaign team for the by election was led by Chief Osadebay while that of the Mid-West People's Congress (MPC, ally of the NPC) was led by an NPC federal minister. The MPC candidate, A.E.K. Ukueku defeated J. Ode of the NCNC. The NCNC blamed the loss of the election on "the introduction of dirty tribal politics by the leaders of the NPC", an allegation the latter dismissed as "provocative and thoughtless" (ibid).

In 1962, Britain resumed its nuclear tests in sub-Saharan Africa. Sir Abubakar supported and justified the British action while denouncing that of the Soviet Union (on the same subject) a year before. The NCNC criticised the Prime Minister and accused him of aligning with the West even when its policies and actions were detrimental to African interest. Moreover, the NCNC accused Sir Ahmadu Bello of "making statements which tend to disrupt the unity of Nigeria" (Daily Times: 14 March 1962) and accused the Northern Regional Government of making Northern Nigeria a hide-out for foreigners who were bent on ensuring the disintegration of the country. Almost at the same time as the above accusations were being levied, the NCNC National Executive Committee criticised the Northern Regional Government for its failure to provide education for the millions of children in the Northern Region who "were hungry for knowledge" (ibid: 28 March, 1962) and chided it for citing the Ahmadu Bello University in what it called the "hot desert of Zaria" instead of Jos where the climate was good for learning.

Following the Action Group's crisis and the Federal Government's sack of the AG-controlled Western Regional Government and the appointment of Dr. Majekodunmi as the Administrator of the region in 1962, the NCNC-controlled Eastern Regional Government

declared that it would not recognise the new government in the Western Region. Again, following insinuations that the NPC was planning to return Chief Akintola and his United Peoples Party (UPP) to power in the Western Region at the end of the Emergency Administration, the NCNC declared that it was not in favour of and would not support any solution short of a general election in Western Nigeria at the end of the Emergency Administration. The above instances and others probably led Gambari (op. cit: 10) to the conclusion that the attitude of many NCNC leaders was more appropriate to that of an opposition than a government party. This rubbishes the claim by the 'Drum Magazine' that the NCNC did everything possible to do nothing that could be interpreted by its partner as an unfriendly act. On the contrary, the NCNC did so many things its alliance partner interpreted as unfriendly acts. As Ojukwu (1989: 28) has rightly observed "...the departing imperialists handed over the country to a committee of incompatibles, composed of conservatives on the one hand and pan-Nigeria nationalists and petit-bourgeois radical socialists on the other". This contradiction in composition led to contradiction in world view and disposition.

In September, 1964, two prominent members of Chief Akintola's NNDP – Chief Ayo Rosiji and Chief Adisa Akinloye – were incorporated into the federal cabinet without the prior knowledge of the NCNC. The AG dismissed the new appointments as "a most grievous rape on democracy" while the NCNC poured unrestrained invectives on the Prime Minister for making new appointments into the Federal cabinet without its knowledge and worst still on the eve of its dissolution. Obviously, the NPC resented the criticism often levied against it by its alliance partner. This probably made the NPC to conclude that all southern politicians, irrespective of party affiliations, detested the northerners and the NPC.

The above, among other reasons, probably informed the moving of the motion that called for the termination of the appointments of all southerners in the public service of the Northern Region. Indeed, during the budget debate of the Northern House of Assembly in March, 1964, it was decided that land should not be leased to Igbo residents in Northern Nigeria and that their existing properties should be confiscated. The assembly also directed that in filling vacant government posts, preference should be given to Northerners, then expatriates and only lastly to Southerners (Richard, 1991: 119). On its part, the NCNC discovered that it could not operate on the same political wavelength with the NPC. This informed the NCNC's decision to end its strife with the AG so as to make future political cooperation between the two southern parties possible. The party declared that it desired "an end to the strife between ourselves and the Action Group". Even though this declaration did not bring an immediate end to NCNC-AG hostilities, it obviously paved the way for the formation of

an alliance between the two parties for the 1964 federal elections. The last straw that broke the back of the camel of the NPC-NCNC alliance was census issue. In 1963, a census was taken to, among other reasons, enable the Electoral Commission allocate parliamentary seats to the regions (on the basis of their populations) for the 1964 federal elections. The 1963 population census had a very great political consequence for the South, particularly the NCNC since the only hope of wresting power constitutionally from the North was in showing that the combined population of the East, West, Mid-West and Lagos exceeded that of the North. Having been a junior partner in an alliance whose hallmark was acrimony, the NCNC particularly favoured a decrease in the population of the North and an increase in that of the East as this would break 'Northern political tyranny' and ensure it (NCNC) a better place in the play of federal politics.

Having cancelled the 1962 census figures because of widespread disagreement, on 6 September, 1963, the Federal Government announced that a new head count would be held between 5 and 8th November, 1963 and that the exercise would cost four million naira. In an attempt to prevent a repeat of some of the misdemeanours that characterised the 1962 census exercise, some measures were introduced. One, a verification team of over six thousand inspectors was sent to each region by the other regions. Two, the United Nations Advisory Team was on ground to monitor the exercise. Three, enumerators were mandated to count only physically present persons. In 1962, enumerators were instructed to "try to see every individual to satisfy themselves that they actually exist" (Ojiako: 153). In 1963 however, everyone must be seen including children. There was a great deal of controversy whether this rule should apply to Northern women in pudah. This was followed by the Eastern Region's Government declaration that it would send "about 2,000 trained educated and matured women inspectors to the North to help count women in pudah in the areas allocated to the East for sampling".

The results of the 1963 head count were announced in an interim report by the Census Board on 24 February, 1963. Once again, the figures showed that the population of the North was more than that of the rest of the Federation combined (Northern Region: 29,777,986; Eastern Region: 12,388,646; Western Region: 10,278,500; Mid-Western Region: 2,533,337; Lagos: 675,352). The re-run census figures provoked immediate reactions. The students of the University of Ibadan boycotted classes and set out for Lagos in lorries shouting "no, no". They were however, turned back by the police at Maryland, about ten kilometres to the capital. As should be expected, Dr. Okpara rejected the figures. On 28 February, he announced his government's "complete rejection" of the census figures alleging "inflation...of such astronomical proportions that the figures obtained, taken as a whole, are worse than

useless" (West African Pilot: 29 February, 1964). In an editorial, the Nigerian Tribune (27 February, 1964) described the results of the census as a "mixture of surprise and riddle" while the Premier of the Mid-Western Region, Chief Dennis Osadebay, dismissed the figures as "the most stupendous joke of our age" (West African Pilot, 11 March, 1964). Dr. Okpara and Chief Osadebay accused Northern leaders of perpetrating innumerable irregularities in the conduct of the headcount so as to keep the South in perpetual political slavery. Indeed, Dr. Okpara instituted a law suit to invalidate the census figures and threatened to pull Eastern Nigeria out of the Federation. But, in May 1964, at the National Economic Council meeting, Osadebay deserted Dr. Okpara by announcing his acceptance of the disputed census figures since, according to him, "...legally and constitutionally, it is the prerogative of the Prime Minister to accept or reject the figures" but Dr. Okpara insisted that he "would not sink any wrong arithmetic on the figures" (Daily Express: 9 May, 1964).

Chief Osadebay may have accepted the census figures in an attempt to ensure the continuation of his government. It would be recalled that in 1964, Chief Osadebay told the Mid-West Parliament that there were intelligence reports indicating that some people were planning the overthrow of his government. Even though their names were not directly mentioned, Okotie-Eboh and Omo Osagie said that their "names have been linked by innuendos and insinuations with the alleged plot to unseat the Osadebay Government" (ibid: 19 April, 1964). Given the generally pro-NPC attitude of Chief Okotie-Eboh and his closeness to the Prime Minister, Osadebay probably thought that if he (Okotie-Eboh) wanted to, he could work against his (Osadebay's) government. The latter probably thought that the best he could do in the circumstance was to align with Okotie-Eboh and consequently with the Prime Minister; and the best way to do this was by accepting the disputed census figures its political, social and economic implications for the young region notwithstanding thus demonstrating very clearly that in Nigeria the interests of the political elite take precedence over that of the citizenry.

The AG-controlled Lagos City Town Council also rejected the census figures while the Mid-West Democratic Front, an ally of the NPC in the Mid-Western election of 1963 did not only reject the figures but called for the declaration of a state of emergency throughout the Federation. His position being a supposedly non-partisan one, in a neither here nor there reaction, Dr. Azikiwe cautioned that since census was a "delicate and explosive issue", it must be handled with care and restraint. He however, pointed out that if the grave allegations levied against the Prime Minister were not carefully handled they "might plunge the nation into disaster" (WAP: 25 February, 1964). For daring to confront the Prime Minister and for not publicly accepting the census figures, Alhaji Ahman Galadima Pategi,

Northern Nigeria Minister of Agriculture, poured unrestrained invectives on the President. Pategi dismissed Dr. Azikiwe as an "unpardonable lapse" who lost his seat in the Eastern House of Assembly in his bid to become Prime Minister (WAP, Daily Times and Nigerian Citizen: 13 March, 1964). In a strongly-worded telegram reply to Pategi's tirades, Dr. Azikiwe debunked Pategi's claims and argued that he was elected to the Federal House of Representatives before he resigned his membership of the Eastern House of Assembly to become President of Senate in consonance with the alliance agreement between his party and the NPC. He said Chief Awolowo offered him (Azikiwe) the position of Prime Minister in an NCNC-AG alliance but declined because he thought that "an NCNC/NPC coalition would bring an element of stability" and that "history will judge if I erred on the side of optimism".

The Premier of the Western Region, Ladoke Akintola, accepted the census figures without any reservations. This should be expected given his generally pro-North posture. Of course, it was obvious that long before the census crisis, an informal alliance existed between Chief Akintola and NPC leaders. Obviously, the leadership of the NPC saw Chief Awolowo as a die-hard critic of Northern leaders. The NPC therefore wanted someone who would not threaten the existence of the 'monolithic North' as one indivisible entity; someone who would not attack the feudal oligarchy in the North; who would neither insist on the creation of the Middle Belt State nor support Northern minorities against 'constituted authorities' and someone who would not criticize but kowtow to them. The NPC probably found all these 'qualities' in Chief Akintola. The 1962 crisis and the treason trial that followed presented the NPC the opportunity to cripple the Action Group and temporarily liquidate Chief Awolowo politically. The causes of the crisis have been analysed by scholars and they need not delay us here. In an attempt to penetrate Western Nigeria, the NPC supported Chief Akintola against his erstwhile boss just as Chief Awolowo had penetrated Northern Nigeria by supporting some minorities' leaders, notably Ibrahim Immam and J.S. Tarka. Knowing full well that an Akintola government in Western Nigeria was far better for the NPC and Northern Nigeria than an Awolowo-man administration, Sir Ahmadu Bello called on "all men of good will throughout Nigeria, particularly the people of Western Nigeria" to rally round Chief Akintola (Daily Times: 24 May, 1962).

At the peak of the Awolowo-Akintola feud, there were insinuations that the Prime Minister was planning the reinstatement of Chief Akintola as the Premier of Western Nigeria at the end of the Emergency Administration. Although, Alhaji Balewa vehemently denied this, Sir Ahmadu Bello declared that the possibility of returning Chief Akintola as Premier at the end of the emergency could not be ruled out. Eventually, Chief Akintola was reinstated as Western Premier on 31 December 1962.

Since Chief Akintola owed his premiership to the goodwill of Northern leaders, why and how would he not accept the results of the census exercise conducted and supervised by his sovereigns? Indeed, even if the figures allocated to Western Nigeria were one thirds of what was allocated to the region, Chief Akintola would still have probably accepted them; since, in Nigeria, the welfare and wishes of the masses had almost always been sacrificed on the altar of the interest of the political class. Africa, as Tordoff has pointed out, "have had rulers who are paranoid, self-seeking and interested in self-enrichment" (Tordoff, 1984: 310). Indeed, in one of his contributions to the debates in the House of Representatives, Fani Kayode said "we have nothing on the Floor of this House but pocket politics" (House of Representatives Debates: 1958-1959 session cmd. 1797: 25).

In accepting the 1963 census figures, Chief Akintola said "it would be well-nigh impossible to improve on the arrangement made for the 1963 census. The figures obtained have been subjected to rigorous checks and were accepted after the most careful scrutiny" (WAP: 26 February, 1964). Chief Akintola probably knew that there were several ways the 1963 head count could have been improved upon, he kowtowed to the NPC and accepted the figures allocated to his region not because they were subjected to any "rigorous checks", but because he felt that his premiership could be on the line should he oppose the NPC on the census issue. On his part, the Prime Minister insisted on the floor of the House of Representatives that his "acceptance and publication of the census figures is final".

In one of his works, Bankole (1976: 64) lists some of the measures that can be taken to "curb the excessive use and abuse of power" by the government of the day to include an independent judiciary, freedom of the mass media and freedom to disagree. However, generally, Nigerian (African) brand of democracy is a kind of democracy that does not brook disagreement or opposition because whoever holds or canvasses any view different from those held by the parties or people in government is seen as a felon. It is therefore not surprising that Balewa issued an ultimatum to NCNC ministers requesting them to either publicly accept the census figures and continue to part-control the federal government or reject them and resign. It would be recalled that following the formation of the NNDP, Chief Akintola issued an ultimatum to all political office holders in Western Nigeria to either join his party or resign their appointments. While those who had neither ideology nor principle scrambled to join Chief Akintola's party, Adeoye Adisa (NCNC), Home Affairs Minister and three corporation chairmen resigned their appointments rather than join Chief Akintola's NNDP. According to Adisa, "men of integrity and honour neither sacrifice their conscience and reputation nor desert their political party in order to remain in office".

Table 3. 1963 census final figures.

Region	1962 census figures	1963 figures (preliminary)	1963 figures (final)
Northern region	22.5 m	29,777,986	29,758,875
Eastern region	12.3 m	12,388,646	12,394,462
Western region	10.5	10,278,500	10,265,846
Mid-Western region	-----	2,533,337	2,535,839
Lagos	0.8 m	675,352	665,246

To demonstrate that he and his party had crossed the Rubicon as far as the 1963 census figures were concerned, Sir Ahmadu Bello threatened that he and his party “were ready for a complete showdown” with the NCNC (Nigerian Citizen: 3 March, 1964). He said even though it was neither the desire nor the policy of the NPC to dominate anyone “my people, my government and my party are fully prepared at any hour of the day for any eventuality and would meet any challenge” and threatened that “if ...unfair and baseless attacks persist against us, we shall be forced to break an electoral truce which I have maintained and shall retaliate fearlessly and in a manner in which we are attacked” (ibid).

On 29 August, 1964, the Federal Minister of Information published the 1963 census final figures. The figures gave Eastern and Mid-Western Nigeria an increase of 5,816 and 2,502 respectively while Northern and Western Nigeria got a decrease of 19,111 and 12,654 respectively (Nigerian Citizen, WAP and Daily Times, 30 August, 1964)(Table 3).

The question one would want to ask is: was it a mere coincidence that only the two regions whose premiers rejected the preliminary census figures got increments while the other two whose premiers accepted the figures without reservations had their initial figures slightly reviewed downwards? Obviously, this was more than a mere coincidence. Probably, the figures for the Western Region would also have been increased had Chief Akintola rejected the preliminary figures, but as far as he was concerned, supporting the NPC leaders so as to retain his premiership was far more important than whatever benefits that would have accrued to the Western Region as a result of favourable head count.

The wide spread furore generated over the census issue was a consequence of the fact that democracy is a game of number; the higher the population of an ethnic group or tribe, the better its chances in the scheme of things. Consequently, in Nigeria, census is more of a political exercise than a socio-economic tool. In the first place, the number of electoral constituencies and parliamentary seats allocated to each region was determined primarily by demographical data. Secondly, politics, in the Nigerian context, is not merely the acquisition of political power but a non negotiable insurance against domination by other ethnic groups. Thirdly, politics is a means of asserting personal or group pre-eminence as well as the primary means of

distributing patronage. Given the above therefore, it should not be surprising that Nigerians went to great lengths to distort their demographical data in 1962-1963. A Mid-West Commissioner for Information, Chief Utomi, gave a summary of the socio-economic aspect of the importance of census in Nigeria. According to him “if ...Government knows how many children, youths, men and women that are in the Region, it will be in a better position to determine how many schools will be provided; or how many factories will be set up in various areas of the Region and of what type they should be”. But, as pointed out above, the political significance of head count in Nigeria far overshadows its socio-economic importance.

The census dispute was followed by inter-regional rivalry and then by virulent inter-tribal recriminations which in turn resulted in the breakdown of the NPC-NCNC federal government. Although, it was on 8 December, 1964 that Parliament was officially dissolved, the NPC-NCNC federal government had hit the rocks long before this date. Indeed, by mid-1964, “the NCNC... had come to feel that the decision of December, 1959 to go into coalition at the federal level with the NPC had been a mistake” (Post and Vickers, 1973: 101). And on 1 December, 1964 Dr. Okpara dismissed the NPC-NCNC Government as “a daft government without a sense of purpose” (Daily Express: 1 December, 1964). Throughout the period the NPC-NCNC federal government lasted, the latter party behaved more like an opposition than a government party. The alliance partners continually launched denigrating attacks on each other with the NCNC on the offensive and its partner on the defensive most of the time. Indeed, Sir Ahmadu Bello dismissed NCNC leaders as “double-faced and untrustworthy” steeped in “ambivalence and duplicity” so that “no descent men” could trust them anymore. He said the NCNC “...was never known to have acted with honour or to keep promises”.

CONCLUSION

In Nigeria, as in most other African and underdeveloped countries, alliances of political parties have tended to be too shifting, motivated largely by political expediency and the desire on the part of individuals, ethnic and other social groups to control or part-control the ‘system of

rewards' and thereby have unhindered access to what they regard as their share of the so-called 'national cake'. Since the acquisition of political power was generally seen as the best form of insurance against domination by other ethnic groups, the various political parties, many of which were associated with distinct ethnic groups, were ready to turn a blind eye on their ideologies (where they existed) and form alliances with other parties in so far as this made it possible for them to control the structural frame and the system of rewards.

This was the case with the 1960-1964 NPC-NCNC alliance government. The alliance was not anchored on ideological compatibility; hence, its hallmark was acrimony. Although, the alliance may have served the useful purpose of ensuring the unity of the Federation and preventing the emergence of a stark and debilitating North-South parliamentary confrontation; it was an "enforced association of incompatibles". It is therefore not surprising that it foundered over irredeemable contradictions.

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