

Table 12.8		(continued)				
CDC	11.1	31	7.1	6	1	0
Others	15.4	43	9.4	8	6	5
List of Acronyms Used in Table 12.8						
AC (later ACN)	Action Congress (of Nigeria)			NPC	Northern People's Congress	
AG	Action Group			NPF	Northern Progressive Front	
AD	Alliance for Democracy			NPN	National Party of Nigeria	
ANPP	All Nigerian People's Party (formerly APP)			NPP	Nigerian People's Party	
APGA	All People's Grand Alliance			NRC	National Republican Convention	
APP	All People's Party			PPA	Progress People's Alliance	
CDC	Congress for Democratic Change			PRP	People's Redemption Party	
GNPP	Great Nigerian People's Party			PDP	People's Democratic Party	
NAP	Nigerian Advance Party			SDP	Social Democratic Party	
NCNC	National Convention of Nigerian Citizens (formerly National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons)			UPN	Unity Party of Nigeria	
NEPU	Northern Elements Progressive Union					
NNDP	Nigerian National Democratic Party					

Old Roots and New Alignments: The PDP and the Other Parties of the Fourth Republic

Nigerians generally reacted with anger to General Abacha's 1993 coup and his subsequent banning of the SDP and NRC. With the unions crushed and Abiola in jail by the end of 1994, democracy deteriorated. In late 1996, the Abacha government registered only five parties, most of whose members had no public constituency and little political experience. During 1997, the five parties, branded by the opposition as "five fingers of a leprous hand," began to clamor for General Abacha to run for president. The presidential election scheduled for August 1998 was reduced to a mere referendum, endorsed by the chief justice of the Supreme Court as legally permissible. The "transition" process had become a travesty.²⁵ Once Abacha's plan to be certified as president became a certainty, domestic opposition increased. A group of former governors and political leaders from the north (many former NPN and PRP members) publicly petitioned Abacha not to run for president and human rights and pro-democracy groups protested. Even General Babangida voiced his opposition to Abacha's continuing as president. The only real obstacle to Abacha's plan for "self-succession" was whether the military would allow it.

Although there had been frequent rumors of Abacha's ill health, his death on June 8, 1998, was still a great surprise. The following day, General Abubakar, chief of Defense Staff, was sworn in as head of state. Shortly afterward, he promised a speedy

transition to democracy and began releasing political prisoners, but Abiola died suspiciously a month after Abacha. New parties quickly formed, and even Yoruba political leaders agreed to participate, although they insisted that the next president should be a Yoruba to compensate their people for having been robbed of their first elected presidency.

Once again, political associations centered on well-known personalities, and intense bargaining and mergers took place. The G-34, the prominent group of civilian leaders who had condemned Abacha's plans to perpetuate his power, created the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in late August, minus most of their Yoruba members, who joined the Alliance for Democracy (AD). At least twenty more parties applied for certification to the electoral commission (INEC); many of them were truly grass-roots movements, including a human rights organization and a trade union party.

To escape the ethnic-based parties of the First and Second Republics, INEC required that parties earn at least 5 percent of the votes in twenty-four of the thirty-six states in local government elections in order to advance to the later state and federal levels. This turned out to be an ingenious way of reducing the number of parties, while obliging viable parties to broaden their appeal. The only parties to meet INEC's requirements were the PDP, AD, and the All People's Party (APP). To assuage the Yoruba over Abiola's lost 1993 mandate, the PDP turned to retired General Obasanjo, who went on to defeat an AD/APP alliance candidate in the 1999 presidential contest.

The parties of the Fourth Republic are primarily alliances of convenience among Big Men from across Nigeria. Their sole purpose is to gain power. They have no ideological differences or policy platforms that distinguish them, such that politicians who lose in one party will frequently shift to another. Yet these parties do feature one terribly important innovation that distinguishes them from those of the First and Second Republics: The PDP, APP (now ANPP), and other leading parties of the Fourth Republic are multiethnic. They rely on elite-centered structures established during previous civilian governments and transition programs, and demonstrate the cross-ethnic alliances that developed over the last quarter-century, particularly through the two mega-parties of the Third Republic. The PDP includes core members of the northern established NPN, the northern progressive PRP, and the Igbo-dominated NPP of the Second Republic, as well as prominent politicians from the Niger Delta. The APP (now ANPP) is also a multiethnic collection, drawing from the Second Republic's GNPP, a party dominated by the northeastern-based Kanuri and groups from the Middle Belt, and also features politicians who had prominent roles in the Abacha-sponsored parties. The ANPP also includes northwestern politicians of royal lineage, Igbo business moguls, and southern minority leaders. The AD, however, was as Yoruba-centered as its predecessors, the UPN in the Second Republic and the AG in the First Republic. The party would later pay at the polls for its lack of national appeal, however, and would join with breakaway factions of the PDP to form the Action Congress (AC, later ACN; see below).

This rise of multiethnic political parties is one of the most significant democratic developments of the Fourth Republic. In multiethnic parties there is a strong incentive for politicians to bargain and bridge their ethnic differences *within* the party, so that they may then compete with the other parties in the system, which would preferably be multiethnic as well.²⁶ In Nigeria, ethnic divisions—supported by prebendal networks—still dominate national politics, but the multiethnic parties have at least done fairly well at bridging these many divides during election periods and at fostering

a climate of compromise during particularly divisive national debates. Greasing the wheels of these compromises among the elites, however, is preferential treatment in access to public offices, government contracts, and the corrupt spoils of oil wealth. In short, multiethnic parties have widened the circle of corruption, allowing the biggest politicians to build vast patronage networks across ethnic lines and diluting—but not erasing—the ethnocentric aspects of the prebendal system. Lower ethnic tensions have come at the price of greater elite corruption, which may be seen as progress, but which must transition to more accountable party politics if the 92 percent of Nigerians who live on less than \$2 per day are to share in the nation's great wealth.

The main vehicle whereby other African countries like Ghana have begun to rise out of this elite corruption trap is through the rise of a unified, viable political opposition, which has not developed in Nigeria. The two main opposition parties, the ANPP and AD (later ACN), never organized a working relationship or a serious policy challenge to the PDP, except in the weeks prior to elections. ANPP leaders generally preferred to work with the PDP in order to gain access to government largesse, and most of its governors joined the PDP by 2010. The courts, however, overturned gubernatorial races in Edo, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, Imo, and Abia, handing these seats to opposition parties. Complicating matters has been an explosion in the number of political parties.

The PDP took power again in 2011 with a massive majority across Nigeria, controlling the presidency, 23 governorships and 26 state assemblies, and more than half of the seats of the National Assembly. Yet it was also a party in disarray. Amid this infighting, President Jonathan moved to assert control of the party through liberal use of state finances and backed by former President Obasanjo. Jonathan struck a deal with the PDP governors to clinch the party nomination and win the election in 2011, facing down a divided opposition.

Political Culture, Citizenship, and Identity

Military rule left Nigeria with strong authoritarian influences in its political culture. Most of the younger politicians of the Fourth Republic came of age during military rule and learned the business of politics from Abacha, Babangida, and their military governors. Nigeria's deep democratic traditions discussed in Section 1 remain vibrant among the larger polity, but they are in constant tension with the values imbibed during years of governance when political problems were often solved by military dictate, power, and violence rather than by negotiation and respect for law. This tension was manifest in the irony that the leading presidential contenders in 2003 were all former military men, one of whom—Buhari—was the ringleader of the 1983 coup that overthrew the Second Republic. Perhaps symbolic of a growing shift in Nigerian political culture away from its authoritarian past, however, Umaru Yar'Adua was the nation's first university graduate to become president, and Goodluck Jonathan has a Ph.D. in zoology.

Modernity versus Traditionalism

The interaction of Western (colonial) elements with traditional (precolonial, African) practices has created the tensions of a modern sociopolitical system that rests uneasily on traditional foundations. Nigerians straddle two worlds, each undergoing constant evolution. On one hand, the strong elements in communal societies that promoted accountability have been weakened by the intrusion of Western culture

oriented toward individuality, and exacerbated by urbanization. On the other hand, the modern state has been unable to free itself fully from rival ethnic claims organized around narrow, exclusivist constituencies.

As a result, exclusivist identities continue to dominate Nigerian political culture and to define the nature of citizenship.²⁷ Individuals tend to identify with their immediate ethnic, regional, and religious groups rather than with state institutions, especially during moments of crisis. Entirely missing from the relationship between state and citizen in Nigeria is a fundamental reciprocity—a working social contract—based on the belief that there is a common interest that binds them.

Religion

Religion has been a persistent source of comfort and a basis for conflict throughout Nigerian history. Islam began to filter into northeast Nigeria in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, spread to Hausaland by the fifteenth century, and greatly expanded in the early nineteenth century. In the north, Islam first coexisted with, then gradually supplanted, indigenous religions. Christianity arrived in the early nineteenth century, but expanded rapidly through missionary activity in the south. The amalgamation of northern and southern Nigeria in 1914 brought together the two regions and their belief systems. The nation is now evenly divided between Muslims and Christians, and the Middle Belt states where the fault line runs have often been particularly volatile. A handful of violent Islamist groups, notably Boko Haram, have become active in recent years, attacking police stations and setting off bombs in several states and Abuja. Their political agendas are primarily local, but they share an interest in establishing an Islamist state in Nigeria and express common cause with global jihadist groups like Al Qaeda, although they do not yet coordinate activities.

These religious cultures have consistently clashed over political issues such as the secular character of the state. The application of the *shari'a* criminal code in the northern states has been a focal point for these tensions. For many Muslims, the *shari'a* represents a way of life and supreme law that transcends secular and state law; for many Christians, the expansion of *shari'a* law threatens the secular nature of the Nigerian state and their position within it. The pull of religious versus national identity becomes even stronger in times of economic hardship.

The Press

The plural nature of Nigerian society, with the potential to engender a shared political culture, can be seen in virtually all aspects of public life. The Nigerian press has long been one of the liveliest and most irreverent in Africa. The Abacha regime moved to stifle its independence, as had Babangida. In addition, members of the media are sometimes regarded as captives of ethnic and regional constituencies, a perception that has weakened their capacity to resist attacks on their rights and privileges. Significantly, much of the Nigerian press has been based in a Lagos-Ibadan axis in the southwestern part of Nigeria and has frequently been labeled “southern.” Recently, however, independent television and radio stations have proliferated around the country, and forests of satellite towers now span Nigerian cities to support the boom in Internet cafés and telecommunications. Internet-based investigative journalists such as saharareporters.com have utilized the uncensored medium of the Internet to print stories that the mainstream newspapers have been afraid to publish, exposing the corrupt activities of some of Nigeria’s biggest politicians.

Interests, Social Movements, and Protest

Because the political machinery was in the hands of the military throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Nigerians sought alternative means of representation and protest. Historically, labor has played a significant role in Nigerian politics, as have student groups, women's organizations, and various radical and populist organizations. Business groups have frequently supported and colluded with corrupt civilian and military regimes. In the last year of the Abacha regime, however, even the business class, through mechanisms like Vision 2010, began to suggest an end to such arbitrary rule. The termination of military rule has seen civil society groups flourish across Nigeria.

Labor

Organized labor has played an important role in challenging governments during both the colonial and postcolonial eras in several African countries, Nigeria among them. Continuous military pressure throughout the 1980s and 1990s forced a decline in the independence and strength of organized labor in Nigerian politics. The Babangida regime implemented strategies of **state corporatism** designed to control and co-opt various social forces such as labor. When the leadership of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), the umbrella confederation, took a vigorous stand against the government, the regime sacked the leaders and appointed conservative replacements. Pro-democracy strikes in mid-1994 by the National Petroleum Employees Union (NUPENG) and other sympathetic labor groups significantly reduced oil production and nearly brought the country to a halt, whereupon the Abacha regime arrested and disbanded its leadership.

The Nigerian labor movement has been vulnerable to reprisals by the state and private employers. The government has always been the biggest single employer of labor in Nigeria, as well as the recognized arbiter of industrial relations between employers and employees. Efforts by military regimes to centralize and co-opt the unions caused their militancy and impact to wane. Moreover, ethnic, regional, and religious divisions have often hampered labor solidarity, and these differences have been periodically manipulated by the state. Nevertheless, labor still claims an estimated 2 million members across Nigeria and remains one of the most potent forces in civil society. The unions have a great stake in the consolidation of constitutional rule in the Fourth Republic and the protections that allow them to organize and act freely on behalf of their members. Given the strength of the NLC, the PDP has sought to break it into its constituent unions to dilute its impact, but has so far been unsuccessful. The NLC has called national strikes on a number of occasions since 2000, typically over wages and fuel price hikes.

The Business Community

Nigeria has a long history of entrepreneurialism and business development. This spirit is compromised by tendencies toward rent-seeking and the appropriation of state resources. Members of the Nigerian business class have been characterized as "pirate capitalists" because of the high level of corrupt practices and collusion with state officials.²⁸ Many wealthy individuals have served in the military or civilian governments, while others protect their access to state resources by sponsoring politicians or entering into business arrangements with bureaucrats.

Private interests have proven surprisingly resilient, as organized groups have emerged to represent the interests of the business class and to promote general economic development. There are numerous associations throughout Nigeria representing a broad variety of business activities and sectoral interests. National

state corporatism

A political system in which the state requires all members of a particular economic sector to join an officially designated interest group. Such interest groups thus attain public status, and they participate in national policymaking. The result is that the state has great control over the groups, and groups have great control over their members.

business associations, such as the Nigerian Association of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines, and Agriculture (NACCIMA), the largest in the country, have taken an increasingly political stance, expressing their determination to protect their interests by advocating for better governance.

Other Social Groups

Student activism continues to be an important feature of Nigerian political life. Since the 1990s, many universities have seen the rise of what are called “cults”—gangs of young men who are typically armed and sometimes do have cultish rituals associated with their groups. Many of these cultists “graduated” to join the militias and thugs of the politicians after 2000, while the cults are also often employed by elites for their power plays. In partial response to the cult phenomenon, religious movements have proliferated across Nigerian universities, providing students with an alternative way of life to these violent groups. Yet the religious groups on campuses have also provided vehicles for encouraging and recruiting both Christian and Muslim fundamentalists.

Growing restiveness over economic hardship and military oppression led to a sharp increase in the number of human rights groups and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) since the 1990s.²⁹ Greater funding for NGOs from foreign governments and private foundations assisted the growth of this sector, most notably in the south but gradually in the north as well. They have generally focused on such issues as civil protection, gender law, health care, media access, and public housing. Most are urban based, although efforts to develop rural networks are underway.

The movement to resist President Obasanjo’s third-term bid in May 2006 resurrected some of civil society’s previous level of alliance building, as did some of the labor-led protests to Obasanjo’s many—and often successful—efforts to raise the price of fuel. Civil society groups also condemned Obasanjo’s efforts to provoke an election crisis in 2007, but faced a quandary: If they organized protests to the flawed elections, they might give Obasanjo the excuse he needed to declare a state of emergency. Consequently, few groups resisted the election outcomes, preferring to accept Yar’Adua in order to get rid of Obasanjo, and to fight the more flagrant election violations at the tribunals.

Overall, civil society groups are making substantial contributions to consolidating democracy in Nigeria. In particular, many groups have built good working relationships with the National Assembly and state legislatures, from which both sides have benefited. Their relationships with the political parties, however, remain distant. Nigeria’s prospects for building a sustainable democracy during the Fourth Republic will depend, in part, on the willingness of many of these advocacy groups to increase their collaboration with the political parties, while avoiding cooptation and maintaining a high level of vigilance and activism.

Summary

Legislatures in Nigeria have long been overshadowed by the powerful executive branch, which dominated politics in the military years. Yet in fits and starts, the National Assembly and some state legislatures have begun to reclaim some of their constitutional prerogatives. Another important shift in recent years is from the ethnic parties of the early republics to the multiethnic parties of the present, which create incentives for politicians to build bridges across ethnic lines. These multiethnic parties have, however, been built in part through corruption. Civil society groups, particularly the labor movement, resisted executive dominance under the military and, since 1999, have tried to press for reforms under civilian rule.

SECTION 5

NIGERIAN POLITICS IN TRANSITION

Focus Questions

What role can political opposition and civil society play in reversing prebendalism and the politics of the “Big Men”?

What other reforms can help to settle the National Question and harness the strong democratic yearnings of the Nigerian public?

Despite the slow progress of the Fourth Republic, Nigerians overwhelmingly favor democratic government over military rule. About 70 percent of respondents in a recent survey said that they still prefer democracy to any other alternative, although popular frustration is growing with the slow pace of reform and continued corruption in politics.³⁰ Will democracy in Nigeria be consolidated sufficiently to meet minimal levels of public satisfaction, or will the nation again succumb to destructive authoritarian rule?

Nigerian politics must change in fundamental ways for democracy to become more stable and legitimate. First and foremost, the nation must turn from a system of politics dominated by “Big Men”—for all intents and purposes, a competitive oligarchy—to a more representative mode of politics that addresses the fundamental interests of the public. Second, Nigerians must conclusively settle the national question and commit to political arrangements that accommodate the nation’s diversity. In short, Nigeria’s Fourth Republic must find ways of moving beyond prebendal politics and develop a truly national political process in which mobilization and conflicts along ethnic, regional, and religious lines gradually diminish, and which can address Nigeria’s true national crisis: poverty and underdevelopment.

Political Challenges and Changing Agendas

Nigeria’s fitful transition to democratic rule between 1985 and 1999 was inconclusive, largely because it was planned and directed from above. This approach contrasts sharply with the popular-based movements that unseated autocracies in Central and Eastern Europe. The military periodically made promises for democratic transition as a ploy to stabilize and legitimate their governments. General Abubakar dutifully handed power to the civilians in 1999, but only after ensuring that the military’s interests would be protected under civilian rule and creating an overly powerful executive that reinforces prebendalism and its patronage system. The military’s rapid transition program produced a tenuous, conflicted democratic government that faces daunting tasks of restoring key institutions, securing social stability, and reforming the economy. The continuing strength and influence of collective identities, defined on the basis of religion or ethnicity, are often more binding than national allegiances. The parasitic nature of the Nigerian economy is a further source of instability. Rent-seeking and other unproductive, often corrupt, business activities remain accepted norms of wealth accumulation.

Nonetheless, Nigerians are sowing seeds of change in all of these areas. Attitudes toward the military in government have shifted dramatically. Military attitudes themselves have changed significantly as well, as evidenced by the restraint shown by the armed forces during Yar’Adua’s incapacitation and long absence. The decline in the appeal of military rule can be attributed to the abysmal performances of the Babangida and Abacha regimes in economic oversight and governance. Many now recognize that the military, apart from its contributions to national security, is incapable of promoting economic and social progress in Nigeria. With the armed forces seemingly secure in their barracks, the nature of the struggles among civilian political elites will decide the direction of political and economic change. Thus, democratic development may be advanced in the long run if stable coalitions appear over time in

a manner that balances the power among contending groups, and if these key elites adapt to essential norms and rules of the political game.

Initially, members of the new political class confined their struggles within the constraints of the democratic system: using the courts, media, legislative struggles, and even legal expedencies such as impeachment. Political actors largely worked through formal institutions, contending openly and offsetting the power of a single group or faction. Since the 2003 elections, however, the political elite have also shown a growing willingness to use extra-systemic measures to forward their interests through election rigging, corruption, and militia-led violence. The Niger Delta has grown particularly violent, with increasingly well-armed militias that in some cases have shown a measure of independence from their political patrons.

The next critical step down the long road of democratic development for Nigeria is the creation of a viable, multiethnic opposition party that is also loyal, meaning that it plays by the rules of the system. Opposition parties help to reduce corruption in the system because they have an interest in exposing the misconduct of the ruling party, which in turn pressures them to restrain their own behavior. Furthermore, in order to unseat the ruling party and win elections, opposition parties need to engage the public to win their votes. In this manner, issues of interest to the public are engaged by the parties. This is the basis of the social contract: Elites gain the privilege of power so long as they use it to promote the public interest.

The introduction of so many new parties since 2002 has hurt the development of a viable, loyal opposition, further diluting it and allowing the PDP to govern largely unchecked. The PDP has also worked to absorb or co-opt opposition leaders when possible. Worse, several minor parties have managed to win only narrow ethnic constituencies, raising the specter that Nigeria may return to the ruinous ethnic party politics of the past. Yet the larger of these opposition parties could also provide the



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Protests over federal exploitation of the oil-producing Niger Delta sparked a region-wide insurgency by 2003, with heavily armed militias engaged in both political disputes and criminal activities, cutting Nigeria's oil production by more than a quarter.

building blocks of a viable opposition party or coalition if the PDP implodes along its strong internal divisions.

The project of building a coherent nation-state out of competing nationalities remains unfinished. Ironically, because the parties of the Fourth Republic generally do not represent any particular ethnic interest—indeed, they do not represent anyone's interests except those of the leaders and their clients—ethnic associations and militias have risen to articulate ethnic-based grievances. Ethnic consciousness cannot—and should not—be eliminated from society, but ethnicity cannot be the main basis for political competition. If current ethnic mobilization can be contained within ethnic associations arguing over the agenda of the parties, then it can be managed. If, however, any of the ethnic associations captures one of the political parties or joins with the militias to foment separatism, instability will result. The Niger Delta has gone furthest down this road, with a number of militias that have voiced ethno-nationalist demands, some of which verge on separatism.

Democratic development also requires further decentralization of power structures in Nigeria. The struggle on the part of the National Assembly and the state governors to wrest power from the presidency has advanced this process, as has the growing competence and role of the judiciary. Privatization of government parastatals could also reduce the power of the presidency over time, since it will no longer control all the primary sectors of the economy. A more decentralized system allows local problems to be solved within communities rather than involving national institutions and the accompanying interethnic competition. Decentralization also lowers the stakes for holding national offices, thereby reducing the destructive pressures on political competition and political office. The devolution of power and resources to smaller units, closer to their constituents, can substantially enhance the accountability of leaders and the transparency of government operations.

Civil society groups are the final link in democratic consolidation in Nigeria. These groups are critical players in connecting the Nigerian state to the Nigerian people. They aggregate and articulate popular interests into the policy realm, and they provide advocacy on behalf of their members. If the political parties are to reflect anything more than elite interests and clientelist rule, the parties must reach out and build alliances with the institutions of civil society. For opposition parties to become a viable opposition movement capable of checking the power of the PDP, they will have to build alliances with civil society groups in order to mobilize large portions of the population, particularly labor unions. Foreign pressure also plays an important role in maintaining the quest for democracy and sustainable development. In recent years, major external forces have been more forthright in supporting civil society and democratization in Nigeria. The United States, Britain, and some member states of the European Union quite visibly exerted pressure on Babangida and Abacha to leave and applied modest sanctions in support of democracy. These same governments again pressed Nigerian leaders to name Jonathan acting president during the crisis over President Yar'Adua's incapacitation.

Nevertheless, the Western commitment to development and democracy in Africa is limited by the industrial powers' addiction to oil, which has blunted the impact of such pressure on Nigeria, and is now exacerbated by growing competition from China for energy resources. Much of the initiative for Africa's growth therefore needs to emerge from within. In Nigeria, such initiatives will depend on substantial changes in the way Nigerians do business. It will be necessary to develop a more sophisticated and far less corrupt form of capitalist enterprise and the development of entrepreneurial, particularly middle class interests within Nigeria who will see their interests tied to the principles of democratic politics and economic initiative. The middle class

is beginning to grow under democratic rule, but it remains small and vulnerable to economic and political instability.

Nigerian politics has been characterized by turmoil and periodic crises ever since the British relinquished colonial power. Over fifty years later, the country is still trying to piece together a fragile democracy, while per capita incomes are scarcely higher than at independence. Despite a number of positive trends, the nation continues to wrestle with overdependence of its economy on oil, enfeebled infrastructure and institutions, heightened sociopolitical tensions, an irresponsible elite, and an expanding mass culture of despondency and rage. Only responsible government combined with sustained civil society action can reverse this decline and restore the nation to what President Obasanjo called “the path to greatness.”

Nigerian Politics in Comparative Perspective

The study of Nigeria has important implications for the study of African politics and, more broadly, of comparative politics. The Nigerian case embodies a number of key themes and issues that can be generalized. We can learn much about how democratic regimes are established and consolidated by understanding Nigeria’s pitfalls and travails. Analysis of the historical dynamics of Nigeria’s ethnic conflict helps to identify institutional mechanisms that may be effective in reducing ethnic conflict in other states. We can also learn much about the necessary and sufficient conditions for economic development, and the particular liabilities of oil-dependent states. Each of these issues offers comparative lessons for the major themes explored in this book: the world of states, governing the economy, the democratic idea, and the politics of collective identities.

A World of States

Nigeria exists in two “worlds” of states: one in the global political economy and the other within Africa. We have addressed at length Nigeria’s position in the world. Economically, Nigeria was thrust into the world economy in a position of weakness, first as a British colony and later as an independent nation. Despite its resources and the potential of oil to provide the investment capital needed to build a modern economy, Nigeria has grown weaker. It has lost much of its international clout, and in place of the international respect it once enjoyed as a developing giant within Africa, the country became notorious throughout the 1990s for corruption, human rights abuses, and failed governance. The return of democracy and soaring oil prices have restored some of Nigeria’s former stature, but its economic vulnerability and persistent corruption keep it a secondary player in the world of states.

The future of democracy, political stability, and economic renewal in other parts of Africa, and certainly in West Africa, will be greatly influenced for good or ill by unfolding events in Nigeria, the giant of the continent. Beyond the obvious demonstration effects, the economy of the West African subregion could be buoyed by substantial growth in the Nigerian economy. In addition, President Obasanjo conducted very active public diplomacy across Africa, seeking to resolve major conflicts, promote democracy, and improve trade. President Yar’Adua was far less active in foreign policy, and cultivated stronger ties with China. President Jonathan has strong ties with the United States, but has yet to define his African policy further abroad.

Thus far, international political and business attention has shifted elsewhere on the continent, focusing on such countries as South Africa, Botswana, and Ghana. Growing insurgency in the Niger Delta has also meant that Nigeria has even fallen