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12 Nigeria

Darren Kew and Peter Lewis

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Official Name: Federal Republic of Nigeria

Location: Western Africa

Capital City: Abuja

Population (2009): 154.7 million

Size: 923,768 sq. km.; slightly more than twice the size of California



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CHRONOLOGY of Nigerian Political Development

1960

Independence. Nigeria consists of three regions under a Westminster parliamentary model. Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, a northerner, is the first prime minister.

January 1966

Civilian government deposed in coup. General Aguiyi Ironsi, an Igbo, becomes head of state.

1967–1970

Biafran civil war

July 1975

Military coup deposes Gowon; led by General Murtala Muhammed, a northerner.

February 1976

Murtala Muhammed assassinated in failed coup led by Middle Belt minorities. Muhammed's second-in-command, General Olusegun Obasanjo, a Yoruba, assumes power.

October 1979

Elections held. A majority in both houses is won by NPN, led by northern/Hausa-Fulani groups. Alhaji Shehu Shagari is elected Nigeria's first executive president.

1960

1965

1970

1975

1980

1985

1990

July 1966

Countercoup is led by General Yakubu Gowon (an Anga, from the Middle Belt) with aid from northern groups.

August 1985

Buhari is overthrown by General Ibrahim B. Babangida, a Middle Belt Muslim, in a palace coup. Babangida promises a return to democracy by 1990, a date he delays five times before being forced from office.

December 1983

Military coup led by General Muhammadu Buhari, a northerner.

September 1978

New constitution completed, marking the adoption of the U.S. presidential model in a federation with 19 states.

SECTION 1

THE MAKING OF THE MODERN NIGERIAN STATE

Politics in Action

In late November 2009, President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua collapsed for at least the third time since coming to office in 2007 from an ailment that he had never fully explained to the nation. He was rushed unconscious to a hospital in Saudi Arabia, and only his wife and a handful of his closest advisors saw him directly. For over three months, Nigerians had no direct evidence that their president was conscious or alive, and even his own ministers and a delegation of Senators were refused access. Government activity at the federal level ground to a halt.

Shockingly, for the first two months, neither the National Assembly nor the cabinet raised any public concern that the nation in effect had no president. The

1995	1999	2000	2005	2007	2011
<p>November 1993 Defense Minister General Sani Abacha seizes power in a coup. Two years later he announces a three-year transition to civilian rule, which he manipulates to have himself nominated for president in 1998.</p> <p>August 1993 Babangida installs Ernest Shonkan as "interim civilian president" until new presidential elections could be held later that autumn.</p>	<p>July–September 1994 Pro-democracy strike by the major oil union, NUPENG, cuts Nigeria's oil production by an estimated 25 percent. Sympathy strikes ensue, followed by arrests of political and civic leaders.</p> <p>June 1998 General Abacha dies; succeeded by General Abdulsalami Abubakar, a Middle Belt Muslim from Babangida's hometown. Abubakar releases nearly all political prisoners and installs a new transition program. Parties are allowed to form unhindered.</p> <p>November 1999 Zamfara state in the north is the first of twelve to institute the <i>shari'a</i> criminal code. That same month, President Obasanjo sends the army to the Niger Delta town of Odi to root out local militias, leveling the town in the process.</p> <p>1999 Former head of state Olusegun Obasanjo and his party, the PDP, sweep the presidential and National Assembly elections, adding to their majority control of state and local government seats. The federation now contains thirty-six states.</p>	<p>2000 Communal conflicts erupt in Lagos, Benue, Kaduna, and Kano states at different times over localized issues.</p> <p>Spring 2002 The Supreme Court passes several landmark judgments, overturning a PDP-biased 2001 electoral law, and ruling on the control of offshore oil and gas resources. In November the Court opens the legal door for more parties to be registered.</p> <p>May 2006 President Obasanjo tries to amend the constitution to allow himself a third term in office, but is defeated by the National Assembly.</p>	<p>August 2002 The National Assembly begins impeachment proceedings against President Obasanjo over budgetary issues. The matter ends by November, with the president apologizing.</p>	<p>April 2011 Jonathan wins the presidential election despite opposition from Northern factions for violating an informal ethnic rotation principle. The PDP again takes the majority of contests, but improved elections under a reformist chairman allow opposition parties to make some inroads.</p> <p>May 2010 President Yar'Adua dies in office, after several months incapacitated in a Saudi hospital. Vice President Goodluck Jonathan assumes the presidency.</p> <p>December 2008 The Supreme Court upholds President Yar'Adua's election in a narrow 4–3 decision.</p> <p>April–May 2007 The ruling PDP again takes a vast majority of election victories across the nation amid a deeply compromised process. Umaru Musa Yar'Adua becomes president. Yar'Adua promises reform, but spends his first year trying to solidify his tenuous hold on power.</p>	<p>June 12, 1993 Moshood Abiola wins presidential elections, but Babangida annuls the election eleven days later.</p>

First Lady and the president's inner circle released occasional statements that the president was recovering well, but prevented any direct contact with him and blocked all attempts to have Vice President Jonathan step in as acting president as the constitution directs. Finally, under both international pressure and the threat of a military coup, the National Assembly declared Jonathan Acting President in February 2010. President Yar'Adua returned to the country shortly thereafter, but was clearly too ill to govern, and he passed away in May 2010. Goodluck Jonathan then was sworn in as president.

The fact that Nigeria could persist for months without a functioning president, during which time his wife and a few advisors could seek to run the country themselves—and that they would go largely unchallenged—speaks volumes about the state of the nation's politics. Democratization in Nigeria—nearly a decade after the exit of the military from power—has yet to produce good governance. Instead, authoritarian rule has given way to competitive oligarchy, in which an increasingly greedy, oil-rich political elite fight to expand their power, while more than 90 percent of Nigerians struggle to survive on less than two U.S. dollars per day. This impoverished majority is so disenfranchised by the state that their president could disappear for months, and a small cabal could hold the nation hostage, without much public outcry.

Focus Questions

What are some of the key impacts that colonialism and military rule left on the development of the Nigerian state?

What role has ethnicity played in the development of Nigeria's political parties, and in the collapse of Nigeria's First Republic and descent into civil war?

How have clientelism and corruption continued to undermine political development in the Fourth Republic?

authoritarianism

A system of rule in which power depends not on popular legitimacy but on the coercive force of the political authorities. Hence, there are few personal and group freedoms. It is also characterized by near absolute power in the executive branch and few, if any, legislative and judicial controls.

legitimacy

A belief by powerful groups and the broad citizenry that a state exercises rightful authority. In the contemporary world, a state is said to possess legitimacy when it enjoys consent of the governed, which usually involves democratic procedures and the attempt to achieve a satisfactory level of development and equitable distribution of resources.

accountability

A government's responsibility to its population, usually by periodic popular elections, transparent fiscal practices, and by parliament's having the power to dismiss the government by passing a motion of no confidence. In a political system characterized by accountability, the major actions taken by government must be known and understood by the citizenry.

unfinished state

A state characterized by instabilities and uncertainties that may render it susceptible to collapse as a coherent entity.

Under the surface of this fiasco, however, were some important signs that a decade of democracy has had some impact. First and foremost, throughout the crisis, as opposition grew it insisted on the constitution as the framework for resolving the dispute. Ultimately, elites turned to the National Assembly, not the military, and military leaders rejected pressure from some junior officers to stage a coup. Moreover, the politicians clearly sensed that they could not neglect public opinion forever. Discontent has grown with the slow pace of change and the intrigues of the oligarchy, and the public has begun to demand a greater share of the nation's wealth and a greater say in political decisions.

Nigeria thus encapsulates many characteristics that more broadly identify Africa, as the young democracy faces the challenge of managing the country's contentious ethnic and religious diversity in conditions of scarcity and weak institutions, while facing the constant struggle between **authoritarian** and democratic governance, the push for development amidst persistent underdevelopment, the burden of public corruption, and the pressure for accountability. Nigeria, like most other African countries, has sought to create a viable nation-state out of the incoherence created by its colonial borders. More than 250 competing ethnic groups, crosscut by two major religious traditions, have repeatedly clashed over economic and political resources. The result: a Nigeria with low levels of popular **legitimacy** and **accountability**, and a persistent inability to meet the most basic needs of its citizens. Nigeria today remains an **unfinished state** characterized by instabilities and uncertainties. Will Nigeria return to the discredited path of authoritarianism and greater underdevelopment, or will the civilian leadership rise to achieve a consolidated democracy and sustainable growth?

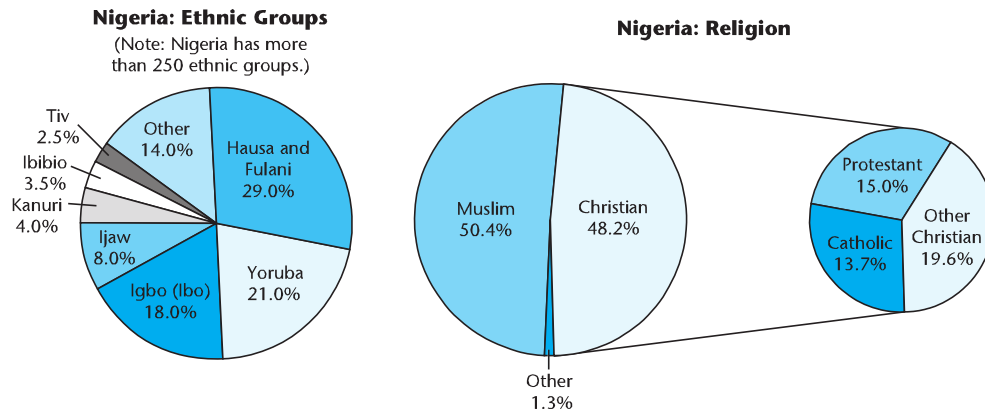
Geographic Setting

Nigeria, with 130 million people inhabiting 356,669 square miles, is the most populous nation in Africa. A center of West African regional trade, culture, and military strength, Nigeria borders four countries—Benin, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. Nigeria, like nearly all African states, is not even a century old.

Nigeria was a British colony from 1914 until 1960. Nigeria's boundaries had little to do with the borders of the precolonial African societies, and merely marked the point where British influence ended and French began. Britain ruled northern and southern Nigeria as two separate colonies until 1914, when it amalgamated its Northern and Southern Protectorates. In short, Nigeria was an arbitrary creation reflecting British colonial interests. This forced union of myriad African cultures and ruling entities under one political roof remains a central feature of Nigerian political life today.

Nigeria is a hub of regional activity. Its population is nearly 60 percent of West Africa's total. Nigeria's gross domestic product (GDP) typically represents more than half of the total GDP for the entire subregion.

Nigeria includes six imprecisely defined "zones." The Hausa-Fulani, Nigeria's largest ethnic group, dominate the northwest (or "core North"). The northeast consists of minority groups, the largest of whom are the Kanuri. Both northern regions are predominantly Muslim. The Middle Belt includes minority groups, both Muslim and Christian. The southwest is dominated by the country's second-largest ethnic group, the Yoruba, who are approximately 40 percent Muslim, 50 percent Christian (primarily Protestant), and 10 percent practitioners of Yoruba traditional beliefs. The southeast is the Igbo homeland, Nigeria's third largest group, who are primarily Christian. Between the Yoruba and Igbo regions is the southern minority zone, which stretches across the Niger Delta areas and east along the coast as far as Cameroon.



Languages: English (official), Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo (Ibo), Fulani, 100–200 additional indigenous

Nigerian Currency

Naira (₦)
International Designation: NGN
Exchange Rate (2010): US\$1 = 150.88
500 Naira Note Design: Aliyu Mai-Bornu (1919–1970) and Clement Isong (1920–2000), economists and governors of the Central Bank of Nigeria



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FIGURE 12.1 The Nigerian Nation at a Glance

Critical Junctures

Nigeria's recent history reflects influences from the precolonial period, the crucial changes caused by British colonialism, the postcolonial alternation of military and civilian rule, and the economic collapse from 1980 to 2000, caused by political corruption and overreliance on the oil industry, which has been reinforced by the post-2003 oil boom.

The Precolonial Period (1800–1900)

In contrast to the forest belt to the south, the more open terrain in the north, with its need for irrigation, encouraged the early growth of centralized states. Such states from the eighth century included Kanem-Bornu and the Hausa states. Another attempt at state formation led to the Jukun kingdom, which by the end of the seventeenth century was a subject state of the Bornu Empire.

Trade across the Sahara Desert with northern Africa shaped developments in the savanna areas of the north. Trade brought material benefits as well as Arabic education and Islam, which gradually replaced traditional spiritual, political, and social practices. In 1808, the Fulani, from lands west of modern Nigeria, fought a holy war (*jihad*), and established the Sokoto Caliphate, which used Islam and a common language, Hausa, to unify the disparate groups in the north. The Fulani Empire held sway until British colonial authority was imposed on northern Nigeria by 1900.

jihad

Literally “struggle.” Although often used to mean armed struggle against unbelievers, it can also mean to fight against socio-political corruption or a spiritual struggle for self-improvement.

Table 12.1 Political Organization	
Political System	Federal republic
Regime History	Democratic government took office in May 1999, after sixteen years of military rule. The most recent national elections were held in 2011.
Administrative Structure	Nigeria is a federation of thirty-six states, plus the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) in Abuja. The three tiers of government are federal, state, and local. Actual power is centralized under the presidency and the governors. <small>5814260 2013/06/12 165.24.252.60</small>
Executive	U.S.-style presidential system, under Goodluck Jonathan
Legislature	A bicameral civilian legislature was elected in April 2011. The 109 senators are elected on the basis of equal representation: three from each state, and one from the FCT. The 360 members of the House of Representatives are elected from single-member districts.
Judiciary	Federal, state, and local court system, headed by the Federal Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court, which consists of fifteen appointed associate justices and the chief justice. States may establish a system of Islamic law (<i>shari'a</i>) for cases involving only Muslims in customary disputes (divorce, property, etc.). Most Nigerian states feature such courts, which share a Federal Court of Appeal in Abuja. Non-Muslim states may also set up customary courts, based on local traditional jurisprudence. Secular courts retain supreme jurisdiction if conflict arises between customary and secular courts.
Party System	Nearly fifty parties have been registered by the Nigerian electoral commission since 2002. The largest are the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the All Nigerian People's Party (ANPP), the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), and Congress for Progressive Change (CPC). PDP won the presidency, majorities in both houses of the National Assembly, as well as a majority of governorships, state assemblies, and local governments.

acephalous societies

Literally “headless” societies. A number of traditional Nigerian societies, such as the Igbo in the precolonial period, lacked executive rulership as we have come to conceive of it. Instead, the villages and clans were governed by committee or consensus.

Toward the southern edge of the savanna, politics generally followed kinship lines. Political authority was so diffuse that later Western contacts described them as “stateless,” or **acephalous societies**. Because such groups as the Tiv lacked complex political hierarchies, they escaped much of the upheaval experienced under colonialism by the centralized states, and retained much of their autonomy.

Southern Nigeria included the highly centralized Yoruba empires and the kingdoms of Oyo and Ife; the Edo kingdom of Benin in the Midwest; the acephalous societies of the Igbo to the east; and the trading city-states of the Niger Delta and its hinterland, peopled by a wide range of ethnicities.

Several precolonial societies had democratic elements that might have led to more open and participatory politics had they not been interrupted by colonialism. Governance in the Yoruba and Igbo communities involved principles of accountability and representation. Among the Islamic communities of the north, political society was highly structured, reflecting local interpretations of Qur’anic principles. Leadership structures were considerably more hierarchical than those of the south, and women were typically consigned to subordinate political status. The Islamic Fulani Empire was a confederation in which the rulers, emirs, owed allegiance to the



sultan, who was the temporal and spiritual head of the empire. The sultan's powers, in turn, were limited by his duty to observe Islamic principles.

Colonial Rule and Its Impact (1860–1945)¹

Competition for trade and empire drove the European imperial powers further into Africa. Colonial rule deepened the extraction of Nigeria's natural resources and the exploitation of Nigerian labor. Colonialism left its imprint on all aspects of Nigeria's political and economic systems.

Where centralized monarchies existed in the north, the British ruled through **indirect rule**, which allowed traditional structures to persist as subordinates to the British governor and a small administrative apparatus. With more dispersed kingships, as among the Yoruba, or in acephalous societies, particularly among the Igbo and other groups in the southeast, the colonizers either strengthened the authority of traditional chiefs and kings or appointed **warrant chiefs** (who ruled by warrant of the British Crown), weakening the previous practices of accountability and participation.

The British played off ethnic and social divisions to keep Nigerians from developing organized political resistance to colonial rule. When resistance did develop, the colonizers were not afraid to employ repressive tactics, even as late as the 1940s. Yet the British also promoted the foundations of a democratic political system. This dual

indirect rule

A term used to describe the British style of colonialism in Nigeria and India in which local traditional rulers and political structures were used to help support the colonial governing structure.

warrant chiefs

Leaders employed by the British colonial regime in Nigeria. A system in which "chiefs" were selected by the British to oversee certain legal matters and assist the colonial enterprise in governance and law enforcement in local areas.



Regions are shown in bold text, ethnic groups are shown in italic text.

Nigeria under the First Republic, divided into four regions, with the massive Northern Region encompassing two-thirds of the nation's territory and more than half its population.

standard left a conflicted democratic idea: formal democratic institutions within an authoritarian political culture. Colonialism also strengthened the collective identities of Nigeria's multiple ethnic groups by fostering political competition among them, primarily among the three largest: the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo.

Divisive Identities: Ethnic Politics under Colonialism (1945–1960)

Based on their experience under British rule, leaders of the anticolonial movement came to regard the state as an exploitative instrument. Its control became an opportunity to pursue personal and group interests rather than broad national interests. When the British began to negotiate a gradual exit from Nigeria, the semblance of unity among the anticolonial leaders soon evaporated. Intergroup political competition became increasingly fierce.

Nigerian leaders quickly turned to ethnicity as a way to pursue competition and mobilize public support. The three largest ethnic groups, the Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba, though each a minority, together comprise approximately two-thirds of Nigeria's population. They have long dominated the political process. By pitting ethnic groups against each other for purposes of divide and rule, and by structuring the administrative units of Nigeria based on ethnic groups, the British ensured that ethnicity would be the primary element in political identification and mobilization.

Initially, ethnically based associations were concerned with nonpolitical issues: promoting mutual aid for housing and education, and sponsoring cultural events. With the encouragement of ambitious leaders, however, these groups took on a more

political character. Nigeria's first political party, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (later the National Convention of Nigerian Citizens, NCNC), initially drew supporters from across Nigeria. As independence approached, however, elites began to divide along ethnic lines to mobilize support for their differing political agendas.

In 1954, the British divided Nigeria into a federation of three regions with elected governments. Each region soon fell under the domination of one of the major ethnic groups and their respective parties. The Northern Region came under the control of the Northern People's Congress (NPC), dominated by Hausa-Fulani elites. In the southern half of the country, the Western Region was controlled by the Action Group (AG), which was controlled by Yoruba elites. The Igbo, the numerically dominant group in the Eastern Region, were closely associated with the NCNC, which became the ruling party there.

Chief Obafemi Awolowo, leader of the AG, captured the sentiment of the times when he wrote in 1947, "Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no 'Nigerians' in the same sense as there are 'English,' 'Welsh,' or 'French.' The word 'Nigerian' is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not."²

The First Republic (1960–1966)

The British granted Nigeria independence in 1960 to an elected parliamentary government. Nigerians adopted the British Westminster model at the federal and regional levels, with the prime minister chosen by the majority party or coalition. Northerners came to dominate the federal government by virtue of their greater population. The ruling coalition for the first two years quickly turned into a northern-only grouping when the NPC achieved an outright majority in the legislature. Having benefited less from the economic, educational, and infrastructural benefits of colonialism, the northerners who dominated the First Republic set out to redistribute resources to their benefit. This NPC policy of "northernization" brought them into direct conflict with their southern counterparts, particularly the Yoruba-based AG and later the Igbo-dominated NCNC.

Rivalries intensified as the NPC sat atop an absolute majority in the federal parliament with no need for its former coalition partner, the NCNC. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the NCNC leader who was also president in the First Republic (then a largely symbolic position), and Tafawa Balewa, the NPC prime minister, separately approached the military to ensure that if it came to conflict, they could count on its loyalty. Thus, "in the struggle for personal survival both men, perhaps inadvertently, made the armed forces aware that they had a political role to play."³

Civil War and Military Rule (1966–1979)

With significant encouragement from contending civilian leaders, a group of largely Igbo officers seized power in January 1966. General Aguiyi Ironsi, also an Igbo, was killed in a second coup in July 1966, which brought Yakubu Gowon, a Middle Belt Christian, to power as a consensus head of state among the non-Igbo coup plotters.⁴

Because many northern officials had been killed in the initial coup, a tremendous backlash against Igbos flared in several parts of the country. Ethnic violence sent many Igbos fleeing to their home region in the east. By 1967, the predominantly Igbo population of eastern Nigeria attempted to secede and form its own independent country, named Biafra. Gowon built a military-led government of national unity in what remained of Nigeria (the north and west) and, after a bloody three-year war of attrition and starvation tactics, defeated Biafra in January 1970. The conflict claimed at least a million deaths.