

Political Instability and the Collapse of Nigeria First Republic Government: 1960-1966

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria First Republic Government was democratically elected institution that governed and regulate its affairs in accordance with the constitution. However, political instability and conflict failed to provide the favorable atmosphere to reign during the 1960-1966, Nigeria first republic government. the instabilities were created as result of ethnic division and competition that courses serious political disorder and turmoil ranging from census crises of 1962, election violence of 1964 and the leadership crises of the western region in 1965. First republic government came in to being as a result of political struggle by the Nigerian nationalist leaders, pre-independence political parties, the Nigeria press men and the ex-service men of the Nigeria army against the British colonial rule. Subsequently, 1959 election was held which served as the final stage that pave the way for the established first republic and the political independence of Nigeria came in 1960. The paper aims to provide the administrative structure of the Nigeria first republic government, the impact of the political instabilities to Nigeria politics and the collapse of the government in 1966. The methodology adopted in these writeup is historical in nature that entails the use of secondary sources, data analysis was collected from books, journal paper, articles, theses, had been study carefully and critically examines in order to determine their validity, accuracy and its authenticity. The objective of the study is to describe the historical significance of political instability in Nigeria first republic government and its impact to the present Nigerian Politics.

Keywords: Republic Government, Political Instability, Parties, Election, Nigeria Politics

INTRODUCTION

First Republic Government come into existence after the end of British Colonial Rule, when the country obtains political independence on 1st October 1960 from the British Colonial masters. The period between 1960 to 1966 was known as first republic government of Nigeria although the country became republic on 1st January 1963. Nigeria possessed all the feature of becoming a democratize nation and a symbol of African giant. Administratively Nigeria became independence on 1st October 1963 the period when the queen of England ceased from administrative control of the country. First republic government was parliamentary government the system inherits from the Westminster as a legacy of colonial masters. The system allowed for president and the prime minister as head of state and the latter as head of government. the legislatives were the federal house of representative and the reginal house of assembles and the house of chiefs, according to independence constitution supreme court was the apex court in the country that has the power to adjudicate cases.

There was a coalition government of Northern People Congress NPC who produce the prime minister and National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon NCNC produce the president. there were other political parties that partake in the first republic government political process such include Action Group AG, Northern Element Progressive Union NEPU, United Middle Belt Congress UMBC, United National Independence

Party UNI, Nigeria New Democratic Party NNDP. The political parties were known as pre independence political parties that fought for the political independence of the country and the establishment of Nigeria first republic government.

Immediately after the establishment of first republic government the country witnesses a series of political instabilities and conflict among them was the famous 1962 census crises, the crises occur as a result of the intention of the western and eastern region to obtained a high number of people in the result and when the census result was announced and the northern region became the highest populated region the other region disagree with the result and erupted in to violence which as a result the census was council and rescheduled. In 1964 election violence erupted shortly after the general strike of the same year, the election crises was accusation and counter accusation of gross manipulation of election result, election irregularities, disqualification of candidates and mountain of allegation that election did not took place in the western regime, many scholars were of the views these and many more reasons led to destruction of first republic foundations. By 1965 leadership tussled of western region breakout between the leader of the action group Obafemi Awolowo and the primer of the region Akintola, the tussle believes to be the final battle that led to the collapse of the first republic government.

The historical significance of the first republic government as first democratic government in Nigeria makes it necessary for this research paper to explore the impact of political instabilities in the history of Nigerian first republic government of 1960 to 1966. The Research paper delve into the political history of the Nigeria first republic government and the factors that led to the collapse of the government in 1966, the political instabilities and crises in the country contributed immensely to the erosion of the laying foundation for liberate democracy in Nigeria as well as in other neighboring countries of west African sub-region.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on Nigeria first republic government are too many, ranging from the collapsed of the government to the causes of the political turmoil in the Nigeria first republic. While these researches would fill the gap on the impact of the first republic political instability on contemporary Nigeria politics.

The book *Crisis, Ethnicity and Democracy in Nigeria The Failure of the First Republic*. Written by Diamond (1988) was the book that buttresses the main argument in this contention, the author expresses more on the courses of political instability in Nigeria first republic and eventually the factors that led to the failure of the government in 1966. But share no light on the impact on Nigeria politics. Therefore, this research would highlight more on the impact of political instability in Nigeria politics. Usman (2017). In his paper title *The Fall of the First Republic*. The author mention how Nigeria first republic was collapse and subsequently took over by the military in 1966 the paper did not touch the effect of the collapse on the Nigeria politics. Ojo, (2012). *Leadership Crisis and Political Instability in Nigeria, 1964-1966: The Personalities, the Parties and the Policies*. The author concentrated more on political instability in the western region of Nigeria and it effect the politics of the region and the country in general, western region political crises was one of the major factors that led to the failure of first republic government. Ochage (2001). In his book *the rise and fall of the Nigerian First Republic: history of Nigeria from Lord Lugard to Gen. Aguiyi-Ironsi (1900-1966)*. Stated the origin and the fall of Nigeria first republic but the impact of the failure was not discussed which this research would discuss in the subsequent explanation.

METHODOLOGY

The research work is mainly historical research therefore, the techniques adopted is historiography in nature in order to come out with an accurate and vigorous information. The method is informed of content analysis that is suitable in historical findings it allowed for analyzing materials or data collected from secondary

sources, historical artifact, which include textbooks, journal papers, articles, online document. thesis. The research finding and collecting materials was carried out through visiting library and Historical Monument center.

Historical approaches involve subjectivity in data analysis to robust criticism with a view to determine their authenticity, validity and accuracy.

Structures of First Republic Government

The Annal of Political History in Nigeria and other parts of African countries in the late 1950s and early 1960s was dominated with celebrations for attainment of political independence from their colonial masters. The Gold Coast (Ghana) became the first West African country to obtain independence in 1957 under the British colony and then Nigeria on the 1st October, 1960, became an independent Nation on the Act of the British parliament (Eseme, 2014). By 1963 the country became republic free from foreign domination. Independence in Nigeria was achieved through constitutional agreement unlike Latin American where military action was used. 1959 general election lay a foundation for democratic governance and the commencement of the Nigerian first republic government. below are map showing the Nigeria map and its Regions with their administrative headquarters after the creation of Midwestern Region in 1963.(Alao, 2015)



Figure 1: *Showing political map of Nigeria 1963 to 1966 (Source: Wikipedia)*

The Nigeria first republic government adopted the Westminster system of Parliamentary Government as a legacy of the British colonial master. A federal constitution was promulgated which allowed for multiparty system although they were regionally base. A coalition government was form immediately after the 1959 general election was held for the house of representatives the result was that NPC had 134 seats and NCNC secure 89 seats while AG had a total of 73 seats therefore none of the parties ginned the majority seats of 156 out of 312 members of the house of representatives, these led to the formation of coalition between NPC and NCNC with Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa of NPC and Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe of NCNC as the

president who represent the Queen of England, at the same time he was the governor general and the head of state, who appear in all ceremonial activities of the government his election in to office was for the period of five years as it was stated in the constitution while the former served as the prime minister and head of government who carry out all the administrative activities of the government. The table below showed clearly the result of the 1959 general election that pave the way to the first republic government (Sklar, 1963).

Table 1: General Election Result 1959

Regions	Action Group & UMBC	NCNC & NEPU	NPC	Others Independents
Northern Region	25	8	134	7
Eastern Region	14	56	—	1
Western Region	33	21	—	8
Federal Territory	1	2	—	—
Total seats (out of 312)	73	89	134	16

Source: Ikelegbe, (1988).

The Nigerian first Republic Government, according to the independent constitution of 1960 to 1963 republic constitution approved that Nigeria shall be a parliamentary democratic government, officially addresses as federal republic of Nigeria with federal constitution and regional constitution (Adodo 1960). The constitution provided three autonomous regional government, namely the Northern region, the Western region and the Eastern region each operated independently and at the center federal government. where there was constitutional conflict between the regional and federal constitution the federal would prevail. Each region was headed by a governor who was the head of state and premier served as the head of the government with his council of minister who at same time legislate in the regional house. Each region operated with full Autonomy to governed and regulate the affairs of region. The constitution also provided the regional house of assemble (lower house) who were elected by the electorate directly and the house of chief (upper house) at the regional government it consists of traditional rulers (Ochage 2001).

The federal legislative was bicameral type that constitute of the upper house the senate and lower house the house of representatives (Osage, 1998). The senate consist of 44 members from selected by the regional house of assembly from various senatorial district of the region and the house of representative comprised of 312 members elected from different federal constituency (Alao, 2015).

The judicial system under the 1963 constitution stated that the law of the land was the English common law and Islamic law these allowed for the adoption of the criminal code and the penal code. The supreme court was the apex court of the land the judgement of the court was the final that no court had the power to reopen the judgement of the court or entertained appeal from the supreme court. Before the independent appeal were made to Privy Council in London or at the West African Court of Appeal (WACA) (Eseme, 2014). The republican constitution all so established the Judicial Service Commission, the commission was incharge of appointment promotion and discipline of the judges in order to insure the independent of the judiciary, the hierarchy of the Nigeria court were the supreme court as the apex court in land follow by, Court of Appeal, High Court, Magistrate Court, Customary Court which is more of traditional law, then the Sharia Court of Appeal and Area Court were of the Islamic law. The executive, legislative and the judiciary operated within the provision of the constitution (Alao, 2015).

Political Instability and Conflict

Political instability and conflicts emanated in most part of sub-Saharan African immediately after the political independence of their countries, they were into one political instability to another as aftermath of colonial rule it stretched from socio political or economic instability to military coup. Nigeria like any other African countries experienced series of political instabilities that hinder socio-economic and political development in the country (Mair, 2000).

The National Census Crises of 1962-63 became the first famous population census conducted under the independent Nigeria government, however census crisis came up shortly after the formation of the first republic government these was because population in Nigeria served as parameter in wealth distribution, government employment, recruitment in to Nigerian army forces, revenue allocation to the regions and seats in the house of representative were allocated to the regions base on the population (Usman 2017). Therefore, the southern politician wanted to end the northern dominance in Nigeria politics and the only way to achieved that was through the census. In May 1962 the census was conducted although the result was not announce in public but there were allegation and counter accusation that the result was been manipulated in the southern part of the country, the result showed that the north population had increase from 16.5 million in the last census of 1952 to 22.5 million in 1962 an increase of 30 per cent, but in the southern part of the country the population had increase to 200% and in the western part the preliminary result showed about 70 per cent increase from the result its indicated that the north had lost its majority share of the country population (Eseme, 2014). Other factors that influence the census crisis were unqualify enumerators, military involvement in the monitory of the census, the police prevented enumerators to do their job and the widespread of inflation of the census result in many regions. These led to volatile situation in the country that course the annulment of the census result and fresh one was conducted in 1963, political and economic factors play more of decisive role in Nigeria population census-taking than any other factors (Diamond, 1988).

The Action Group Crises of 1962-63 and many factors were responsible for the action group (AG) crises and disintegration of the political party (Ojo 2016). The party retained political power in the western region after its won the 1959 general election, however by 1962-63 the party collapse due to certain intra-party politics one of them was the leadership tussle between the party leader Obafemi Awolowo and the deputy leader who was the premier, Chief Samuel Akintola over the control of the party and government affairs (Ojo, 2012). the issues were known as “personality clash”. The crises started when the party leader view the deputy leader was over ambitious and greed individual that want to sideline him and dominated the party. These make Awolowo to saw him as a traitor, that he must be remove as deputy and as premier of the western region. Furthermore, the clash of ideology between the two personality, these divided action group in to two group of Radical and Conservatives, the first faction was headed by chief Awolowo and the other headed by chief Akintola, his supporters cooperate with the NPC the rule party. While the Awolowo group make an alliance with NCNC in order to root out NPC from power. Another course of AG spilt was an allegation that chief Awolowo as a party leader want to be consulted on any matters of important policy making, he must be consulted before taking any decision by the western region government headed by chief Akintola. Akintola and other party official saw Awolowo as political threat to the western region government (Oladiran, 2013).

In addition, as the crisis persisted, on the February 1963 an all party members meeting was called in Jos where the party draw a conclusion that office of deputy leader shall be remove, that chief Ayo Rosiji shall be dismiss from the party national secretariat and remove chief Akintola as deputy leader as well as a premier of western region, That he was found guilty of anti-party activities, maladministration, disloyalty and gross-misconduct (Omotola, 2014). Therefore. the members of reginal house of assemble passed a vote of no confidence and presented it to the governor, thus chief Akintola was dismiss from the office of the premier of western region, as deputy party leader and was replace by Alhaji D.S. Adegbenro. The consequences of these action led to serious mayhem and political violence by “free-for all-fight” which

started by supporters of Akintola to prevent the house from carrying out their duties, which created disorder and confusion the police had to intervene under the order of prime minister to lock the house (Diamond, 1988). These deem it necessary for the prime minister to impose state of emergency, that dissolved the entire house of chief and the house of assemble and a sole administrator had been made under the leadership of Dr. M.A. Majekodunmi was constituted. on November 1962 chief Awolowo and 30 others were accused of overthrowing the federal government and was sentence to 10 years imprisonment. From his words.

“We were deeply committed to a change of government and we saw that waiting for elections would not produce any solution to the problem... We started preparations for it and the preparations had gone very far and I believe we would have pulled it off. But unfortunately for us, our leader was so kind to the Nigerian police that he had a police informant among his planners and so the police knew every move we were making. And so, it was easy to trip us up... So, all I am saying is that, yes, there was an attempt to overthrow the government. Yes, I took part in the attempt. Yes, it failed” (Obafemi Awolowo, 1960).

In 1963, Chief S.L Akintola and other members of the NCNC form a new political party known as Nigerian National Democratic Party NNDP and form a new government in the western region. By 1963 Midwest region was created these was possible as the AG was out of power in the region. The federal government set a commission of inquiry headed by justice G.B.A Cokerto to investigate and the outcome found Akintola not guilty (Smith, 2002).

The General strike of 1964, the root course of the strike was the rise in the salaries of the ministers and the parliamentary members while worker was left with no increment. Thus, various group of worker union were mobilized under the axis of joint action committee or JAC, the strike lasted from 1st to 12 June it was estimated that about 300,000 workers joint the action and about 300 active union involved. The industrial action taken the country economic activities into standstill; the strike was marked as one of the political disorders that led to the failure of Nigeria first republic government (Diamond, 1988).

The Federal Election of 1964-65 was a federal parliament election was conducted between two political parties of Nigeria National Alliance NNA and United Progressives Grand Alliance UPGA (Diamond, 1988b). The elections were one of the historic elections in the political history of Nigeria that was held on 30th December 1964. The election process encounters with series of volatile situation stretching from killing of political opponents, kidnaping, harassment by the ruling party in the region, allegation and counter allegation on plot to rig the election. As a result, the election was postponed to 18th of March 1965. (Anglin 1965)And when the election was held the parties were on open harassment and intimidation to its opposition party during the campaigns. These led to deployment of the military in order to grantee the peaceful Atmosphere. The alliance parties under NNA were the Northern people congress, Nigerian national democratic party, Midwest democratic front, Dynamic party, Niger delta congress, Lagos state united front, and the Republican Party. And the alliance under UPGA there were national council of Nigeria Cameroons, Action Group, Northern progressive front, Kano People Party, northern element progressive union, United Middle-belt Congress and Zamfara Commoners Party. the result was victorious to the NPC with 162 seats in the house of representatives out of 312 seats while the NNA won a total of 198 seats sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was re-elected as prime minister of Nigeria however the election was mark by manipulation and violence in the history. Below is the election result of 1964-65 federal parliament election (Ken, 1963).

Table 2: 1964-1965 General Election Result

Political parties	Northern Region	Western Region	Eastern Region	Mid-Western Region	Lagos Capital	Total seats Won
NPC	162	0	0	0	0	162
NNDP	0	36	0	0	0	36

NCNC	0	5	64	14	1	84
AG	0	15	4	0	2	21
Others	5	1	2	0	1	9
Total seat in the parliament	1167	57	70	14	1	Total seat out of 312

Source from: *Election in Nigeria; African election data base*

The combinations of political violence and irregularities that witness the 1964 election also reappear in the 1965 election. As the election result was announce and the NNA emerged victorious. The killing continued vehemently resulted into military struck on 15th of January 1966 and took over the mantle of leadership and the struck mark the end of first republic govern Election upheaval was classified as the final showdown to the collapse of the first republic (Ken, 1963).

Collapse of the First Republic

Western Region Rerun Election of October 1965, was among the remote course that trigger the collapse of first republic government in Nigeria (Osage, 1998). The election was rerun a leftover of the 1964 general election, the election was between the AG and the NNDP which they believe in a free and fair election their candidate will won the election as Akintola the serving premier was not ready to vacate office, the election encounter inter and intra party politic stretch from AG, NNDP deadly rivalry and Akintola alliance with the norther people congress, these created an unprecedented pollical turmoil in the region, which spread to other part of the country. The was conducted under unfavorable condition to an extant of harassing the opposition, rigging at the polling unit and announced the winner on the Radio by the NNDP. As result of these the electoral commissioner had resigned and the AG members when into street demonstrating that led to the loss of life and property (Olumide & Ekanade, 2011). Consequently, the prime minister failed to impose the emergency rule as it was imposed in the 1962 in order to restore the law and order in the region. Failure to invite the army the army invited themselves as it argues by many scholars, army came and took over the mantle of leadership that mark the end of Nigeria First Republic Government (Achebe, 1999).

Lack of political party ideology, programmed and principles, in the foundation of political parties in the first republic was also among the remote courses which led to the collapse of the government, the parties were build base on ethnicity, regionalism, religion and tribal, NPC for instance dominated the entire northerregion of nigeria and it won all the elective seats, with the policy of one north one people one destiny(Udofia, 1981). The party was traditionalist, aristocratic, gradualist and regionalist in their ideologies theparty was regionally based in its political activities. NCNC was nationalist, radical, egalitarian and populistand AG adopt the democratic socialism (Jackson, 1972; Danjibo & Ashindorbe, 2018).

“Another remote course of the fall of the first republic government in 1966 was tribalism and nepotism embark in the formation by the three major ethnic group that were later to control three major regions of their origin.... that were affected with lack of clear political ideology as identify as a remote course of the 1966, the NPC was feudalism and aristocratic which contracted to it political bedrock mate NCNC that embraced to some extent, egalitarian temperament while the action Group preached democratic socialism”
Sklar, R.L 1963

The Region operates one party regionally based political parties’ system, instead of multiparty system which would allow for diverged ideology among the polity that signal political instability in the government (Israel & Okpalaeke, 2018).

The creation of mid-west in 1963 and the fear of domination among the minorities group Nigeria also create a lot of confusion and controversy among the political leaders of NPC, NCNC and AG. these led to more agitation by the minority group for more state creation for example, Mid-Belt Zone League, and Caliber-Ogoja-Rivers Movement were form to press for state creation in order to free from domination the majority tribes of their region, it was argue that the declaration of state of emergency and the creation of Mid-west region had fueled the tension that led to the loss of life and property (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

Impact to Nigeria Politics

Disparity among the ethnic group, socio-cultural and political culture among the regions also served as course to the fall of first republic (Jiboku & Jiboku, 2018). Each of the region was dominated by one major ethnic or the other ,in norther Nigeria the Hausa/Funani were the dominant group and in the western Nigeria the Yoruba the largest group and the Igbo occupy the eastern region each ethnic group speak different language and practice difference region, these ethno-federal arrangement was the genesis and the fundamental course of all political disorder and decaying in the first republic government due to creation of competition among the ethnic group in the country. Absent of political culture which when properly administer could led to sustainability and development of liberate democracy in the country. The elite failed to use power in accordance to the power play regulation and they also lack political tolerance. Instead of using the independence as an avenue to prosper and developed the country but rather put selfish interest in manipulating political norm. As Okwudiba NNoli put it:

“Ethnicity is not a critical variable, it lacks explanatory potency its role in African politics, although sometime considerable, is more apparent than real. Its potential as a force for changing the objective realities of Africa is very minimal” (Okwudiba, 1978).

Economic of dependencies served as a measure in the failure of the first republic, the Nigeria economy was dominated by the foreign multinational and trading companies, particularly the British (Rodney, 1973). The economy largely depends on foreign control despite the country economic policies that forms towards development and growth. However, the economy was dislodged by the foreign multinational with policies of exploitations and capitalist mode of production, taxation had the government into economic crises. The issues of revenue allocation and locating industry led to reginal agitation against one region to another which created mismanagement and embezzlement of fund as in one of the event chief Awolowo was accuse of misused of fund and later was sentence to jail. The form of economy policy inherits by the first republic created societal class and development of capitalist mode that effect the cooperate existence of the regions (Rodney, 1973).

The 15 January 1966 military intervention, mark the end of Nigerian first republic government when a group of youth offices from Nigeria army plot a coup d'état against the Nigeria civilian government others members of the nt, under the leadership of Major C.K Nzeozgwu topple the government in the name of coup de'eter (Oyeleye & Oyediran, 1979). Others members of the coup plot were Igbo in tribe (Easterners) while those that lose their life in the coup were Hausa in tribe (Northerners) that included the premier of norther region sir Ahmadu Bello and the Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa the then premier of Nigeria, the historical exposition indicate that the coup was Igbo against the Hausa in another word east against the North. Meanwhile the western region also suffers from the coup by losing their dignitaries in persons of chief S.L Akintola the premier of western region, col. Adetuji Major Samuel among the other. The northern felts cheated and sideline by the military government, thus on July 15th of same year another military coup took place, that brings an end to the Nigerian first military consequently the result of the nigeria second military coup led to the 1967nigeria civil war as the Eastern region Igbo want to secede from the federation of Nigeria (Toyin, 2015). The war lasted for 30 months and the outcome of the war was “No victor no Vanquish”. Larry Diamond makes the following remarks.

“In short, the rulers used power that they held constitutionally to do unconstitutional things. In the process they destroyed them- selves. Nigeria had censuses that were not censuses, elections that were not elections, and finally governments that were not governments” (Larry, 1988a).

CONCLUSION

The paper examines the political instability that bedeviled the continuity of Nigerian first republic government that resulted in the collapse of the government. The historical anthology of Nigerian first republic government had it that the genesis of the instability came out of ethnic division and competition, creation of regionalism in 1946 by Richard constitution and politics of ethnicities by first republic political parties. These mean that since independence to the present democratic process Nigeria is witnessing different kind of political instability stretching from ethnic difference to socio-political instability and military intervention, that attempt to disintegrate the existence of the country as a nation. These may not be unconnected with the British colonial policies, the indirect rule system and the policy of divide and rule and the economic policy of import dependence that indirectly continued to exit in the country into what scholars called Neo-colonialism.

In addition for a country to be vibrate there is need to putdown policies and programmed that would do away with the ethnic diversity as it was stated by Malam Aminu Kano “ For Nigeria to remain as a nation we must understand our difference in order to live in peace and harmony with one another” the differences referred to different in culture, religion, ethnicity and location. for the present federal government to avoid the failure of the first republic it needs to get rid insecurity, corruption, unemployment and various kind of election malpractice. There is also the issues of equal distribution resources and infrastructures among the members states of the country. The equitable existence of Nigeria as a multi-ethnic nation would create a sense of unity, harmony and mutual co-operation would enhance socio-economic and political development in the country.

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