

Continuity and Change in Nigeria's Political Evolution: The 1979 Elections

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Introduction

It is generally agreed among analysts and commentators on Nigeria's pre-1966 politics that, foremost among the factors that led to the fall of the first Republic was the structure and mode of operation of the Nigerian political parties. The three major parties — the Action Group (AG), the National Convention of Nigerian Citizens (N.C.N.C.) and the Northern People Congress (N.P.C.) were not only based in the three regions — West East and North respectively (before the creation of the Mid-West region), but depended on the three major ethnic groups — the Yoruba, Ibo and the Hausa/Fulani for their core of support. The only way trans-regional support was secured was through a network of alliances with opposition parties in other regions.

The mode of operation of the parties was characterised by the harassment and intimidation of political opponents; campaigns were carried out in a way and with a language that served to bring to the fore and emphasise primordial differences, while elections were marked by rigging, persecution and attempted suppression of rival political party functionaries within one's region. It is no wonder then that election time was synonymous with one of the social disorder and anarchy, when riots and violence became the order of the day. Given this state of affairs, the break-down of the system was only a matter of time.¹

With this background knowledge and the claim to be a "corrective regime", the military, following its usurpation of power, embarked on a process of conscious structural remodelling, institutional reconstruction and social engineering of the Nigerian political system, in a bid to evolve, if not a new political party system, at least a better one than had existed hitherto — A system that would be devoid of the fissiparous elements of its predecessor, conducive to national stability and integration, and one that would reduce to the minimum electoral malpractices.

The division of the country into twelve and later nineteen states was seen as having struck a blow at the base of regionalism, ethnicity and thus political instability for instead of the four regions which served as focal points of ethnic and political loyalty and thus generators of interethnic and inter-regional conflicts, there were now nineteen states, the creation of which was not based on ethnic, sectional or other such considerations. According to Gowon, the new state structure "had in fact produced a basis for political instability in that the structural imbalance of the First Republic has been decisively corrected."²

Since the ethnic groups were distributed into various states and because, as a result, a party could not hope to win a nation-wide election based on the support of one state alone, the feeling was that sectionalism or even ethnicity would not be dominant features of post-military Nigerian politics. If the possibility of states, consisting of the same ethnic groups or belonging to the same geographical area, "ganging up" to form a political party had occurred to Gowon, the occasion for putting forward a formula to solve such a dilemma never occurred. The solution would have

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ited for Gowon's views on the future constitution and of that of the Constituent Assembly he would have established during preparations for handing over to civilian rule. Besides counter facts, we know that Gowon left the scene without attempting to solve this dilemma or even evincing an awareness of the probability of its occurrence.

Since the occasion for handing over to civilian rule occurred in Murtala's regime, more thought and concern was given to political institutions and processes that would usher in the desired kind of system. It is in fact with the Murtala/Obasanjo regime that we have a clear case made for Panter-Brick's analogy between military and colonial rule with regards to their manner of departure from the political scene. He says; "A military regime that has assumed responsibility for correcting the deficiencies of its predecessor may act like a colonial government, exercising the power of tutelage, and serving for itself the right to insist upon certain constitutional provisions. It will most certainly give itself a period of grace, ruling by decree until certain conditions are fulfilled, and it may preempt future decisions by its own unilateral action."³ The military regime in Nigeria in fact treated the path towards civilian rule insisting on some specific constitutional provisions in the constitution that was drawn up preparatory to handing over to civilian rule. These provisions influenced greatly the kinds of political parties and political personalities that emerged, and was crucial in determining the tempo and pace of political processes as a whole.

DIRECTIVES, CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS AND DECREES

After listing some of the ills that bedevilled Nigeria's first Republic, Murtala told the Constituent Assembly members that had been elected and nominated to draw up a new Constitution for Nigeria that "Considering our past political experience" the constitution they were to devise should seek to: eliminate cut-throat political competition, discourage institutionalised opposition, establish principles of public accountability, eliminate over-centralisation of power in a few hands, evolve a free and fair electoral system which would ensure adequate representation of all Nigerians at the centre, establish genuine and national political parties, set up an Executive Presidential System of Government and emphasise the Federal character of the country in the choice of the future cabinet.⁴ These directives served as the parameters within which the Constituent Assembly worked.

In keeping with these directives, they evolved a constitution which stated, inter alia, that a political party to be recognised as such should "ensure that the members of the executive committee or other governing body of the political party reflect the federal character of Nigeria."⁵ This federal character was defined as "two-thirds of the States comprising the Federation."⁶

The financial position and dealings of the parties were to be subject to the scrutiny of the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) as the occasion arose while "any funds or assets remitted or sent to a political party from outside Nigeria shall be handed to FEDECO within 21 days."⁷ Lastly, all political party headquarters were to be in the national capital.

To qualify for the office of the President, a candidate needed not only a majority of the votes cast at the Presidential election but was also required to have not less than "one quarter of the votes cast at the election in each of at least two-thirds of all states in

the Federation."⁸ In the event of an inconclusive first election, a run-off election with the above criteria determining the winner would be carried out. If this failed to produce a winner, "there shall be a third popular election with the winner decided by simple majority of votes won"⁹ The second and third election would be contested by the candidate who secured the highest number of votes at the first ballot and "one among the remaining candidates who has a majority of votes in the highest number of states"¹⁰ All these provisions were incorporated into the electoral decree of 1977. It is evident that these provisions were not only aimed at producing a nationally integrative electoral system, but also at producing a President elected on popular (all-Nigerian) support rather than one elected by a section of the country.

The decree, not only emphasised the above ideals, but to make for public accountability, empowered FEDECO to disqualify from contesting any of the election people who had been found guilty by one of the series of tribunals set up by the military since 1966 as well as people whose tax papers for the last three years were not in order. To make the political parties financially independent, there was a provision for a financial grant from the Government. 50% of this grant was to be shared equally among all the parties with candidates for election in not less than 20 per cent of the constituencies for the particular election at the start of the campaign, and the remaining 50 per cent was to be shared after the elections in proportion to the number of seats won by each party in the Senate and House of Representatives.¹¹ Lastly, the FEDECO reserved the right to disqualify any political party from participating in the elections by refusing to register it.

THE CAMPAIGNS

With the stage thus set, the ban on political parties was lifted by mid-September 1978 and FEDECO set 18 December of the same year as dead-line for the submission of papers by all parties that wanted to contest the elections. It has been estimated that not less than 53 parties were formed when the ban was lifted.¹² Of these, 19 submitted their papers and 5 were declared qualified to contest. The fortunate five were: the Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP), the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP), The Peoples Redemption Party (PRD) and the United Party of Nigeria (UPN). Their Presidential Candidates were: respectively, Alhaji Ibrahim Waziri, Alhaji Shehu Shangari, Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, Alhaji Aminu Kano and Chief Obafemi Awolowo.

There was a general sense of disappointment among articulate sections of society at the tenor of the campaigns. Although the Manifestos of the various parties dealt with their positions on specific social and economic issues, the campaigns were completely devoid of any fundamental issues of national import. The preoccupation was with disparaging the leadership qualities of one's opponents, narrating their role and contribution to the political evolution of the country¹³ — emphasising negative aspects in the process — attacking and counter-attacking each other's pronouncements and such other mundane concerns. The Nigerian papers were aggressive in their condemnation of this campaign trend. One carried an editorial on "Political Mediocrity"¹⁴, another lamented the "Poverty of ideas".¹⁵ A columnist in another paper introduced a new perspective on psephology when he attributed what he termed the "lack of originality" in the campaigns to the "law of attack" under which a politician is saved the trauma of thinking and planning and yet managing to comm

TABLE 1.
VOTES SCORED IN THE SENATORIAL ELECTIONS

STATES	PARTY				
	GNPP	UPN	NPN	PRP	NPP
ANAMBRA	12832	10932	210101	19574	699157
BAUCHI	188819	28959	323392	127279	39868
BENDEL	38332	316511	650194	2055	80639
BENUE	46452	14769	332967	—	75523
BORNO	278352	22145	184633	31508	—
CROSS RIVER	161353	77479	310071	—	68203
GONGOLA	223121	124707	203226	30708	17836
IMO	101184	7553	145507	8609	750518
KADUNA	33824	85094	410888	278305	61807
KANO	35430	13831	233985	683367	—
KWARA	32383	126065	54282	328	1020
LAGOS	14480	428573	35730	2556	52738
NIGER	21498	13860	175597	8139	207
OGUN	1018	230411	31953	—	119
ONDO	4905	501522	49612	—	6417
OYO	9472	758696	200372	2497	4397
PLATEAU	41287	20024	154792	19017	220278
RIVERS	46985	20106	153454	30	86138
SOKOTO	910310	34145	571562	38305	—

Source: Daily Times, New Nigeria, Nigerian Standard, August, 1979.

TABLE 2:

SEATS WON PER STATE — SENATORIAL ELECTIONS

STATE	NUMBER OF SEATS	PARTY				
		GNPP	UPN	NPN	PRP	NPP
ANAMBRA	5	—	—	—	—	5
BENDEL	5	—	4	1	—	—
BAUCHI	5	—	—	5	—	—
BENUE	5	—	—	—	—	—
BORNO	5	4	—	1	—	5
CROSS RIVER	5	2	—	3	—	—
GONGOLA	5	2	2	1	—	—
IMO	5	—	—	—	—	5
KADUNA	5	—	—	3	2	—
KANO	5	—	—	—	5	—
KWARA	5	—	2	3	—	—
LAGOS	5	—	5	—	—	—
NIGER	5	—	—	5	—	—
OGUN	5	—	5	—	—	—
ONDO	5	—	5	—	—	—
OYO	5	—	5	—	—	—
PLATEAU	5	—	—	1	—	4
RIVERS	5	—	—	2	—	2
SOKOTO	5	—	—	5	—	—
TOTAL	95	8	28	35	7	16

Source: Daily Times, New Nigeria, Nigerian Standard, August, 1979.

TABLE 3:

STATE HOUSES OF ASSEMBLY RESULTS

STATE	NUMBER OF SEATS	PARTY				
		GNPP	UPN	NPN	PRP	NPP
ANAMBRA	14	1	—	13	—	—
BAUCHI	60	9	—	45	—	—
BENDEL	60	—	34	22	2	—
BENUE	57	6	—	48	—	—
BORNO	72	57	—	11	2	—
CROSS RIVER	84	16	7	58	—	—
GONGOLA	63	25	18	15	—	—
IMO	90	2	—	9	—	—
KADUNA	99	10	3	64	16	—
KANO	138	3	1	11	122	—
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	—	—
RIVERS	42	—	1	26	—	—
SOKOTO	111	19	—	92	—	—
TOTAL	1,347	155	333	487	143	226

Source: Daily Times, New Nigeria, Nigerian Standard, August, 1979

TABLE 4

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES RESULTS.

STATE	NUMBER OF SEATS	PARTY				
		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

Source: Daily Times, New Nigeria, Nigerian Standard, August, 1979

TABLE 5
COMPUTATION OF ELECTORIAL RESULTS OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

PARTY	GNPP		UPN		NPN	VOTES RECEIVED	NPP
	VOTES RECEIVED	%	VOTES RECEIVED	%			
ANAMBRA	20,228	1.67	9,063	0.75			
BAUCHI	154,218	15.44	29,960	3.00			
BENDEL	8,242	1.23	356,381	53.23			
BENUE	42,993	7.89	13,864	2.57			
BORNO	384,278	54.04	23,885	3.35			
CROSS RIVER	100,105	15.14	77,775	11.76			
GONGOLA	217,914	34.09	138,561	21.67			
IMO	34,616	3.00	7,335	0.64			
KADUNA	190,936	13.80	92,382	6.68			
KANO	18,482	1.54	14,973	1.23			
KWARA	20,251	5.71	140,026	39.48			
LAGOS	3,943	0.48	681,762	82.30			
NIGER	63,273	16.50	14,155	3.69			
OGUN	3,974	0.53	689,655	92.61			
ONDO	3,561	0.26	1,294,666	94.51			
OYO	8,029	0.57	1,197,983	85.78			
PLATEAU	3,400	6.82	29,029	5.29			
RIVERS	15,025	2.18	71,114	10.33			
SOKOTO	359,021	26.61	34,102	2.52			
TOTAL	1,686,489		4,916,651				
VOTES RECEIVED	NPN	VOTES RECEIVED	PRP	VOTES RECEIVED	NPP		
163,164	3.50	14,500	1.20	1,002,083	52.58		
623,989	62.8	143,202	14.34	47,314	4.72		
242,320	36.19	4,939	0.73	57,629	8.60		
411,648	76.39	7,277	1.35	63,097	11.71		
246,778	34.71	46,385	6.52	9,642	1.35		
425,815	64.40	6,737	1.01	50,671	7.66		
227,057	35.52	27,750	4.34	27,856	4.35		
101,516	8.80	10,252	0.89	999,636	86.67		
596,362	43.12	437,771	31.66	65,321	4.72		
243,423	19.94	932,803	76.41	11,082	0.91		
190,142	53.62	2,376	0.67	1,830	0.52		
59,515	7.18	3,874	0.47	79,320	9.57		
287,072	74.88	14,555	3.79	4,292	1.11		
46,358	6.23	2,338	0.31	2,343	0.32		
57,361	4.19	2,509	0.18	11,752	0.86		
177,999	12.75	4,804	0.32	7,732	0.55		
190,458	34.73	21,852	3.98	269,666	49.17		
499,846	72.65	3,212	0.46	98,754	14.35		
898,094	66.58	44,977	3.33	12,503	0.92		
5,688,857		1,732,113		2,822,523			

Source: Daily Times, New Nigeria, Nigerian Standard, August, 1979.

followership by simply attacking whatever his opponents say or do" ¹⁶ The cynicism was carried further by another columnist who attributed the lucklustre nature of the campaigns to the fact that the "soldiers have banned insults". ¹⁷

One does not need to go far to find the reason for this state of affairs. Given the apparent similarity in party programmes and ideology of the leaders, it is no wonder that the campaigns were not only dull but dominated by debates over trivialities. If we apply the conventional Classification categories of left, right and centre to the parties we shall find that all of them can be said to be centrist, with the PRP and UPN (particularly the former) being left of centre. It is also worth noting the fact that although not all the Presidential Candidates participated in drafting the Constitution ¹⁸ — a constitution that re-affirms Nigeria's commitment to the capitalist way of life — all of them gave it unqualified support.

An alternative explanation may be the kind of electorate they were dealing with. The electorate is not only largely illiterate, but among the literati, a large number of them share the same philosophical and ideological outlook with the candidates. Governmental directives and constitutional provisions barring certain groups from "active" participation in the elections, might also have contributed greatly to this situation. We shall deal with this latter factor later on.

On the positive side however, there was a clear attempt by the political actors to desist from the use of any language that might be insinuated as being aimed at rallying ethnic support, and except in some few cases, there was no violence or intimidation and each candidate campaigned unimpeded all over the country. Corroborating this last observation, Chief Awolowo, after recalling an occasion in the 1959 election when a Native Authority policeman came and dismantled everything and cancelled his permit as he was about to mount the rostrum for a campaign in Sokoto, said; today "we have been able to campaign in all nooks and corners of the Northern State unmolested". ¹⁹

VOTING TREND

The worst disappointment in the whole election exercise, however, was the evident continuity in the voting behaviour of the Nigerian electorate. As evidenced in the distribution of votes and seats won by each of the five parties, (See Tables 1-5) each party performed best in the home-state of the Presidential Candidate and/or in the adjoining states, most of which are made up of the ethnic group from which the candidate hails. Thus the GNPP in the Senatorial Elections won its highest number of seats (5 seats) in the Bornu State. ²⁰ It won 22 out of its 24 seats in the House of Representatives, 57 of its 72 State House of Assembly Seats and 54.07% of all the votes cast in the Presidential Election in the State. The UPN had the highest number of votes in the Senatorial elections in Oyo State, won all the five seats in Oyo State, won all the five seats in Onyo, Ondo, Ogun and Lagos States, all the House of Representative seats in Ondo, Ogun and Lagos, and 38 of the 42 in Oyo. In the State House Assembly elections UPN won all the seats in Ogun and Lagos, 65 of the 66 allocated to Ondo and 117 of the 120 seats in Oyo State, while winning 92.61 percent, 82.3 percent, 94.1 percent and 85.78 percent respectively of the votes cast in the Presidential election. Except the Bendel State, where it had 53.2 percent of the votes, the others are predominantly Yoruba States. The NPN on its part, had its highest votes in Senatorial

elections in Sokoto while winning all the five seats in Sokoto, Bauchi, Niger and Benue. It won all the House of Representatives seats in Niger, taking 18 of the 20 in Bauchi, 18 of the 19 in Benue and 31 of the 37 in Sokoto. It also performed well in the Rivers State, where it took 10 of the 14 seats and 22 of the 28 in the Cross Rivers, while winning over half the seats for Kaduna and Kwara States. In the State House of Assembly elections, it won 45 of the 60 seats for Bauchi State, 28 of the 30 in Niger, 92 of the 111 in Sokoto, 48 of the 57 in Benue, 58 of the 84 in the Cross River, 25 of the 42 in Kwara and 64 of the 99 in Kaduna State and took 62.48 percent, of the votes cast in the Presidential elections, in Bauchi State, 66.58 percent in Sokoto State, 76.39 percent in the Benue State, 72.65 percent in the River State, 64.40 percent in the Cross Rivers and 53.62 percent in Kwara State.²¹

The PRP got its highest votes in the Senatorial elections in Kano State, which was also the state where it won all five seats. For the House of Representatives it took 39 of the 46 seats and 122 of the 138 seats in the House of Assembly, while it got 76.41 percent of the votes cast in the Presidential election in the state. Similarly the NPP had its highest votes in the Senatorial election in Imo State winning all the five seats for that state and the Anambra State. In the House of Representatives election it got 28 of the 30 seats in Imo, 26 of the 29 in the Anambra State and 13 of the 16 in Plateau State, while winning 79 of 90, 73 of 87 and 35 of 48 seats respectively in the States House of Assembly elections. In the Presidential elections it had 86.67 percent of the votes in Imo and 82.88 percent of the seats in Anambra. Both states are Ibo dominated. The above pattern was the same in the Gubernatorial elections except for the displacement of the NPN by the PRP in Kaduna State and of GNPP's assertion of its authority in the Gongola, where the UPN had been a close contender in the other elections.

It is thus evident from the above that ethnic factors predominated the voting pattern except for aberrant cases like that of the NPP in the Plateau,²² the NPN in the Rivers, Cross Rivers and Benue States and the UPN in Gongola. These aberrations, however, do not distort the pattern.

The special case of the PRP deserves further comment. While we may say that sectional factors might have been crucial in its victory in the Kano State, its admirable performance in the Kaduna State cannot be thus explained nor can ethnic explanations. The core of its support, in that state, was in areas dominated by the same ethnic group that makes up Kano State which served as the backbone of the NPN, i.e. the Hausa-Fulani. Since the party programme did not appeal enough to the electorate in that state to give it a dominant position in the other elections and since its Presidential Candidate could not must more than 32 percent of the votes cast in the state in the Presidential election, we cannot but conclude that the personal appeal of the Gubernatorial candidate was the crucial factor that made the PRP victory in the Gubernatorial election in Kaduna State. Considerations relating to the personality of the Presidential candidate may also account for NPN suprememacy over the GNPP in the Presidential election in the Gongola State.

IDEOLOGICAL BIASES

I have dealt in passing with some aspects of the regulations governing the general conduct of the elections, however, a few more comments may be added here. Apart from the constitutional provisions which prohibited political activities by certain interest and pressure groups like the Trade Unions and Student Organisations²³

(which are also contained in the Electoral Decree), the Government, through the agency of the National Universities Commission, barred University Lecturers from "active politics"²⁴ In the case of the Trade Unions and Student Organisations, it said that they could exercise their voting rights by voting as individuals but not as corporate groups affiliated to any political party.²⁵

Considering the fact that these groups consist of the bulk of the articulate section of a largely illiterate society, the restraints placed on their active participation cannot but have contributed to the dull monotony of the election period. Considering the fact that it is these same groups that are usually prone to adopting a critical probing posture in their political discourses, one cannot but conclude that their behaviour can be better explained in ideological terms — i.e. geared towards the exclusion from the country's political processes of actors seen as dangerous to the continuance of the preferred status quo — than in terms of any avowed commitment to peaceful elections.

Ideological underpinnings are evident in some of the other regulations. For instance, it was one of the electoral rules that one should vote only where one is registered. The staging of the elections in the summer months when all schools, colleges and universities have closed and students had dispersed to their respective homes, meant the effective disenfranchisement of the bulk of Nigerian youths since they were not registered at their various institutions. The effect of this was also to defeat a good that might have emerged from the lowering of the voting age to 18 years.

The short period between the lifting of the ban on political activities and that of the submission of registration forms seemed to have an in-built bias in favour of old politicians, most of whom had their old party structures intact or at least re-vitalised. It was, obviously, placing too much faith in the ability of the new-comers to expect them to have succeeded within two months or so in establishing nation-wide political parties under the FEDECO stated criteria. It is no wonder then that those parties that were finally registered could be shown to have connections to pre-1966 political parties — at least all of the Presidential candidates were prominent politicians before the advent of the military.

FEDECO's inability to spell out clearly its criteria for disqualification of a political party, left a lot of room for speculation on its assumed non-partisanship while its inability to pay the political parties the first allotment of their grant in time exposed it to the charge of deliberately sabotaging the chances of the poorer parties.

One cannot find any reasonable justification for the delay in the disbursement of this amount till two weeks to the elections. It cannot be denied that the performance of poor parties like the PRP, and to a lesser extent the NPP, were negatively affected by the process.

CONTINUITIES

It is generally believed that the five political parties are off-springs of past political parties. While one may dismiss such a belief as being impressionistic, we cannot deny the preponderance of particular old party coalitions within the new parties. Thus, one can say that the NPN is dominated by former NPC members, the UPN of former Action Group members, the NPP of former NCNC members, the PRP of former NEPU members, albeit with a sprinkling of members from former allied parties, and those that have fallen out with their erstwhile colleagues and some new faces. Although the leader of the GNPP was a former NPC stalwart, the mode of operation

and philosophy of this party is reminiscent of that of the former Bornu Youth Movement.* It also has a sizeable number from the former major parties.

Barely a month after the elections, a Federal Permanent Secretary lamenting the evident revival of "the old habit of voting along (ethnic) lines" in Nigeria's elections in spite of efforts at social engineering", called for a rotation of the Presidency to make it "clear that it is not the monopoly of any geographical area". This lamentation in fact highlights one of the most pernicious elements of continuity in Nigeria's electoral process as we have already seen. The dominance of sectionalism and personality politics have also been demonstrated. The bias in favour of entrenched social forces in electoral regulations which in turn encourages corrupt electoral practices, the dominance of the political scene by parties of the centre and thus of campaigns devoid of any attempt at a systematic and critical analysis of the country's state of underdevelopment, and lastly and most importantly too, the continued dominance of the country's political processes by an elite, united by a tacit ideological commitment to Nigeria's dependent capitalist mode of development, is also evident.

Another element of continuity, is the emergence once more of a victorious party at the polls but lacking enough seats in the Senate to run the Government alone. A Nigerian paper had after the 1964-65 elections (which produced a similar situation) characterised "Nigerian Democracy" as one "in which the majority party must under all circumstances rule hand-in-hand with (a) minority party, even though it might not wish to do so."²⁸ So it is that the NPN with just over 33 percent of the votes cast in the Presidential election and about 37 percent of the seats in the National Assembly has had to go into an alliance or at least a working agreement with some other party. It was to have a working majority. It is of importance to note that the NPP, the first party to indicate its willingness to work with the NPN,²⁹ is made up mainly, as we have indicated, of former NCNC members, and it was the NCNC that provided the second partner in the past two coalition Governments Nigeria has had.

DISCONTINUITIES

Obvious among elements of discontinuity are the lowering of the voting age to 18, the extension of the franchise to women in the northern parts of the country, the low salience of ethnic and sectional pronouncements during the campaigns, and the relative absence of violence and malpractices like rigging. These, plus other discontinuous features in the country's political processes to be dealt with shortly are, as indicated at the opening parts of this essay, the result of a conscious attempt at re-modelling the structural frame³⁰ of the country's political processes towards a system that is nationally integrative and imbued with a high content of public probity. Thus we had the use of tax papers to determine the extent to which prospective office holders performed their civic obligations and the attempt to limit the contest to those with a "clean record" as evidenced in the disqualification of some candidates on the grounds of having been found guilty of some wrong-doing or the other by some of the tribunals set up by the military since their seizure of power.³¹

A noteworthy result of the government's emphasis on a nationally integrative electoral system — which is also partly the result of political expediency motivated at

* The Bornu Youth Movement was led by Alhaji Ibrahim Imam a Kanuri and was based also in the area now comprising Bornu

vote — catching — was the geographical balancing act in the filing of party offices. In instance, no party chose its President and Deputy from the same geographical area. While the NPN, GNPP and PRP whose Presidential Candidates are from the Northern part of the country and the UPN whose Presidential Candidate is from the Western part of the country, chose their running mates from the East. The UPN whose Presidential Candidate is from the Eastern part of the country, chose his running mate from the North.³²

VOTER APATHY

A prominent feature of the elections which cannot be easily slotted into the continuity — discontinuity dichotomy, is the apparent voter apathy reflected in the elections. This comparison is precluded because of the partial boycott by some of the major parties of the 1964 elections. Be that as it may, the general voter turn-out for the 1964 election left much to be desired. A turn-out of as low as 19.65 per cent was recorded in the House of Representatives Elections while the highest turn-out of 35.1 per cent was recorded in the Presidential Elections. On the whole, however, only about 25 per cent of the registered voters turned out for all the elections in 1979. This contrasts sharply with the 79.8 per cent turn-out in the Federal elections of 1959 although a better performance over the 20 per cent in the 1964 elections³³ which, as had already been indicated, can be attributed to the partial boycott of that year.

Surely, after over thirteen years of military rule, one would have expected an overwhelming welcome for the civilian regime. But perhaps, the length of military rule might have taken the politics out of the people or, could it be the manifestation of a reaction of a people to a political system that has served to alienate them from the political processes over the years?

CONCLUSION

If we accept the fact that elections and their results are among the best indicators of the tone and direction of a political system and of the distribution of power within the system,³⁴ the above demonstrates that little of substance has changed in the Nigerian political system. The constitution, with its re-affirmation of Nigerian commitment to the capitalist path of development and the Electoral rules with their bias in favour of entrenched social forces were obviously not meant to effect a fundamental change in the country's structural frame. In these circumstances the failure of the elections to effect any change in the distribution of power in the society is not surprising. This indicates that the military's diagnosis of the causes of the ills of the Nigerian Society are not only wrong but the prescriptions are themselves inappropriate. It indicates, in short, that the problems require a more structural approach than that provided by the legislative fiat.

FOOT NOTES

1. For detailed analysis of the structure and operation of these political parties see E. J. Dudley, *Instability and Political Order — Politics and Crisis in Nigeria* (Ibadan, 1979).

University Press, 1973). K.W.J. Post and Michael Vickers, *Structure and Conflict in Nigeria 1960-1965* (Heinemann 1973). Richard L. Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties* (Princeton University Press 1963) and Walter Schwartz, *Nigeria* (Pall Mall, London 1968 and J.P. Mackintosh *Nigerian Government and Politics* (George Allan and Unwin Ltd. 1966).

2. Quoted in A.D. Yahaya, "The Creation of States" in *Soldiers and Oil* (ed). Keith Panter-Brick (Frank Cass 1978), p. 203
3. op. cit., p. 291
4. *Address to the Constitution Drafting Committee in Survey of Nigerian Affairs 1975* (ed) O. Oyediran (O.U.P. Nigeria 1978). p. 225-226.
5. The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 203 (1) b.
6. op. cit. 203 (2) b
7. op. cit. 206
8. op. cit. 125
9. Initially this was to be decided by a simple majority of the votes cast in an election by an electoral collage consisting the two Houses of the National Assembly and the State House of Assemblies, see op. cit., 126 (4). The change was effected by Decree 15 1975.
10. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 126 (3) b. Under this provision it would have been Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim and not Chief Obafemir Awolowo (as was generally believed) that would have contested the second election with the NPN Presidential Candidate because, compared to Chief Awolowo he had the majority of votes in the highest number of states — 12 to 7 See *New Nigerian*, 17 September, 197 "Who qualifies for Electoral College Awolowo or Waziri?"
11. Electoral Decree 85(2)
12. *Dr. William D. Graf Elections 1979* (Daily Times Publication 1979), p. 58
13. Especially his/her role during the Civil War
14. *Nigeria Standard*, March 12 1979
15. *Puch*, Feb 13 1979. Also "Hobsons Choice" *New Nigerian*, June 12 1979.
16. *Nigeria Standard*, Feb 16 1979
17. *Grape Vine* (Daily Times) Election '79 p. 63. In fairness to the UPN leadership, it tried to make free education a crucial election issue but the other leaders warded off the challenge with the argument that free education is a non-issue since it has even been inscribed in our constitution. Thus in the last analysis the question was not whether they were committed to it or not but whether the necessary financial and material pre-requisites are available. Be that as it may one can say that these requirements though crucial will depend on the priorities of the party in power.
18. Two of them, Alhaji Shehu Shangari and Alhaji Aminu Kano, did.
19. *Nigeria Standard*, Jan 31 1979.
20. It secured its highest number of votes however in the Kaduna State. Bornu is predominantly Kanuri - a group from which Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim hails.
21. The performance of the NPN in Cross Rivers and Rivers States can be explained by historical precedents for these areas have been traditionally dominated by parties allied to the NPC the bulk of whose members now make up the NPN. Kaduna and Kwara have been traditional NPC strongholds while the case of the

- Benue State can be explained in terms of the changes in the interest of its elites especially Tiv elites like Tarka who have been closely identified with the creation of the NPN. The apparent nation-wide support for the NPN should not however be exaggerated, for of all the Senatorial seats won over 51 per cent are from the Hausa-Fulani dominated states of Sokoto, Bauchi, Kano, Niger and Kaduna. About half of its seats in the House of Representatives and the State Assemblies are also from the same states, while 53.4 per cent of the votes won by the President come from these states.
22. While the Plateau State has like the Cross Rivers, and Rivers States and also Benue had the tradition of voting outside their geographical location its present attachment to the NPP is more complex. With most of its former allies in the APC and given the high religious sensibilities of its elites — sensibilities that were clearly demonstrated in the Shavia controversy during sittings of the Constituent Assembly alignment with the NPP seemed a natural outcome.
 23. The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 201.
 24. This phrase was never defined. See Eme Awa "A Special Class in Political System", *Daily Times*, Jan 13 1979.
 25. The National Union of Nigerian Students had anyhow been banned by the Government in 1978 albeit the individual Student Unions in the various campuses still existed.
 26. For such a charge see A. Oyebola, *Nigeria Standard*, June 20 1979.
 27. One can talk of former NPC allies like the Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP) the Niger Delta Congress (NDC), the Republican Party and the Mid West Democratic Front; of AG allies like the UMBC. The NCNC and NEPU were also allies.
 28. *Nigerian Citizen*, Feb. 24 1965.
 29. It was reported recently that the PRP has also indicated its willingness to go into the proposed alliance.
 30. This concept is derived from Post and Vickers op. cit. p. 40, and refers to the constitutional and institutional matrix that defines the main features of governmental structures and within which government policies are enacted.
 31. The disqualification exercise was at best half-heartedly executed.
 32. Another evident continuity that manifests itself the balancing act is the continued dominance of the major ethnic groups and of men in the country's political process.
 33. Richard Sklar op. cit. p. 32 and Swartz op. cit. 112