



**THE
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**Politics and Governance
in a Conglomerate Nation, 1977-2017**

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PART ONE

VI. Democratization under Military Tutelage: Crisis and Consensus in the Nigerian 1979 Elections

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The building of the Second Republic required a military government, which had been deeply engaged in shaping the Federation over almost fifteen years, performing as an impartial umpire in the electoral choice of its successors. This complex process is dissected in this article together with an analysis of the relative strengths of the five competing parties and their electoral performance. The significant role of personalities, persistent ethnic and other sectional constituencies, and the re-emergence of familiar party alliances, showed how much the civilian politicians had to contend with after a long period of exclusion from power.

Political regimes and systems in Africa have changed at least as rapidly as the theories that have been advanced to explain their nature. No sooner had the independence governments been installed in the early 1960s than a series of military coups, or the gradual erosion of constitutional provisions, resulted in the establishment of authoritarian regimes in most countries. Two decades after independence, one scholar contended that only three of these governments qualified to be called constitutional: the relatively small polities of Botswana, Gambia, and Mauritius.¹ For these and other reasons, it is necessary to be cautious and critical when a new wave of political change seems to be surfacing in tropical Africa.

In 1978-79, three of the most tyrannical rulers in the continent - Idi Amin of Uganda, Macias Nguema of Equatorial Guinea, and Jean Bedel Bokassa of the Central African Republic - were dislodged from power. Almost concurrently, Nigeria and Ghana were returned from military to constitutional governments, while the nationalists in Rhodesia were permitted to translate their military and popular strength into parliamentary seats and control of the state apparatus. Elsewhere in the continent, in Senegal and Upper Volta, reforms were introduced in the political system to try to render elections something more than "meaningless political rites performed to grant periodic legitimation" to the existing regimes.² One important consequence of this incipient transformation, or rejuvenation, of liberal politics is that students of Africa must once again prepare to study seriously the conduct of elections and party politics, "which have

¹ Richard L. Sklar, "The Nature of Class Domination in Africa," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 17, no. 4 (1979): 541.

² Naomi Chazan, "African Voters at the Polls: A Re-examination of the Role of Elections in African Politics," *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 17, no. 2 (July 1979): 136. The new multiparty system in Upper Volta lasted only two years, as it succumbed to a military coup in November 1980.

been relegated to the sidelines, along with such unfashionable topics as one-party-ism, charisma, and 'African' socialism."³

One topic that became highly fashionable for a period was the study and explanation of military intervention. Today, however, the critical topic with regard to the military in Africa is how they can arrange, or be induced, to leave the political arena and return to their barracks.⁴ The hope that they might be more successful than the earlier civilian governments in promoting stability, national integration, and economic development has now been almost universally abandoned: "The coup as a method of change that changes little has become endemic to Africa's politics."⁵ This general conclusion, in fact, harks back to the impasse that Finer recognized some time ago: "The military engage in politics with relative haste but disengage, if at all, with the greatest reluctance."⁶ Hence the importance of the few tentative inquiries into the conditions that seem to facilitate the disengagement of the military from the political arena in Africa.

Claude Welch wrote several years ago an essay that now appears perspicacious in its attempt to operationalize the mechanics of military disengagement.⁷ He selected three factors that seemed to facilitate disengagement: the cohesiveness of the ruling junta, the scope of their political objectives, and the "relative fit" with their successor groups.⁸ All three of these factors correlate well with the successful disengagement of the Nigerian military in 1979. On this occasion, attention will largely be devoted to Welch's third point, which he also elaborated upon at some length.⁹ He contends that disengagement would be encouraged by "the opportunity to transfer control to civilians whose outlook, policies, and backgrounds resemble those of the ruling group."¹⁰ He later states this point more categorically:

³ Ibid.

⁴ Emmanuel Hansen and Paul Collins, "The Army, the State, and the 'Rawlings Revolution' in Ghana," *African Affairs* 79, no. 314, (January 1980): 3-23.

⁵ Ruth First quoted in Samuel Decalo, *Coups and Army Rule in Africa: Studies in Military Style* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 27.

⁶ S.E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback* (New York: Praeger, 1962), pp. 242-243.

⁷ Claude E. Welch, "The Dilemmas of Military Withdrawal from Politics: Some Considerations from Tropical Africa," *African Studies Review*, 17, no. 1 (April 1974). Among the other writings by Welch on the military and politics in Africa, see *Soldier and State in Africa* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1970).

⁸ Welch, "The Dilemmas of Military Withdrawal," p. 213.

⁹ The 1975-79 regime remained cohesive despite the assassination of its first leader, General Murtala Muhammed, in February 1976; and the political objective of disengagement was never in question despite the failure of previous Nigerian military governments to live up to similar promises. See Robin Luckham, *The Nigerian Military: A Sociological Analysis of Authority and Revolt 1960-67* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971); B.J. Dudley, *Instability and Political Order: Politics and Crisis in Nigeria* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1973); and Keith Panter-Brick, ed., *Soldiers and Oil: The Political Transformation of Nigeria* (London: Frank Cass, 1978).

¹⁰ Welch, "The Dilemmas of Military Withdrawal," p. 213.

Withdrawal depends...upon similar policy perspectives on the part of the governing junta and potential successor. Similarity stems from ethnic and ideological considerations, but must be complemented by availability, by recognition of military institutional prerogatives, and by popular support.

To phrase the obvious, officers wishing to return to the barracks will not hand over power to individuals whose basic political orientations differ markedly [from their own].¹¹

A more recent study, which analyzes the transition to civilian rule in Ghana in 1979, explains at length Welch's concept of the "relative fit" with the military's successors. Emmanuel Hansen and Paul Collins boldly argue that "military disengagement is contingent on the presence of certain objective conditions."¹² These include "reasonable assurance" that the personnel or ideologies removed in the previous regime will not be reinstated; that the incoming administration will not constitute a constraint on the corporate and other interests of the army leadership; and that the coup leaders, their lives and property will not be endangered.¹³ What these arguments suggest is that the task of demilitarization involves inevitably issues of ideological continuity and security on the part of the withdrawing military. Yet, given the very nature of the implicit questions about the impartiality of the retiring regime, these concerns are likely to be consigned to the unstated and unpublicized dimensions of the transfer of power.

The military can, of course, withdraw in a number of ways. The most frequent processes of disengagement in Africa are what Welch calls disengagement as a result of fission or personal transition.¹⁴ In the first case, a split occurs within the ruling junta, or armed forces, which facilitates a handing over of power to civilians. Personal transition, on the other hand, refers to the familiar process by which a coup leader such as Eyadema in Togo or Mobutu in Zaire exchanges his military uniform for a presidential business suit. An alternative to these two methods, which occurs much less frequently, is "conscious civilianization": "Under certain conditions... individual juntas may facilitate the reestablishment of the constitutional order, not by fission or personal transition, but by a protracted process of civilianization."¹⁵

¹¹ Ibid., p. 222. The frequent occurrence in Latin America of the intervention of the military to prevent the election, or installation, of political groups or individuals to whom they are opposed is, as Welch argues, an extreme case of this phenomenon.

¹² Hansen and Collins, "Rawlings Revolution," p. 5.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 5-6. The authors list a fourth point, a "safe exit" for the army and "no prosecution or persecution after it had left the scene," which is really an elaboration of their third point.

¹⁴ Welch, "The Dilemmas of Military Withdrawal," pp. 214-219.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 219 and 224.

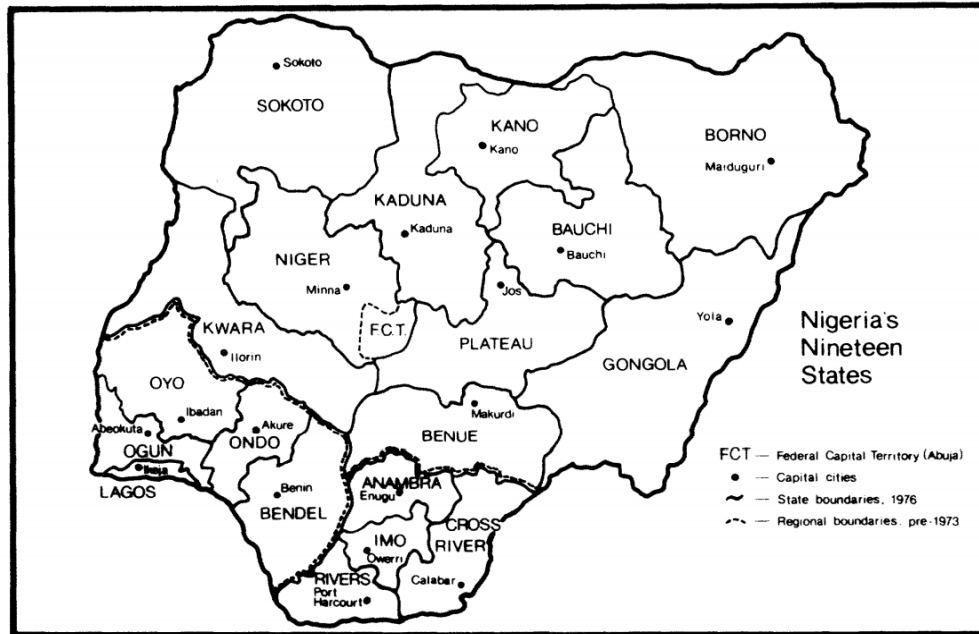


Figure 1

The transition from military to civilian rule in Nigeria, 1975-79, is likely to serve as a model of such a "protracted process of civilianization" in Africa and elsewhere. This experience takes on a greater significance in view of the size, complexity, and relative power of Nigeria in the African contest. Since the reintroduction of party politics and the holding of competitive elections are normally central features of "conscious civilianization," the departing regime in Nigeria had to confront a special challenge: to conduct elections that would be widely regarded as fair and abide by the will of the electorate whatever the outcome of the balloting. Such intentions, as the recent history of Africa and Latin America attests, have proven easier to declare than to honor.¹⁶

When the many factors are taken into account, the general consensus is likely to be that the achievement of the military regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo in transferring power to its popularly chosen civilian successors represents a bright new page in modern African, and especially postcolonial, history. Nevertheless, it will also be recognized that Nigeria was not immune to the usual predispositions of other military governments discussed earlier. By way of background to this analysis, a number of factors that silently influenced the later stages of the disengagement process can be stated. They should give the reader a sense of the undercurrents to the post- election political and constitutional crisis of August-September 1979.

¹⁶ One can cite the example of Bolivia, where the military intervened in 1979 and again in 1980 to prevent the assumption of office by former president Hernán Siles Suarzo. A classic case in Africa is that of Sierra Leone where a coup took place in 1967 within hours of the oath of office being administered to the victorious candidate for the premiership, Siaka Stevens. See Humphrey J. Fisher, "Elections and Coups in Sierra Leone," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 7, no. 4 (1969): 611-636.

1. The leader of one of the contending parties, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, had become increasingly drawn into a personalized conflict with the head of state, General Obasanjo.¹⁷
2. Awolowo and Obasanjo were indigenes of the same state in the federation, Ogun, but belonged to different subgroups of the Yoruba people.¹⁸
3. Awolowo had earlier taken the position that he would not pursue any inquiries into decisions and actions of the previous administration. In reaction to direct criticisms from a wealthy supporter of the major party opposed to him, Awolowo began indicating the costly governmental projects his party would investigate when it came to power.¹⁹
4. Awolowo had long demonstrated his opposition to military government during peacetime by resigning from the Gowon government in 1971. He was also the only person who refused to serve on the Constitution Drafting Committee from the fifty-one appointed by Obasanjo's predecessor, General Murtala Muhammed.
5. While the elections, for the most part, consisted of a competition among the five legalized parties, the varying degrees to which they constituted - singly or in alliance - a "relative fit" with the departing military administration was a not insignificant element in their campaign tactics and personnel recruitment.²⁰

The Post-election Crisis

On October 1, 1979, General Olusegun Obasanjo handed power over to his popularly-elected successor, Alhaji Shehu Shagari, bringing to an end thirteen years of military rule. President Shagari hails from Sokoto in the northwest of the country. He was the candidate of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) and had served in the post-independence civilian government

¹⁷ The ways in which Awolowo regarded public statements of Obasanjo as really directed at himself can be seen in his reprinted speech "Towards Stability and Progress," *The Punch* (Lagos: December 13, 1979):9.

¹⁸ The National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the major opponent of Awolowo's party, drew a number of its strongest candidates in the state from among the same subgroup as the head of state, namely, the Egba. The state, ethnic, or clan origins of General Obasanjo were never the subject of public political discussion in Nigeria. Such a tacit ban, however, did not extend to the private discussions and strategies of the politicians.

¹⁹ These included the planning of the new capital at Abuja and the vast sums spent to revamp the telephone system, in which the critic in question, Chief M.K.O. Abiola, head of ITT in Nigeria and himself another Ogun/Egba indigene, was directly involved. [Tragically, Moshood Abiola's path to the presidency was impeded in 1993 as Awolowo's was in 1979 by military regimes. Abiola's electoral victory was annulled while the scales were tipped away from Awolowo.]

²⁰ It would take considerable space to substantiate this contention. See my earlier article "Political Parties and Ideology in Nigeria," *Review of African Political Economy* 13 (1979): 78-90, for a survey of the ideological dimension. I discussed there the differing degree to which the contesting parties represented a challenge to, or continuity with, the military administration. Such issues inevitably overlapped with those of the prestige and security of the withdrawing military.

and as commissioner for finance under General Gowon.²¹ What should have been a smooth transition was nearly disrupted by the challenges to Shagari's being declared elected, especially from the runner-up in the election, Chief Obafemi Awolowo of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN). The case went on appeal from the Election Tribunal to the Nigerian Supreme Court. The Court decisively rejected Awolowo's appeal.

It was unfortunate that the elections, five in all from July 7 to August 11, ended with such a crisis. The actual voting results had demonstrated a high degree of consensus behind the victorious party and a consistent level of support for the other parties. The declaration that Shehu Shagari had been elected was made on August 16, just when his opponents believed they had stopped him from winning on the first round. According to the new Constitution and Electoral Decree, to be elected on the first round a presidential candidate had to obtain the highest number of votes and "not less than one-quarter of the votes cast at the election in each of at least two-thirds of all the States in the Federation."²²

²¹ All five presidential candidates had previously occupied high positions in the federal government, three of them (Awolowo, Shagari, and Ibrahim) having held the finance portfolio. As Gowon's successive commissioners of finance, Awolowo and Shagari also served as deputy chairmen of the Executive Council, and hence as the leading civilian politicians in the military government in 1967-71 and 1971-75, respectively.

²² *The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1979* (Lagos: Federal Ministry of Information), section 126, pp. 42-43. *The Electoral Decree 1977*, which laid down the rules that governed the formation of parties and the elections, was based on prior electoral laws as well as on the Draft Constitution of 1976. It was later amended to take account of changes made to this draft by the Constituent Assembly of 1977-78.

Table 1 Votes Received, by Party, 1979 Senate Election

(Seats won are in parentheses.)

| STATE | GNPP | UPN | NPN | PRP | NPP |
|------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Anambra | 12,832 | 10,932 | 210,101 | 19,574 | 699,157(5) |
| Bauchi | 188,819 | 28,959 | 323,392(5) | 127,279 | 39,868 |
| Bendel | 38,332 | 316,511(4) | 250,194(1) | 2,055 | 80,639 |
| Benue | 46,452 | 14,769 | 332,967(5) | --- | 75,532 |
| Borno | 278,352(4) | 22,145 | 184,633(1) | 31,508 | --- |
| Cross River | 161,353(2) | 77,479 | 310,071(3) | --- | 68,203 |
| Gongola | 223,121(2) | 124,707(2) | 203,226(1) | 30,708 | 17,830 |
| Imo | 101,184 | 7,553 | 145,507 | 8,609 | 750,518(5) |
| Kaduna | 233,824 | 85,094 | 410,888(3) | 278,305(2) | 61,807 |
| Kano | 35,430 | 13,831 | 233,985 | 683,367(5) | --- |
| Kwara | 32,383 | 126,065(2) | 54,282(3) | 328 | 1,020 |
| Lagos | 14,480 | 428,573(5) | 35,730 | 2,556 | 52,738 |
| Niger | 71,498 | 13,860 | 175,597(5) | 8,139 | 207 |
| Ogun | 1,018 | 230,411(5) | 31,953 | --- | 119 |
| Ondo | 4,905 | 501,522(5) | 49,612 | --- | 6,417 |
| Oyo | 9,472 | 758,696(5) | 200,372 | 2,497 | 4,397 |
| Plateau | 41,287 | 20,024 | 154,792(1) | 19,017 | 220,278(4) |
| Rivers | 46,985 | 20,106 | 153,454(3) | 30 | 86,138(2) |
| Sokoto | 305,292 | 34,145 | 571,562(5) | 38,305 | --- |
| Seats won out of 95 | 8 | 28 | 36 | 7 | 16 |

Source:

Adapted from *West Africa*, No. 3241 of 27 August 1979, pp. 1572-73, and No. 3258 of 24 December 1979, p. 2365.

Tables
I-VI

Table 2 House of Representatives

| | Number of Seats | GNPP | UPN | NPN | PRP | NPP | |
|--------------|--------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Anambra | 29 | - | - | 3 | - | 26 | |
| Bauchi | 20 | 1 | - | 18 | - | 1 | |
| Bendel | 20 | - | 12 | 6 | - | 2 | |
| Benue | 19 | - | - | 18 | - | 1 | |
| Borno | 24 | 22 | - | 2 | - | - | |
| Cross River | 28 | 4 | 2 | 22 | - | - | |
| Gongola | 21 | 8 | 7 | 5 | - | 1 | |
| Imo | 30 | - | - | 2 | - | 28 | |
| Kaduna | 33 | 1 | 1 | 19 | 10 | 2 | |
| Kano | 46 | - | - | 7 | 39 | - | |
| Kwara | 14 | 1 | 5 | 8 | - | - | |
| Lagos | 12 | - | 12 | - | - | - | |
| Niger | 10 | - | - | 10 | - | - | |
| Ogun | 12 | - | 12 | - | - | - | |
| Ondo | 22 | - | 22 | - | - | - | |
| Oyo | 42 | - | 38 | 4 | - | - | |
| Plateau | 16 | - | - | 3 | - | 13 | |
| Rivers | 14 | - | - | 10 | - | 4 | |
| Sokoto | 37 | 6 | - | 31 | - | - | |
| Total | 449 | 43 | 111 | 168 | 49 | 78 | |
| | % | 100% | 9.6% | 24.7% | 37.4% | 10.9% | 17.4% |

Since there are presently nineteen states in Nigeria, it was assumed that two-thirds of nineteen being 12.67, the latter figure would be rounded up to thirteen in determining whether a candidate had obtained the required geographical spread in his vote total. Indeed, the addition of the phrase "in each of at least" appeared to most observers to emphasize that the states must be taken as entities under this provision. Moreover, a number of directives dealing with other aspects of the elections of the Federal Electoral Commission (Fedeco) since the lifting of the ban

on political parties on September 21, 1978, suggested this interpretation of the two-thirds rule. An editorial in one of the country's government-owned newspapers, and with the largest circulation, reminded the Chairman of Fedeco that it was he who in December 1978 said:

One of the conditions the commission used in presumably determining the national character of a political party was whether it had properly established offices in at least two-thirds of the states in the Federation. He [the chairman] pointedly added then: 'that is 13.'

Last Thursday was too late in the day and in the march towards civilian rule for the 13-state formula to be thrown overboard.²³

On August 16, the announcement that Shagari had been elected was accompanied by the following terse announcement from Fedeco in all the newspapers:

. . . in the absence of any legal explanation or guidance in the Electoral Decree, it [Fedeco] has no alternative than to give the phrase "at least two-thirds of all states in the federation" . . . the ordinary meaning which applied to it.

This "ordinary" meaning turned out to be that since two-thirds of 19 is 12.67, a winning candidate must obtain a minimum of 25 percent of the vote in twelve states and 25 percent of the vote in .67 of the thirteenth state, or one-sixth of the vote in that state. The correctness or absurdity of this ruling has been argued at great length in the pages of Nigerian newspapers as well as before the Election Tribunal and the Supreme Court. Of most concern here are not the mathematical or legal ramifications of this issue but rather the political dimensions of a sudden and unexpected announcement on the part of Fedeco.

Some of the serious political implications of this episode will be summarized. The author was in close and regular contact with Nigerian politicians of all parties, journalists, and Fedeco officials during this critical period. First, the fact that Chief Richard Akinjide, the legal advisor of the NPN, which benefited from this impromptu decision, had publicly announced two days previously (August 14, 1979) that this should be the correct interpretation of the Electoral Decree bolstered the charge that Fedeco's decision reflected the partisan bias of the military government.²⁴ Second, one of the compelling arguments for having a clear winner on the first round, even if it required some mathematical juggling, was the need to spare the nation recourse to an electoral college, provided for in the Constitution and Electoral Decree.²⁵ Such a College

²³ *Sunday Times* (Lagos), 19 August 1979.

²⁴ The confrontation between Akinjide and Awolowo over this issue, and in the subsequent courtroom proceedings, unfortunately revived the animosities that date from the early 1960s in western Nigeria, when Akinjide was a vigorous opponent of Awolowo's Action Group party.

²⁵ This argument was strongly made in *West Africa* (London), 20 August 1979.

would have consisted of all the federal and state legislators chosen in the previous elections. It was felt that these electors would be susceptible to inducements, especially financial, and the College might constitute an opportunistic approach to deciding on the presidency. This sudden concern to avoid an Electoral College, however, lacked some of its compelling force within Nigeria since, in March 1979, the military regime had rejected appeals to insert a second popular election into the provisions of the constitution. It rejected the claim that the legal draftsmen had inadvertently left out this option while formalizing the decisions of the Constituent Assembly. [The full print of an edition of *The Daily Times* with an investigative report of this alleged error was ordered to be pulped. I saw a copy of the newspaper before the order was executed.]

Third, two days before handing over power, the Supreme Military Council (SMC) decreed several amendments to the constitution including the elimination of the Electoral College. These, when added to the seventeen amendments it had made to the draft it received from the Constituent Assembly in June 1978, reinforced the image of the military regime as not only being supra-constitutional but able at will to intervene to correct what it considered any anomalies in the transitional process. Fourth, before the Supreme Court met to consider the electoral appeal of Chief Awolowo, the SMC announced the appointment of a new Chief Justice of the Federation, Mr. Justice Fatai-Williams, in place of Sir Darnley Alexander. The choice of Mr. Justice Fatai-Williams seemed satisfactory in view of his qualifications, and Sir Darnley was due for replacement. Nevertheless, the designation of a Chief Justice is one of the prerogatives of the President under the new constitution. It appeared a hasty act for the military to perform just before Shagari assumed office and at a time when his election was to be reviewed by the Supreme Court.²⁶

Fifth, Fedeco's August 16 announcement was criticized for a number of circumstantial reasons. The returning officer in the election was a publicly unknown individual named Frederick Menkiti, rather than any of the already known figures in the organization, especially the Chairman, Michael Ani, and his deputy, Alhaji Ahmadu Kurfi. It subsequently turned out that Menkiti had joined Fedeco from the Federal Ministry of Industries shortly before the presidential election and had served as a director of the Peugeot assembly plant of which Shagari had been the Chairman. The persistent question posed throughout the campaign and elections regarding Fedeco's independence from the military regime was revived by the decision not to adhere to Fedeco's earlier directives concerning the interpretations of two-thirds of nineteen states. For Fedeco, within walking distance of the Ministry of Justice and the Attorney General's office, to issue so important a statement "in the absence of any legal explanation or guidance" is

²⁶ A memorandum from General Obasanjo to president-elect Shehu Shagari asking for his preference among three possible appointees as chief justice was subsequently published in Nigerian newspapers.

puzzling. At several previous stages of the transition, close consultation between these offices had been exercised to arrive at authoritative interpretations of the Electoral Decree.²⁷

Table 3 State Assemblies

| STATE | Number of Seats | GNPP | UPN | NPN | PRP | NPP |
|--------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Anambra | 87 | 1 | - | 13 | - | 73 |
| Bauchi | 60 | 9 | - | 45 | 2 | 4 |
| Bendel | 60 | - | 34 | 22 | - | 4 |
| Benue | 57 | 6 | - | 48 | - | 3 |
| Borno | 72 | 59 | - | 11 | 2 | - |
| Cross River | 84 | 16 | 7 | 58 | - | 3 |
| Gongola | 63 | 25 | 18 | 15 | 1 | 4 |
| Imo | 90 | 2 | - | 9 | - | 79 |
| Kaduna | 99 | 10 | 3 | 64 | 16 | 6 |
| Kano | 138 | 3 | 1 | 11 | 123 | - |
| Kwara | 42 | 2 | 15 | 25 | - | - |
| Lagos | 36 | - | 36 | - | - | - |
| Niger | 30 | 2 | - | 28 | - | - |
| Ogun | 36 | - | 36 | - | - | - |
| Ondo | 66 | - | 65 | 1 | - | - |
| Oyo | 126 | - | 117 | 9 | - | - |
| Plateau | 48 | 3 | - | 10 | - | 35 |
| Rivers | 42 | - | 1 | 26 | - | 15 |
| Sokoto | 111 | 19 | - | 92 | - | - |
| TOTAL | 1,347 | 157 | 333 | 487 | 144 | 226 |
| % | 100% | 11.66% | 24.72% | 36.15% | 10.69% | 16.78% |

Before proceeding with the sixth point regarding the electoral ruling that enabled Shehu Shagari to be declared elected on the first ballot, it is necessary to consider the extended reply of Fedeco Chairman Michael Ani to charges and countercharges following the August 16 announcement. Ani took pains to rebut the claim that Fedeco had failed to exercise its various functions independently of the military regime. It could be asserted on Ani's behalf that Fedeco, given the very nature of military government, could not really have exercised the degree of freedom it felt desirable to assert publicly.²⁸ On the issue of rigging and electoral misconduct during the balloting, Ani was frank and engaging: "I don't know whether there is any fair election in this world," he declared. What really mattered, according to Ani, was not the perpetration of

²⁷ In 1978, to determine if political associations satisfied one of the constitutional stipulations to qualify for registration (concerning their political program), the relevant documents were routinely passed to the Ministry of Justice for vetting. See the comments of Michael Ani discussed below for further elaboration of this point.

²⁸ Ani's assertion about the degree of Fedeco independence will not stand up to close analysis in future studies of the Nigerian transition. For example, he did not conceal from his associates his frustration over such issues as the long delay of the government in agreeing on the dates for the elections. The television interview with Michael Ani took place on January 18, 1980 and was printed in the *New Nigerian* (February 4, 1980): 3 and 7.

specific acts of dishonesty or irregularity, but the question whether such incidents were of such a degree as to falsify the results. He also gave a full description of when he became "frightened" during the elections:

I got the hint that the presidential ballot paper had leaked because it was to be the last election. The papers had already gone out but how it got leaked, I don't know. It was being forged on a very large scale.²⁹

Table 4 State Governors

| PARTY | NUMBER | STATES |
|-------|--------|--|
| NPN | 7 | Bauchi, Benue, Cross River, Kwara, Niger, Rivers, Sokoto |
| UPN | 5 | Bendel, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Oyo |
| NPP | 3 | Anambra, Imo, Plateau |
| GNPP | 2 | Borno, Gongola |
| PRP | 2 | Kano, Kaduna |

The Fedeco chairman then described how, with less than a week to go, fifty million new ballot papers were printed and distributed. Many of Ani's assertions during the campaign and the elections are not likely to dispel the charges he sought to refute. For example, on the issue of why the election of the new president of the Nigerian Republic was announced by Frederick Menkiti, Ani's comment is studiously cryptic:

He (Menkiti) was not a member of Fedeco. He was a returning officer. After an election, I can invite anybody to come and be a returning officer. I give him the result to go and read. That's all...The law allows me to appoint a returning officer to come and announce it. I have not gone to seek Menkiti, but his work was for that one day - to come and announce the result as given to him by us.³⁰

On the crucial question of how the new two-thirds rule came to be adopted, Ani again leaves his listener, and reader, informed but not enlightened. He rejects the allegation that he was in any way influenced by the proposing of this formula by Richard Akinjide of the NPN on August 14. According to Ani, when he saw what was shaping up on the electoral scoreboard, he

²⁹ Ibid., p. 3.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 7. [The clouded announcement of Shagari's election calls to mind the similarly "hands-off" way in which the annulment of the June 12, 1993 election of Moshood Abiola was managed.]

went to the Ministry of Justice to ask if twelve and two-thirds must be interpreted as thirteen: “It was suggested to me that by the reason of the word each, it could be aggregated. But the firm advice given to me was that since the lawmakers did not say actually what should be done, you can give that phrase its ordinary meaning.”³¹

This statement still begs the question of what is the "ordinary meaning" of two-thirds of such corporate entities as states of a federation. Just how the decision of August 16 came to be made, and what relative roles the military, Fedeco, and even certain politicians played in its determination will rely on future commentators for clarification. To return to the final point about this episode, the electoral decision appeared to be *ad hoc* in nature and, moreover, to represent an awkward solution to a problem that can be traced back to the political campaign and the pattern of voting in the first four of the 1979 elections. It is noteworthy that Michael Ani remarked that he "saw the scoreboard" and that his inquiries regarding the probable deadlock began on August 10 or 11, that is, less than a week before the actual decision was announced. It is possible to go back to the moment in the political campaign when the stage was set for the controversy of mid-August. In April 1979, it appeared that two of the five presidential candidates would be disqualified from competing because of their failure to meet requirements concerning their tax records. In fact, Michael Ani, the electoral commissioner, issued a statement that strongly suggested that they would be so disqualified.³²

The first of the targets, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (Zik) of the Nigerian People's Party, the federation's former president, took the matter to court for a ruling on his tax position. As leader of the party that had come to embrace the grievances of the Igbo people - who generally feel they have been neglected by the government since their defeat in the Biafran War - Azikiwe treated his imminent disqualification as an example of continued discrimination against the Igbo. Zik obtained a favorable ruling from the federal court in his home capital, Enugu. Given the terms of the Electoral Decree, however, Fedeco and the government could have gone ahead with his disqualification. The jurisdiction of the courts had been specifically ousted from reviewing Fedeco's decisions in such matters. For broader political considerations, Azikiwe was allowed to compete; but this decision opened the way for Aminu Kano of the People's Redemption Party (PRP) to obtain a similar ruling from the Court in his home capital of Kano and thus to avoid Fedeco's ban.

What did this particular set of incidents mean for the elections that began just one month later? It meant that with Azikiwe running, Shagari would not win 25 percent of the vote in the predominantly Igbo states of Imo and Anambra. With Aminu Kano also cleared to run, it meant

³¹ Ibid., p. 3.

³² *New Nigerian* (April 21, 1979). In his January 1980 interview, Ani made it clear that he stuck by his earlier position although the courts had decided differently. That was the end of the matter as far as he was concerned.

that Kano state would be lost to Shagari and the NPN.³³ Chief Awolowo was certain to sweep the mainly Yoruba states of Ondo, Ogun, Oyo, and Lagos as anyone witnessing the *levées en masse* for his campaign rallies could have predicted. With all five candidates cleared for the presidential race, there were already seven of the nineteen states in which Shagari and the NPN could not hope to obtain 25 percent of the votes without a high level of electoral tampering.³⁴

³³ At the time of Shagari's nomination, one of his challengers in the NPN, Maitama Sule, had argued in his promotional literature that with Aminu Kano gone from their party, the nomination of Shagari rather than himself (another Kano man), would result in the loss to the NPN of Kano, the most populous state in the nation.

³⁴ This point, regarding the possibility of inflating the vote only where a party is already dominant, is discussed below.

Table 5 Presidential Election

| | | Waziri Ibrahim (GNPP) | Obafemi Awolowo (UPN) | Shehu Shagari (NPN) | Aminu Kano (PRP) | Nnamdi Azikiwe (NPP) |
|-------------|------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| STATE | Total Votes Cast | % Votes Rec'd | % Votes Rec'd | % Votes Rec'd | % Votes Rec'd | % Votes Rec'd |
| Anambra | 1,209,038 | 1.67 | 0.75 | 13.50 | 1.20 | 82.58 |
| Bauchi | 998,683 | 15.44 | 3.00 | 62.48 | 14.34 | 4.72 |
| Bendel | 669,511 | 1.23 | 53.23 | 36.19 | 0.73 | 8.60 |
| Benue | 538,879 | 7.89 | 2.57 | 76.39 | 1.35 | 11.71 |
| Borno | 710,968 | 54.04 | 3.35 | 34.71 | 6.52 | 1.35 |
| Cross River | 661,103 | 15.14 | 11.76 | 64.40 | 1.01 | 7.66 |
| Gongola | 639,138 | 34.09 | 21.67 | 35.52 | 4.34 | 4.35 |
| Imo | 1,153,355 | 3.00 | 0.64 | 8.80 | 0.89 | 86.67 |
| Kaduna | 1,382,712 | 13.80 | 6.68 | 43.12 | 31.66 | 4.72 |
| Kano | 1,220,763 | 1.54 | 1.23 | 19.94 | 76.41 | 0.91 |
| Kwara | 354,605 | 5.71 | 39.48 | 53.62 | 0.67 | 0.52 |
| Lagos | 828,414 | 0.48 | 82.30 | 7.18 | 0.47 | 9.57 |
| Niger | 383,347 | 16.50 | 3.69 | 74.88 | 3.99 | 1.11 |
| Ogun | 744,668 | 0.53 | 92.11 | 6.23 | 0.31 | 0.32 |
| Ondo | 1,369,547 | 0.26 | 94.51 | 4.19 | 0.18 | 0.86 |
| Oyo | 1,396,547 | 0.57 | 85.78 | 12.75 | 0.32 | 0.55 |
| Plateau | 548,405 | 6.82 | 5.29 | 34.73 | 3.98 | 49.17 |
| Rivers | 687,951 | 2.18 | 10.33 | 72.65 | 0.46 | 14.35 |
| Sokoto | 1,348,697 | 26.61 | 2.52 | 66.58 | 3.33 | 0.92 |
| TOTAL | 16,846,633 | 10.0% | 29.2% | 33.8% | 10.3% | 16.7% |
| | | 1,686,489 | 4,916,651 | 5,688,857 | 1,732,113 | 2,822,523 |

A way was apparently found to circumvent this dilemma, once it became evident on Fedeco's scoreboard in early August: the formula that Shagari did not really need the full 25 percent of the vote in a thirteenth state. If the outcome could not be changed, at least the rules that governed the interpretation of the outcome were subject to revision. Nigeria was still under military rule. As part of the defense of his actions, Ani pointed out that the same two-thirds rule was not applied in a rigorous way to block a party becoming registered when the question

involved a thirteenth state.³⁵ However, what could be accepted by opposing politicians as a salutary adjusting of legalistic stipulations in the former case became, when the presidency was at stake, the litmus test of impartiality of the military regime.

Once the results of the first senatorial elections were in, it was clear to many observers that Shagari would not clear the 25 percent hurdle in any of the seven states in which one of his opponents enjoyed a high level of communal support. In short, the presidential candidates were expected to run well ahead of the prior performances of their parties in the senatorial elections in which local men had been pitted against each other. Table 6 illustrates this tendency clearly. As soon as the senatorial results were reported, three of Shagari's opponents gravitated toward one another in search of a strategy for an expected second round of the presidential vote in the Electoral College. The exception, Aminu Kano, remained aloof from what he regarded as an opportunistic alliance with little ideological basis. The person who appeared most embarrassed by the last-minute changes in the rules was the Chairman of Fedeco, Chief Michael Ani. On the day preceding Shagari's victory, he discussed with reporters the timing of a likely runoff, and even derided the new two-thirds interpretation as "a dangerous issue" into which he would not be dragged.³⁶ Moreover, he commented, "every political party had its research groups and, apart from being interested groups, the parties were entitled to their opinions." Confronted with a serious crisis in Ghana, when the votes on the Union Government referendum of the military government led by General Ignatius Acheampong were being counted, Ani's Ghanaian counterpart, Mr. Justice I.I. Abban, had gone into hiding from the soldiers rather than acquiesce in the latter's planned manipulation.

Table 6

| State | <u>Senatorial Election</u> | | <u>Presidential Election</u> | |
|---------|----------------------------|---------------|------------------------------|------------------|
| | % NPN | % Major Party | % Shagari | % Major Opponent |
| Anambra | 22.05 | 73.39 (NPP) | 8.50 | 82.58 (Zik) |
| Imo | 14.35 | 74.06 (NPP) | 8.80 | 86.67 (Zik) |
| Oyo | 20.54 | 77.78 (UPN) | 12.75 | 85.78 (Awo) |
| Ondo | 8.82 | 89.17 (UPN) | 4.19 | 94.51 (Awo) |
| Ogun | 12.12 | 87.44 (UPN) | 6.23 | 92.11 (Awo) |
| Lagos | 6.69 | 80.25 (UPN) | 7.18 | 82.30 (Awo) |
| Kano | 24.20 | 70.70 (PRP) | 19.94 | 76.41 (Aminu) |

³⁵ *New Nigerian* (February 4, 1980): 3.

³⁶ *Daily Times* (Lagos), 16 August 1979.

In the case of Nigeria, Michael Ani chose to refrain from public comments once the presidential election results and rule interpretation met with vehement opposition from some sections of the country and equally fervent support from others. Ani's own remark can serve as a fitting epitaph on this episode: "Time is a healing factor."³⁷ Indeed, the strength of Nigeria's new political system will lie in its capacity to heal and transcend such disputes, which sorely tempt the losing factions to reject the system and its review, or judicial, procedures in toto.

The 1979 Consensus in Nigeria

The most significant observation about the electoral crisis of 1979 therefore is that, although it raised searching questions about the propriety of the regime's behavior, it did not prevent the relatively smooth transfer of power on October 1. The fact that Nigerian supporters of the losing parties did not rush into the streets to wreak havoc, especially in Awolowo's western states, tells us something about the distance the country had traveled since the mid-1960s, when many persons lost their lives in popular upheavals ignited by reports of electoral misconduct.³⁸ The knowledge that the military was still in power and could suppress any uprising was a dissuasive factor. Nevertheless, if the military presence contributed to the peaceful transition, it did so because the desire to see it go was so pervasive that few politicians wished to give it an excuse for prolonging its stay.³⁸

One fundamental reason Nigeria withstood the crisis of August-September 1979, in short, is because of the degree of popular support for the transition from military to civilian rule and for the return to constitutional government promised the country by each succeeding military regime but repeatedly postponed. It would not be possible in the space available to discuss the details of this four-year transitional program, or even the new constitution. It can be noted, however, that the military and its civilian advisers were entirely responsible for deciding on the first and were able both to influence the choice of persons who formulated the second and determined its final form.³⁹ When the Nigerian people were at last free to express their political wishes, they surprised observers by the striking consistency in their voting behavior in five trips to the polls

³⁷ *New Nigerian* (February 4, 1980): p. 7.

³⁸ See Sklar, "Nigerian Politics: The Ordeal of Chief Awolowo, 1960-65," in *Politics in Africa: 7 Cases*, ed. Gwendolyn M. Carter (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966), pp. 1 19-166; and John P. Mackintosh, *Nigerian Government and Politics: Prelude to Revolution, pt. 3* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966).

³⁹ The Supreme Military Council selected all fifty members of the Constitution Drafting Committee (1975-76). The Constituent Assembly, which reviewed and altered the Draft Constitution (1977-78), contained 203 indirectly-elected members (by local government councils) and 27 directly appointed by the SMC. There was no referendum and no real popular involvement in the constitution-making process. At the time of the election of the local government councils in December 1976 (indirectly in some states), no decision had been made that these would later serve as electoral colleges for the Constituent Assembly.

over a period of six weeks. They also gave significant broad-based support to one of the parties, the NPN, despite the multiple ethnic and linguistic divisions in the country.

The first casualty among predictions about the voting was the bandwagon effect that was generally expected as soon as certain parties outstripped the others nationally. What in fact occurred is that Nigerian voters throughout the federation went out and placed their thumbprints next to their party's symbols regardless of its performance nationally.⁴⁰ These voters demonstrated that they were voting on the basis of deeply-held sentiments that could not be swayed by rival parties' last-minute adjurations not to waste their votes. One political scientist, still attached to the inevitability of the "bandwagon effect," claimed that he had at last discovered it and resolved the mystery.⁴¹ It is necessary, especially for the sake of non-Nigerian specialists, to reply briefly to his claim.

According to Martin Dent, "in every state except Gongola, the party getting the highest vote in the senatorial election increased its share of the vote in the presidential election." Such an observation, which he then elaborates as demonstrating a bandwagon effect, fails to take account of certain countervailing considerations. First, as peacefully as the elections may have been conducted, few close observers would disagree that a certain amount of spurious balloting occurred. The allegations are contained in the charges and countercharges made by party officials throughout the election; in the submissions to the electoral tribunals, which voided some of the elections on these grounds; but most importantly, in the blitzkrieg operations of Fedeco just before the final election to substitute new ballots because of mounting evidence about the improper handling of ballots and boxes. I am raising this matter, not to undermine the general validity of the election results, but to suggest that these results, barring a few blatant exceptions, must be treated as roughly valid.⁴²

It can be further asserted that it was manifestly within the power of most of the parties to inflate the vote in areas in which they enjoyed preponderant communal support. The reason for this is that Fedeco employees were recruited largely from local government officials; and the success or failure of the parties identified with the local people or area of these officials was

⁴⁰ Almost all the results of the first election were disseminated before the second began a week later. Although the proportion of uncompleted tabulations rose as the electoral machinery felt the stress of its arduous assignment, the general performance of all the parties was regularly made known to voters before the next stage of the voting.

⁴¹ Martin Dent, "Mystery of the Missing Bandwagon," *West Africa*, no. 3243, 10 September 1979. For a contrary analysis of the election results, see Panter-Brick, "Nigeria: The 1979 Elections," *Afrika Spectrum* 14, no. 3 (1979): especially 330-333.

⁴² Some of these unfair practices did constitute the basis for the cancellation of certain election results by the electoral tribunals. It appears that the tendency of the electoral tribunals has been to uphold disputed election results except in those cases where the malfeasance was very blatant and/or could have affected the outcome of the contest.

often seen by them as more than a mere government exercise. The second point that Dent overlooks is the 25 percent increase in the number of total voters between the senatorial and presidential elections. The fact that more voters turned out to cast their ballots for Azikiwe in Anambra, or Shagari in Sokoto, or Awolowo in Ogun than did for their respective parties earlier does not necessarily mean that there was a rush to join the respective party's bandwagon. Rather, this trend largely reflects the greater incentive for supporters of these parties to vote when the leader - not various (and often unknown) party nominees - is running. There was thus a drop in the vote from the Senate elections to those for the House of Representatives and State Assembly, but then a sudden rise in the election for governor (one candidate per party per state), finally peaking in that for president.⁴³

Despite the fact that the NPN obtained more votes in the presidential election than in any of the previous four, the percentage of Shagari's votes (33.6 percent) was approximately the same as that of his party in the senatorial election. And although Awolowo registered the greatest increase (more than 5 percent) over his party's senatorial vote, this achievement reflected no shift to a UPN "bandwagon." It was largely a case of two factors mentioned above: the partial inflation of the vote in each party's "security zone" and the greater incentive of the Chief's dedicated supporters to vote when he is the one actually competing. It is therefore important to be cautious when making fine points about the 1979 elections based simply on the published results. Where possible, these must be checked against other reports or assessments of what transpired in the areas in question.

To return to a central argument of this article, the 1979 elections demonstrated a high degree of uniformity and persistence in the pattern of party support among Nigerian voters. As it was in the senatorial election, so it would be for the next four: the NPN coming first, followed by the UPN, NPP, GNPP (Greater Nigeria People's party), and PRP.⁴⁴ The NPN won thirty-six of the ninety-five seats in the Senate, obtaining two or more senators in eight states, and one each in four states. As mentioned above, the NPN fell just short of the thirteen-state target. Yet, in the four states in which it won only one senatorial seat - Bendel, Borno, Gongola and Plateau - it did so comfortably with over 30 percent in each (see Table 1). The second-placed party in the first election was the UPN with twenty-eight seats. Awolowo's party won seats in seven of the states, sweeping all five in each of the four predominantly western Yoruba states of Ogun, Ondo, Oyo,

⁴³ A reverse way of demonstrating the argument that it was the "pulling effect" of the gubernatorial and then presidential candidates that accounted for the voter increase is by showing the tenacity of voters even in states in which their party had been consistently in the losing column. The aggregate vote of the latter category tended to remain constant, or drop slightly, but in no way demonstrates a marked shift to the locally dominant party. (The voting turnout - which, according to official figures, was roughly a quarter in the first, and a third in the final, election-is not a reliable indicator because of the inflated electoral register, i.e., 47.7 million voters.)

⁴⁴ Except in the final elections when the PRP surged ahead of the GNPP by .3 percent of the total vote.

and Lagos; two from the mainly Yoruba-speaking areas of Kwara state; four from Bendel; and two from Gongola in the extreme east of the country.

It initially surprised many observers that Awolowo easily cleared the 25 percent hurdle in the first six of the states mentioned above but not in Gongola, where he only obtained 21.67 percent and where the party had earlier won two senatorial seats and a third of the state's contingent to the House of Representatives. In previous elections in that state, however, the UPN had been helped by a highly advantageous concentration of its strength that enabled it to win two of the five Senate seats with 20.8 percent of the vote; while the NPN with 33.9 percent in the same elections obtained only one Senate seat. The results for the UPN in Gongola were extremely important since they represented the party's only real success outside the former Western region of Nigeria, of which Awolowo had been the first Premier. Bendel state, where the UPN performed even better than anticipated, was a part of the former West and had been excised in 1963 to form the mid-West region. In Kwara, the UPN obtained over a third of the state's legislative seats, and while Awolowo captured 40 percent of the votes for president. This state contains a large Yoruba-speaking area, which the Chief's former party, the Action Group, had strenuously fought to have attached to the Western region.⁴⁵

Ethnic Consolidation in the Elections

Although Nigerian politicians had been induced by a variety of electoral regulations to form national political organizations, by the time the voting results were issued, most of the parties appeared to have been stamped with an ethnic print by the voters in the polling booths. Indira Gandhi, who is no stranger to this practice in the world's largest party political system, declared before her return to power in 1980:

You are on your own in a democracy. You have to fight your way. So each community tries to think in what way it can consolidate... This sort of thing goes on, not only with the Muslims but within the castes among the Hindus themselves.⁴⁶

As this statement indicates, ethnic and other cultural forms of consolidation can take place at many different levels. In the private conversations he conducted before the lifting of the ban on political activities, Chief Awolowo made it clear to those invited to join him that he no longer wished to be regarded as just the leader of the Yorubas. He therefore undertook an exhaustive national campaign, subjecting himself and his colleagues to an arduous series of tours (Awolowo turned 70 in 1979). Remote or water-bound villages that could not be reached by road

⁴⁵ See C.S. Whitaker, Jr., *The Politics of Tradition, Continuity, and Change in Northern Nigeria, 1946-1966* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), pp. 137-145.

⁴⁶ *Observer* (London), 23 December 1979, p. 13. For a comparative analysis, see Crawford Young, "Nigeria and India: The Integrative Role of Cultural Complexity" in *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), pp. 274-326.

were visited by helicopter. Much of this proselytizing was, however, to little avail. His party trounced all others in the West and fared badly everywhere else except in Gongola.

Yet, we must not be too quick, even here, to overlook a new consensus or consolidation among Awolowo's supporters. The former Western region had in the pre-military era been one of Nigeria's most heavily divided and keenly contested areas, with Yoruba sub-ethnic groups lining up, not only to support opposing political parties, but to beat and burn one another when they disagreed over electoral results.⁴⁷ By sweeping Yorubaland so convincingly, Chief Awolowo became leader of the Yorubas with a completeness whose significance can be fully comprehended only when placed in the context of the historical rivalries among the Yoruba subgroups. Another intriguing result of the elections was the performance of Azikiwe's NPP. Once again, the pattern set in the senatorial election was to be repeated in the other four: the NPP winning decisively in Anambra and Imo, satisfactorily in Plateau, and maintaining a foothold in Rivers. To put it succinctly, the NPP counterbalanced its relative failure nationally by an awesome demonstration of consolidated ethnic voting.

In the presidential election, the seven states in which the NPP's performance was better than desultory (i.e., more than 5 percent of the vote) fell into clear categories: the predominantly Igbo (Anambra and Imo), Middle-Belt (Plateau and Benue), and those containing significant Igbo, or Igbo-related, minorities (Bendel, Lagos and Rivers). The striking inroads of the NPP in Plateau state were a consequence of developments before and after the Constituent Assembly, involving attempts by individuals from the Middle-Belt and Gongola to galvanize a new "majority of minorities" movement in Nigerian politics. The party's failure to achieve the same level of success in the second major Middle-Belt state, Benue, can be attributed to strong pockets of anti-Igbo sentiment there that served to offset the Hausa-Fulani issue. Other factors include the success of the NPN in winning the affiliation of powerful local patrons from each of the three major ethnic groups of the state (Tiv, Igala, and Idoma) and the self-defeating struggles among rival NPP candidates for the party's nominations. Similar factors also account for the party's failure to perform more satisfactorily in another neighboring state of Igboland, namely Rivers.

Originally, as mentioned above, the Nigerian People's Party was meant to be a new force in the country's politics, grouping the ethnic and other sectional minorities against the political formations expected to be based on the three major ethnolinguistic groups: the Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani, and Igbo.⁴⁸ But a series of maneuvers within the party aimed at placing Azikiwe at its

⁴⁷ Kenneth W.J. Post and Michael Vickers, "Descent into Chaos: The Western Election and its Aftermath," in *Structure and Conflict in Nigeria, 1960-66* (London: Heinemann, 1973), pp. 219-238; and Sklar, "The Ordeal of Chief Awolowo, 1960-65." For the politicizing of Yoruba clan divisions during the 1950s, see Kenneth Post and George D. Jenkins, *The Price of Liberty: Personality and Politics in Colonial Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

⁴⁸ Joseph, "Political Parties and Ideology" and "The Ethnic Trap: Notes on the Nigerian Campaign and Elections, 1978-79," *Issue* (African Studies Association, forthcoming).

helm resulted in a split in November 1978, at which point Waziri Ibrahim and his followers left to form the GNPP. The NPP that emerged in 1979 fully reflects Indira Gandhi's words quoted above: "You are on your own... You have to fight your way... each community tries to think how it can consolidate." The only peculiarity is that the NPP served as the framework for consolidating two different sets of ethnic collectivities with no previous history of close political cooperation: the Igbo people and the Middle-Belt Christian communities.

The little-publicized discontent of the Igbos since the defeat of Biafra must be mentioned here. Such a factor does not negate the considerable reconciliation that has been achieved since the civil war. The consensus of opinion among Igbos of all socioeconomic strata is that the postwar "oil boom," the construction projects, and the indigenization programs in industry and trade have benefited other Nigerian peoples much more than themselves. As for the people of the Middle-Belt, and especially those of Plateau state, many of their leaders have chafed at what they consider the continued domination of their communities by Islamic Hausa-Fulani elites. Moreover, there has been anger among them toward the Obasanjo regime for the reprisals allegedly carried out against some of their people following the abortive coup of February 1970, in which the head of state, General Muhammed, was assassinated, and in which their fellow Middle-Belter, former General Gowon, was implicated.

It is perhaps no accident that the two parties that came last overall in the elections are the ones with the lowest overt ethnic identification, namely, the PRP of Aminu Kano and the GNPP of Waziri Ibrahim.⁴⁹ Malam Aminu, a former opposition politician in Nigeria, was an active member of the National movement in 1978 that gave rise to the NPN. He and his followers decamped at the inception of that party when they were disappointed in the allocation of party offices. Although financially handicapped, his People's Redemption Party managed to win seven seats in the Senate, five in Kano and two in Kaduna. His party pulled one of the biggest upsets in the campaign by adding to its certain governorship in Kano that of Kaduna, where the NPN had the week previously won two-thirds of the State Assembly seats. By preventing Shehu Shagari from garnering 25 percent of the presidential vote in Kano state, Malam Aminu's highly populist appeal to the lower and middle classes of that state was the proximate cause of the 1979 crisis discussed above.

Waziri Ibrahim could have played more of a "spoiler" role in the election had his party achieved its anticipated results at the polls. Despite this, the GNPP managed a reasonable showing for a minor party (11.8 percent of the State Assembly seats, 8.4 percent in the Senate, 9.6 percent in the House of Representatives, 10.5 percent of the governorships, and 10 percent of the presidential vote). Moreover, although the PRP roughly matched the GNPP in the ratio of its victories, the GNPP's support was broader. It obtained, for example, Assembly seats in thirteen

⁴⁹ This assessment of these parties is based on extensive interviews conducted by the author with members of all three parties with a strong base in the north, namely, the NPN, the PRP, and the GNPP.

states compared to the PRP's five, and House of Representatives seats in seven states to the PRP's two.

Power to the NPN: A Step Forward or Sideways?

When the Fedeco/SMC bombshell was dropped on August 16, 1979, at least one Nigerian politician could feel vindicated by this action: S.G. Ikoku, a veteran radical, former associate of Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, and vice-presidential candidate of the PRP. Throughout the transition process, Ikoku had been one of the most consistent critics of what he regarded as the stage-management of the return to civilian rule by the Obasanjo regime. On August 16 the verdict he expressed to reporters was appropriately succinct: "We in the PRP have no doubt that the entire country will draw a conclusion from this precipitate action that Alhaji is the favoured baby."⁵⁰ On this occasion I wish simply to outline how the National Party of Nigeria constructed a new consensus based on "enlightened" self and communal interests to replace the consensus the military had forged by force of arms over the previous thirteen years.⁵¹

The National Party of Nigeria emerged from a protracted series of meetings between past and aspirant Nigerian politicians during the 1976-78 period but really gathered momentum after the Constituent Assembly convened in October 1977. The consensus among its leaders was the need to establish a broad political organization that would be best placed to win national power. It was tacitly accepted by them that the North would provide its central core of mass votes but that this concentration would be counterbalanced by the projecting of a national rather than sectional image, which would then permit the easy recruitment of candidates and supporters throughout the federation. Ideologically, the party stressed its commitment to "One Nigeria" and avoided taking clear positions on issues that were likely to alienate any potential affiliates.⁵²

In view of the ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity of Nigeria and the recent history of intense sectional conflicts, the performance of the NPN in the 1979 elections was exceptional. In addition to the presidency, the party won 30 percent of the seats in the Senate, 37 percent in the House of Representatives, 36 percent in the state assemblies, and 37 percent of the governorships. The fact that it did not achieve an overall majority of these positions can be largely attributed to the failure to rope in Azikiwe and, with him, the Igbo vote. Chief Awolowo, as a result of his political sentiments and political ambitions, which predate Nigerian independence, has consistently refused to make common cause with northern elites. As discussed earlier, Aminu Kano and the vote of Nigeria's most populous state, Kano, were lost because of

⁵⁰ *Daily Times*, 17 August 1979.

⁵¹ The military was also mindful of achieving balanced national participation in government positions, as well as in the location of government projects.

⁵² During the campaign, NPN leaders changed tack abruptly on matters that aroused strong feelings in particular geographical areas, such as the demand for free education in the West and for a different system of revenue allocation in the oil-producing areas.

the unwillingness of this same group to concede primacy in their party to their arch opponent since 1950.⁵³ The last sizeable and consolidated mass vote left for the NPN (outside the north) remained that of the Igbos of Imo and Anambra states.

The negotiations between NPN leaders and Azikiwe's lieutenants were continually renewed and then suspended. While Zik vacillated over whether to join the party on the basis of what he saw as unsatisfactory terms, many leading Igbo figures, including some with close ties to Azikiwe, threw in their lot with the NPN. When Zik finally moved to take over the rump of the NPP in December 1978, the great majority of aspirants for national and state office in Imo and Anambra, uncertain whether Azikiwe still had his hold on the Igbo people, decided to remain in the seemingly secure embrace of the NPN. Their people, however, rendered judgment most unambiguously on election day. Important Igbo personalities on the NPN ticket went down to defeat, often to unknown individuals. The Igbos decided to place their trust in Zik to get them the best deal in the new republic, rather than in those Igbos who with identical motives had joined the apparently dominant party.⁵⁴

On October 6, 1979, a week after his accession to power, President Shagari made public the Cooperation Agreement that had been reached between his NPN and Azikiwe's NPP. This agreement gave Shagari the support of 54.8 percent of the seats in both houses of the National Assembly, thereby enabling him to get his initial nominations approved and sympathetic consideration of his legislative program. The NPP struck a hard bargain, however, obtaining commitments to set up an agency to help states "whose social and economic development are lagging behind" the others and a committee to review the constitution and deal with such issues of importance to the Igbos as "abandoned property" in the civil war.⁵⁵ The program of the government would be based on a synthesis of the manifestos of the cooperating parties. Moreover, the NPP obtained key appointments in Shagari's cabinet and in the leadership of the Senate and House of Representatives.

During the first two years of the Shagari regime, the NPN-NPP alliance has been plagued with conflicts between factions in both parties. Moreover, such an alliance carries with it a disturbing legacy from the post-independence period. The formation of an NPN-NPP government in 1979 meant that history has repeated itself with considerable force. In 1960 Nigeria became independent under a nearly identical, and equally fragile, governing coalition

⁵³ See Dudley, *Parties and Politics in Northern Nigeria* (London: Frank Cass, 1968).

⁵⁴ This summary of very complex developments is based on numerous interviews conducted by the author in Lagos and Enugu (capital of Anambra state) with central figures in these proceedings from September 1978 to June 1979.

⁵⁵ During the great exodus of Igbos back to their "homeland" in the months preceding the outbreak of the civil war in May 1967, they were forced to abandon homes and places of business. Such a process continued during the civil war as the Biafran army was gradually hemmed in from all sides. The former owners of much of this lost property had not recovered it or received compensation.

between the Northern People's Congress (NPC) and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC).⁵⁶ The NPC was, as its name implies, a party largely based on the north. It was led by Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello (both killed in the first military coup of January 1966), whereas the NCNC was the party of Azikiwe, who happened to be on a Caribbean cruise when the plotters struck. Although Tafawa Balewa became Nigeria's first prime minister while Ahmadu Bello (the Sardauna of Sokoto) chose to remain Premier of the North, the latter was indisputably the leading force in the party. Consequently, the 1979 alliance agreement between Azikiwe and the new President from the Sokoto aristocracy recapitulates Nigerian history in a striking way.

The presidential system of 1979 is quite different from the parliamentary one of 1959-66. Yet the first decisive move of the Shagari government has been to act as if the system were parliamentary and the president needed a cabinet that reflected a dominant majority within the National Assembly. It is left to be seen if a new set of political attitudes and practices will emerge as Nigerian politicians begin operating the institutions provided for under the new constitution. The evidence available so far is not encouraging. Between 1979 and 1981, the National Assembly has been stymied by endless squabbles resulting in long delays in the passage of key legislation, including the annual budget. A bitter split has occurred in one of the parties, the PRP, extending from the party's leadership through the ranks of legislators and party supporters. Such a scission might facilitate a salutary realignment into two party blocs in Nigeria. It can also, however, be the source of unrelenting conflicts similar to the split in Awolowo's first party after 1962, an event widely regarded as the proximate cause of the collapse of the first Republic.⁵⁷

The most daunting problems facing the new political system are as much sociopolitical as institutional. The NPN came to power by designing a refurbished version of the model of governance of 1959-66. This model consists of neutralizing the regional, ethnic, and religious divisions in the country through the implementation of a distributive system of the state's resources that favors no single corporate group to the disadvantage of any other.⁵⁸ The NPN-NPP pact has further consolidated this strategy. Such a policy, however, calls for a tacit acceptance of whatever leadership appears capable of carrying, or arranging, the electoral support of as many sections of the population as possible. It further gives legitimacy to the current practice by which

⁵⁶ The NCNC became the National Convention of Nigerian Citizens after the reunification of the Cameroon Trust territories in 1962.

⁵⁷ The Aminu Kano wing has won legal recognition as the official PRP, while the dissidents include the two governors elected under the party label in Kano and Kaduna states. The official PRP has tended to be more acquiescent toward the Shagari government, while the dissidents have associated themselves on occasion with the "progressive" governors of the UPN and GNPP. Indeed, it was the latter policy of collaboration by the governors which precipitated the split within the PRP. [A similar split, also adjudicated by the courts in 2017, has occurred in the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) which lost the 2015 elections after 16 years of political dominance.]

⁵⁸ Joseph, "Political Parties and Ideology," pp. 83-85.

the various factions of Nigeria's bourgeoisie appropriate a significant portion of state allocations for their own use but justify doing so as being the share of "their" people in the national pie.⁵⁹

What Nigeria needs is not just smooth continuity from the recent military past,⁶⁰ as is evident in the growing extremes of wealth and poverty, the stagnation of agricultural production, the slow pace of industrialization, and the distress of urban dwellers owing to poor housing, inadequate public transport, and high unemployment. To some degree, especially in the socioeconomic domain, the Nigerian 1975-79 regime conforms to Ruth First's dictum quoted earlier that military coups in Africa have resulted in minimal fundamental changes. The fact that the same assertion cannot be made with equal conviction for constitutional and political matters indicates the measure of achievement of this regime. As General Obasanjo declared before leaving office, his government had "laid down the basic infrastructure of a stable political order."⁶¹ The initial proof of this remark was the successful implementation of a peaceful transition despite the serious questions that will persist regarding the role of the military regime in ensuring the success of the preferred civilian configuration.

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From the standpoint of the introductory discussion in this article, it can be suggested that perhaps the standard of neutrality and impartiality to be applied in transitional elections, whether from colonial or military regimes, is not some ideal one. With such a measuring rod, it might be concluded that the Nigerian transition was close to exemplary. The real value of the transition was making possible the freer play of political and social forces in Nigeria than was the case during the thirteen years of government by military decree. Whether that promise becomes a reality could ultimately determine if the election controversy of 1979 recedes to the status of an episode in Nigeria's electoral history or, instead, is regularly resuscitated to denounce the behavior of some politicians or a distrusted regime.

It cannot be predicted whether the new civilian system will fare any better than its predecessor, although some of the marked defects of the latter - such as the great imbalance in the size and power of the regions - were eliminated under successive military governments and entrenched in the new constitution. In the final analysis, the Nigerian people have patiently witnessed the return to civilian government as decreed and implemented from the top. From now on, they are likely to be less patient in waiting for real improvements in the accumulated socio-economic problems bequeathed by the departed, but still observant, military guardians.

⁵⁹ For a critique of this kind of political thinking, see Yusufu Bala Usman, "The State of the Nation: Whose State? Whose Nation?" in his collection of essays, *For the Liberation of Nigeria* (London and Port-of-Spain: New Beacon Books, 1979), pp. 59-77.

⁶⁰ Joseph, "Affluence and Underdevelopment: the Nigerian Experience," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 12, no. 2 (1978): 221-239.

⁶¹ *New Nigerian* (September 6, 1979) (transcript of his speech marking the opening of the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies).